Conceptual Flipsiding
in/and Illiberal Imagination:
Towards a Discourse-Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract

This article highlights the increasingly prevalent process of so-called "conceptual flipsiding": that is, of strategic reversal of notions once closely associated with liberal democracy, and of its key values of freedom, equality, tolerance, and the like, for the pronouncedly illiberal gains. Viewing the said process as part and parcel of the wider normalization of an illiberal imagination through strategic discourses and practices in and beyond the field of politics, the article contends that conceptual flipsiding increasingly allows recontextualizing and eventually normalizing a deeply illiberal understanding of polity, society, and community. Seeing these as increasingly redefined in recent years in many formerly liberal-democratic contexts by, especially, the far right and its numerous affiliates in politics, media, and/or un-civil society, the article argues for theoretical and analytical elaboration of conceptual flipsiding in order to depict its wider exploratory usability in grasping the current illiberal conceptual and discursive fluidity. The article emphasizes that, following the discourse-conceptual logic behind the conceptual flipsiding dynamics, one is able to deconstruct the ongoing infusion of key social and political concepts and discourses with new and often deeply illiberal understandings.

Keywords: conceptual flipsiding, illiberalism, discourse-conceptual analysis, far right, social and political concepts

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While the government presence of far-right parties has commonly been associated with deep institutionalization of illiberal politics, widely conceived, several cases also show that, even if the far right falls out of government, the eradication of its socio-political illiberal logics is a very complex process that must take place across a variety of laws, procedures, and public institutions[1]. However, while backpedaling on processes of "undermining the institutional fabric of liberal democracy"[2] by the far right is one thing, it seems the reversing of wider "illiberalism as culture"[3] is perhaps even more complex, since it requires a gradual re-shifting of public and everyday discourses into those that could allow for the reinstating of liberal democracy not only in politics but also in the wider society.

A particular challenge—indeed evident in both of the above processes—seems to be posed by the society-wide implications of what we define as *conceptual flipsiding*: a process of strategic reversal of notions closely associated with liberal democracy or with its key values of freedom, equality, tolerance, and the like, for pronouncedly illiberal gains.[4] We contend that, as it is increasingly present in contemporary illiberal discourses, conceptual flipsiding should not only be seen as an element of political-institutional "mainstreaming" of the far right[5] but also, or perhaps especially, as part of a much broader and much more pervasive society-wide processes of normalization of illiberal discourses and practices.[6] It should especially be located among those driven by the often long-term, gradual "discursive shifts"[7] taking place across a variety of public and everyday social contexts.

We argue that, as a result of conceptual flipsiding, not only could the once widely acceptable meanings of key socio-political concepts be gradually "washed out"[8] or "semantically bleached,"[9] but that they would often be outright strategically replaced with new, illiberal understandings. This would often lead to increasing public uncertainty as to whether the previous (in most cases liberal-democratic) or the current (in most cases illiberal) understanding of some key notions in public life should actually be seen as valid and legitimate. As a result, however, often the latter rather than the former understandings would prevail, yet with such deep conceptual "doublethink,"[10] resulting in at least a duality—if not an outright multiplicity—of understandings and misunderstandings of many socially foundational ideas. The uncertainty and volatility around those, as is evident with as pivotal concepts as, for example, the rule of law, would be of huge importance in the institutional domain

1 Martin Krygier, Adam Czarnota, and Wojciech Sadurski, eds., *Anti-Constitutional Populism*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

2 Wojciech Sadurski, *A Pandemic of Populists* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

3 Jan Kubik, "Illiberalism as Culture," in *The Oxford Handbook of Illiberalism*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197639108.013.4.

4 Michał Krzyżanowski and Natalia Krzyżanowska, "Narrating the 'New Normal' or Pre-Legitimising Media Control? COVID-19 and the Discursive Shifts in the Far-Right Imaginary of 'Crisis' as a Normalisation Strategy," *Discourse & Society* 33, no. 6 (2022): 805–818, https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926522109542.

5 Pontus Odmalm and Eve Hepburn, eds., *The European Mainstream and the Populist Radical Right*, (London: Routledge, 2017); Aurelien Mondon and Aaron Z. Winter, *Reactionary Democracy* (London: Verso, 2020).

6 Michał Krzyżanowski, "Normalization and the Discursive Construction of 'New' Norms and 'New' Normality: Discourse in/and the Paradoxes of Populism and Neoliberalism," *Social Semiotics* 30, no. 4 (2020): 431–448, https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2020.1766193; Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: Shameless Normalisation of Far-Right Discourse* (London: Sage, 2021).

7 Michał Krzyżanowski, "Discursive Shifts in Ethno-Nationalist Politics: On Politicisation and Mediatisation of 'Refugee Crisis' in Poland," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 16, nos. 1–2, (2018): 76–96, https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2017.1317897; Michał Krzyżanowski, "Discursive Shifts and the Normalisation of Racism: Imaginaries of Immigration, Moral Panics and the Discourse of Contemporary Right-Wing Populism," *Social Semiotics* 30, no. 4 (2020): 503–527, https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2020.1766199.

8 Ewa Polak, "Zacieranie granic i rozmywanie znaczeń jako jedna z tendencji współczesnych przemian cywilizacyjnych," *Annales UMCS* 25, no. 1 (2018): 25–38, http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/k.2018.25.1.25.

9 Antoine Meillet, "L'évolution des formes grammaticales," *Scientia (Rivista di Scienza)* 12, no. 6 (1912): 384–400.

10 George Orwell, *1984* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949).

where such duality/multiplicity would often hinder the possible reversal of the previously normalized illiberal ideas (see, for example, Poland after the defeat of the far-right Law and Justice [PiS] party in the fall of 2023).[11]

To be sure, the general process of strategically "twisting" or "reversing" the meaning of key social and political concepts which we highlight is far from new. It has, namely, been recurrently present in public and especially political discourse of, in particular, authoritarian, nationalist, and populist regimes where reversal of meanings would recurrently serve manipulation and misinformation, often as part of authoritarian legitimization of mechanisms and institutions of violence and social control.[12] It would hence be particularly evident during periods of crisis:[13] that is, when the often radical or even outright exclusionary visions of polity and society would come to the fore and/or be ideologically promoted. In such a scenario, strategies of, among other things, the famous "victim-perpetrator-reversal"[14] or of persistent, populist "calculated ambivalence"[15] would figure among the frequent attempts to misrepresent ideas in and about society, often in the ideological defense of nativism, radicalism, colonialism, racism and the like.

Given its ongoing romance with many of the above ideologies combined into a pronouncedly illiberal catalog of values and views, it is not surprising that the contemporary far-right accelerating, in particular, in the 21st century,[16] would be particularly eager to make strategic redefinitions of liberal-democratic notions for illiberal gains into one of its central, discursive-political strategies. Therein, conceptual flipsiding would become a process not only of initiating but also of, indeed, the recontextualizing and normalizing of a deeper, public "reversal of meanings"[17] for both evidently illiberal but even outright anti-democratic or even anti-social aims.

11 David Ost, "Letter from Poland: Undoing the country's authoritarian experiment," *The Nation*, January 30, 2024, https://www.thenation.com/article/world/letter-from-poland.

12 Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich*, (London: Continuum, 2006); Roger Fowler, Bob Hodge, Gunther Kress, and Tony Trew, *Language and Control*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1979); Willibald Steinmetz, ed., *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

13 Reinhart Koselleck, "Crisis," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67, no. 2 (2006): 357–400, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30141882; Michał Krzyżanowski, Anna Triandafyllidou, and Ruth Wodak, "Introduction," in *The European Public Sphere and the Media: Europe in Crisis*, eds. Anna Triandafyllidou, Michał Krzyżanowski, and Ruth Wodak (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1–12; Michał Krzyżanowski, Ruth Wodak, Hannah Bradby, Mattias Gardell, Aristotle Kallis, Natalia Krzyżanowska, Cas Mudde, and Jens Rydgren, "Discourses and Practices of the 'New Normal': Towards an Interdisciplinary Research Agenda on Crisis and the Normalization of Anti- and Post-Democratic Action," *Journal of Language & Politics*, 22, no. 4 (2023): 415–437, https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.23024.krz; Hagen Schulz-Forberg, "The Spatial and Temporal Layers of Global History: A Reflection on Global Conceptual History through Expanding Reinhart Koselleck's Zeitschichten into global spaces," *Historical Social Research* 38, no. 3 (2013): 40–58, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23644524; Hagen Schulz-Forberg, "Crisis and Continuity: Robert Marjolin, Transnational Policy-Making and Neoliberalism, 1930s–1970s," in *Rethinking European Integration History in Light of Capitalism*, ed. Aurélie D. Andry, Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, Haakon A. Ikonomou, and Quentin Jouan (London: Routledge, 2022): 679–702, https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2019.1599826.

14 Ruth Wodak, *Disorders of Discourse* (London: Longman, 1996).

15 Ruth Wodak, "Populist Discourses: The Rhetoric of Exclusion in Written Genres," *Document Design* 4, no. 2 (2003): 132–148, https://doi.org/10.1075/dd.4.2.04wod; Jakob Engel and Ruth Wodak, "Calculated Ambivalence and Holocaust Denial in Austria," in *Analysing Fascist Discourse*, eds. John R. Richardson and Ruth Wodak (London: Routledge, 2014): 73–96; Kurt Sengul, " 'It's OK to Be White': The Discursive Construction of Victimhood, 'Anti-White Racism' and Calculated Ambivalence in Australia," *Critical Discourse Studies* 19, no. 6 (2021): 593–609, https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2021.1921818.

16 Gabriella Elgenius and Jens Rydgren, "Frames of Nostalgia and Belonging: The Resurgence of Ethno Nationalism in Sweden," *European Societies* 21, no. 4 (2019): 503–602, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2018.1494297; Cas Mudde, *The Far-Right Today* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2019); Jens Rydgren "Radical Right-Wing Parties in Europe. What's Populism Got to Do with It?" *Journal of Language and Politics* 16, no. 4 (2017): 485–496, https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.17024.ryd; Jens Rydgren and Sara van Der Meiden, "The Radical Right and the End of Swedish Exceptionalism," *European Political Science* 21, no. 4 (2019): 439–455, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-018-0159-6; Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*; Ruth Wodak and Michał Krzyżanowski, eds., *Right-Wing Populism in Europe & USA: Contesting Politics & Discourse beyond 'Orbanism' and 'Trumpism'* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2017, *Journal of Language & Politics* special issue 16, no. 4).

17 Andrzej Rychard, "Manifestacja Odwracania Znaczeń," *Poranek TOK FM*, September 8, 2023, https://audycje.tokfm.pl/podcast/145466,-Manifestacja-odwracania-znaczen.

Hence, assuming the central importance of conceptual flipsiding for illiberalism as "highly polysemic and multicontextual,"[18] this paper elaborates on the notion and its more general (and perhaps transnational) usability in grasping the current illiberal conceptual and discursive fluidity. It also emphasizes the necessity to critically and analytically follow the discourse-conceptual logic[19] that nests the ongoing infusion of key social concepts with illiberal understandings across a variety of contexts. On top of that, fostered by the wider tenets of illiberalism as well as its most frequent context of articulation—that is, the politics of the far right and its affiliates in political, media and uncivil society—many facets of contemporary conceptual flipsiding would entail a "recontextualization"[20] of historical ideas and arguments. As a result, a wider, and often historically contingent illiberal colonization of concepts encompassed by notions once universally seen as the key values of liberal democracy would take place. It would see those concepts being radically redefined, often up to the point of becoming standard notions in illiberal politics and ideologies (as has evidently been the case with, for example, the many recent debates over the concept of freedom of speech).[21]

However, in a similar vein, many other flipsided concepts would emerge as elements of strategic labeling in public discourse. Therein, ideologies and views profoundly conflicting with liberal democracy—including of racism, extremism, neofascism, etc.—would come to be increasingly normalized in the course of their redefinition under the guise of, among other things, previously flipsided notions of freedom of speech, patriotism, and the like. Thereby, their somewhat automatic public acceptability instrumentalized to legitimize the effectively antidemocratic actions and aims. Still, at the same time, not only would specific ideas or notions see their meanings profoundly altered, but so would the labels used against social actors standing in defense of the liberal-democratic understanding of some key social and political notions. The former would hence often be referred to via labels such as woke intellectuals, cancel culture, and the like, and would in the wider struggle for definitions deemed as culture wars[22] be deliberately and strategically misrepresented as non-belonging to the allegedly increasingly nativist, exclusionary, and essentially illiberal common sense.[23]

Given the above complexities, we approach concepts as inherently fluid social constructs and as always open to possible reinterpretations and misinterpretations, across various contexts in and beyond public language, the public sphere, and public discourse.[24] We argue that, as the general descriptor of "liberal" or "liberalism" can be a compound of both liberal-democratic views but also of opposing illiberal ideologies, related concepts, and their interpretation, would also be historically contingent and strongly context-dependent. Our aim is, therefore, to reveal theoretically as well as empirically the recent dynamism of concepts set in the liberal-democratic vs. illiberal

18 Marlene Laruelle, "Illiberalism: A Conceptual Introduction," *East European Politics* 38, no. 2 (June 2022), 303, https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2022.2037079.

19 Michał Krzyżanowski, "Recontextualization of Neoliberalism and the Increasingly Conceptual Nature of Discourse," *Discourse & Society* 27, no. 3 (2016): 308–321, https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926516630901; Michał Krzyżanowski, " 'Brexit' and the Imaginary of 'Crisis': A Discourse-Conceptual Analysis of European News Media," *Critical Discourse Studies* 16, no. 2 (2019): 465–490, https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2019.1592001.

20 Basil Bernstein, *Strategies of Pedagogic Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1990); Krzyżanowski, "Recontextualizations of Neoliberalism."

21 Gavan Titley, *Is Free Speech Racist?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020).

22 Sean Phelan, "Seven Theses about the So-Called Culture War(s)—or Some Fragmentary Notes on 'Cancel Culture,' " *Cultural Studies* (2023), https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2023.2199309.

23 George Newth and Allessio Scopelliti, "Common Sense, Populism, and Reactionary Politics on Twitter," *Party Politics* (online first 2023), https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688231224319.

24 Helge Jordheim, "Conceptual History," in *Bloomsbury History: Theory & Method* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350970878.066; Hagen Schulz-Forberg, "The Spatial and Temporal Layers of Global History"; Willibald Steinmetz and Michael Freeden, "Introduction—Conceptual History: Challenges, Conundrums, Complexities," in *Conceptual History in the European Space*, eds. Willibald Steinmetz, Michael Freeden, Juan Fernandez-Sebastian (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017): 1–46, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781785334832-002.

dichotomy while assuming that they would need to be seen as elements of a longer continuum rather than being placed in a fixed set of universal positions. By doing so, we also recognize that contestation of concepts will always be the central factor in their social functioning and the key driver in their redefinition, while thereby recognizing the vision of illiberalism as "a global but context-dependent movement that varies in intensity across countries, regime types, and constituencies, and features different ideational combinations."[25]

Hence, informed by the various intricacies of the illiberal discourse logic, our focus below revolves analytically around far-right discourse as one the key sites of articulation of illiberal ideas repackaged via the conceptual flipsiding logic. However, we look at discursive practices of the far right under the assumption that, though prominent, the political is only one of the many contexts in which illiberal ideas would be expressed and negotiated, often on a par, and in connection with, among other things, multiple venues and channels of the burgeoning "illiberal intellectual internationale,"[26] illiberal "uncivil society" (both online and offline),[27] or via erupting illiberal "hyperpartisan media."[28] The perspective taken here builds therefore specifically not only on our long-term research on the illiberal discourse and politics of the far right[29] but also on the work on how the nativist politics of exclusion has recently become more widely normalized and legitimized via various mobilizing concepts and strategic discursive shifts. These, as the research shows, would often be proposed by the far right and/or its wider illiberal affiliates[30] yet while aiming for the general recontextualization and normalization of illiberalism in the wider public imagination.

25 Laruelle, "Illiberalism," 304.

26 Valentin Behr, "Towards a Transnational and Social History of Anti-Liberalism. Insights from the Trajectory of Ryszard Legutko," *European Politics and Society* 24, no. 1 (2023): 22–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/237451 18.2021.1956237; Ramona Coman, Valentin Behr, and Jan Beyer, "The Shaping Power of Anti-Liberal Ideas," *European Politics and Society* 24, no. 1 (2021): 1–4, https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2021.1956244.

27 Michał Krzyżanowski and Per Ledin, "Uncivility on the Web: Populism in/and the Borderline Discourses of Exclusion," *Journal of Language & Politics* 16, no. 4 (2017): 566–581, https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.17028.krz.

28 Maria Rae, "Hyperpartisan News: Rethinking the Media for Populist Politics," *New Media & Society* 23, no. 5 (2021): 1117–1132, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820910416.

29 Natalia Krzyżanowska and Michał Krzyżanowski, " 'Crisis' and Migration in Poland: Discursive Shifts, Anti-Pluralism and the Politicisation of Exclusion," *Sociology* 52, no. 3 (2018): 612–618, https://doi. org/10.1177/0038038518757952; Michał Krzyżanowski, "Right-Wing Populism, Opportunism and Political Catholicism: On Recent Rhetorics and Political Communication of Polish PiS (Law and Justice) Party," in *Populismus: Herausforderung oder Gefahr für die Demokratie?* eds. Anton Pelinka and Birgit Haller (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2012): 111–126; Michał Krzyżanowski, "Policy, Policy Communication and Discursive Shifts," in *Analysing Genres in Political Communication*, eds. Piotr Cap and Urszula Okulska (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2013): 101–133; Michał Krzyżanowski, "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 *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, eds. Ruth Wodak, Brigitte Mral, and Majid KhosraviNik (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013): 135–148, https://doi. org/10.5040/9781472544940.ch-009; Michał Krzyżanowski, Anna Triandafyllidou and R. Wodak, "The Politicisation and Mediatisation of the 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee* Studies 16, nos. 1–2 (2018): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.17042.krz; Krzyżanowski and Ledin, "Uncivility on the Web"; Wodak and Krzyżanowski, *Right-Wing Populism in Europe & USA.*

30 Krzyżanowski, "Discursive Shifts in Ethno-Nationalist Politics"; Michał Krzyżanowski, " '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, nos. 1–2 (2018): 97–117, https://doi.org/10.1080/ 15562948.2017.1317895; Krzyżanowski, "Normalization and the Discursive Construction of 'New' Norms and 'New' Normality"; Krzyżanowski, "Discursive Shifts and the Normalisation of Racism"; Michał Krzyżanowski and Mats Ekström, "The Normalization of Far-Right Populism and Nativist Authoritarianism: Discursive Practices in Media, Journalism and the wider Public Sphere/s," *Discourse & Society* 33, no. 6 (2022): 719–729, https:// doi.org/10.1177/09579265221095406; Krzyżanowski and Krzyżanowska, "Narrating the 'New Normal' or Pre-Legitimising Media Control?"; Michał Krzyżanowski, Mattias Ekman, Per-Erik Nilsson, Mattias Gardell, and Christian Christensen, "Un-Civility, Racism and Populism: Discourses and Interactive Practices of Anti- & Post-Democratic Communication," *Nordicom Review* 42 (2021): 3–15, https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2021-0003.

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Conceptual Flipsiding in/and the Illiberal Logics of Discourse

While the articulation and communication of illiberal ideologies takes place in and via public discourse—wherein the political input often remains central—the public domain is also, at the same time, the main carrier as well as the main site of mediation of, on the one hand, the specifically political process of the ideological "mainstreaming" of far-right ideologies[31], and, on the other hand, of the related, deeper as well as society-wide dynamics of the normalization of exclusion seen as a token of the ever more widespread illiberal, exclusionary thinking in the general public domain.[32]

Normalization needs to be seen as part of a longer and continuous process that relies on various strategic *discursive shifts*[33] that are first enacted, then perpetuated, and eventually normalized in line with pronounced strategies of political, media, and other powerful public actors. This logic, consequently, often creates recurrent path dependencies for the even deeper practices of not only rhetorical but also physical or systemic exclusion, which are "pre-legitimized"[34] via the construction and fueling of a wider "atmosphere of incitement"[35] to, as well as acceptance of, discrimination against those members and groups in society hastily considered as the "other." The analysis of discursive shifts, furthermore, makes it possible to identify how and when public and political discourses transform and become politicized in the media[36] for various illiberal aims. It also allows for exploring how, down the line, exclusionary discourses almost always create a peculiar snowball effect and eventually acquire velocity that allows them to successively pre-legitimize ever-stronger expressions of discrimination and exclusion in the wider society.

Irrespective of the context in which these processes occur, *discursive shifts* rely strongly on construction of various "imaginaries."[37] Within those, the often untrue and unrealistic representations and visions of the nativist self or, in particular, of the imagined "other" (within/outside) community can be articulated and eventually mobilized. In a longer run, these can also be perpetuated and normalized, thus becoming stable elements of illiberal public discourses pre-legitimizing the wider politics of exclusion. Crucially, mindsets central to normalized discourses of exclusion combine elements of the real and the unreal[38], and promulgate more or less objective facts and processes identifiable in the social reality with imagined or even utopian visions of how society was, allegedly, functioning in the past ("retrotopia")[39] or how

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31 Mondon and Winter, *Reactionary Democracy*; Odmalm and Hepburn, *The European Mainstream and the Populist Radical Right*; Rydgren and van der Meiden, "The Radical Right and the End of Swedish Exceptionalism."

32 Aristotle Kallis, "Far-Right 'Contagion' or a Failing 'Mainstream'? How Dangerous Ideas Cross Borders and Blur Boundaries," *Democracy & Security* 9, no. 3 (2013): 221–246, https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2013.792251; Aristotle Kallis, "'Counter-Spurt' but Not 'De-Civilization': Fascism, (Un)civility, Taboo, and the 'Civilizing process,' " *Journal of Political Ideologies* 26, no. 1 (2021): 3–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/1356931 7.2020.1825278; Krzyżanowski, "Discursive Shifts in Ethno-Nationalist Politics"; Krzyżanowski" Normalization and the Discursive Construction of 'New' Norms and 'New' Normality"; Krzyżanowski "Discursive Shifts and the Normalization of Racism."

33 Krzyżanowski, "Discursive Shifts in Ethno-Nationalist Politics"; Krzyżanowski, "Normalization and the Discursive Construction of 'New' Norms and 'New' Normality"; Krzyżanowski, "Discursive Shifts and the Normalization of Racism."

34 Michał Krzyżanowski, "Values, Imaginaries and Templates of Journalistic Practice: A Critical Discourse Analysis," *Social Semiotics* 24, no. 3 (2014): 345–365.

35 Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*.

36 Krzyżanowski, " 'We Are a Small Country that Has Done Enormously Lot,' " 79.

37 Bob Jessop, "Understanding the 'Economization' of Social Formations," in *The Marketization of Society* (Bremen: University of Bremen, 2012): 5–36; Bob Jessop, "Crisis Construal in the North Atlantic Financial Crisis and the Eurozone Crisis," *Competition & Change* 19, no. 2 (2015): 95–112, https://doi.org/10.1177/1024529415571866; Krzyżanowski, " 'Brexit' and the Imaginary of 'Crisis' "; Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

38 Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

39 Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2017).

it apparently could or should be functioning in the illiberal "new normal"[40]. This includes visions of what society is ("the people"), but also how relationships between its members (men/women, majority/minorities, etc.) should be organized and articulated. These visions hence act in support of "public pedagogies"[41] which allow political and other actors to ideologically control social action via public imagination.

All of the above logics and discursive shifts need to be considered within the wider setting of various types of "discursive change,"[42]—that is, the transnational discourse dynamics defining trajectories and strategies of public discourses across various contexts.[43] While various types of dynamics could well be considered as those defining contemporary facets of discursive change, one significant trajectory has been that of the "increasing conceptualization of discourse,"[44] which, originally arriving as a token of neoliberal economization of society and of the public domain,[45] eventually came to be also adopted by illiberal politics and ideologies.[46] The said dynamics encompass various parallel processes. On the one hand, it entails a gradual changing of the focus or orientation of discourse away from social actors and groups—as those traditionally represented as agents, doers, or as benefactors of various social, political, and economic dynamics—to making it ever more focused on abstract ideas and concepts. On the other hand, while moving the focus of discourse away from social actors and from doers/benefactors of social action—and thus making it ever less focused on human/social agency—this process has allowed for representing social processes and problems on a strictly abstract and conceptual level. By the same token, it has often obscured the agency of powerful actors—responsible for changes that could be perceived as negative for society—while additionally not showing members of society affected by various facets of change.

The adoption of such strategies by, in particular, the far right, was to a large extent logical, insofar as ideological debates induced by the far right (such as culture wars) have very often boiled down to strictly conceptual struggles and have very often been framed via *topos*[47] of "definition and name interpretation"[48] instead of focusing on specific actions or policies, or considering their medium- and long-term implications. However, such illiberal embracing of conceptual logic entails a number of further discursive dynamics. The first of these is the process of production of the so-called "borderline discourse"[49]—often initially distributed by far-right affiliates within uncivil society and hyperpartisan channels, and only later entering the mainstream media and political debates—whose aim is the normalization of uncivil and often antisocial, illiberal ideologies under the guise of socially- and politically-acceptable ideas and claims. Such construction of borderline discourse has been crucial in, for example, normalization of the wider politics of exclusion groomed in such socially-acceptable ideological-discursive frames of rationalism, religion, values, etc.[50] By the same token, the production of borderline discourse would also enable

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40 Krzyżanowski et al. "Discourses and Practices of the 'New Normal.' "

41 Philip Graham and Harry P. Dugmore, "Public Pedagogies in Post-Literate cultures," *Discourse & Society* 33, no. 6 (2022): 819–832, https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265221095421.

42 Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992).

43 Krzyżanowski, "Policy, Policy Communication and Discursive Shifts."

44 Krzyżanowski, "Recontextualizations of Neoliberalism."

45 Jessop, "Understanding the 'economization' of Social Formations"; Sean Phelan, *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political,* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

46 Krzyżanowski, " 'Brexit' and the Imaginary of Crisis,"; Krzyżanowski and Krzyżanowska, "Narrating the 'New Normal' or Pre-Legitimising Media Control?"

47 *Topos* (plural *topoi*) is a Greek term for an analytical category often used in rhetorical, narrative, or discourse analysis to designate a specific argumentation scheme/frame often recurrently deployed by the speakers/ authors. For further details, see, for example, Michał Krzyżanowski, *The Discursive Construction of European Identities* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010).

48 Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination* (London, UK: Routledge, 2001).

49 Krzyżanowski and Ledin, "Uncivility on the Web."

50 Krzyżanowski, "Normalization and the Discursive Construction of 'New' Norms and 'New' Normality."

simultaneous or subsequent introduction of the wider "proxy discourses"[51] that allow for elaborating various frames in either their proximity or by association, as "public implicatures."[52] Such has been frequently the case with, for example, discussions connecting criminality to immigration/multiculturalism, and with arguments about their inherent connection persisting in the public imagination even when the relationship would not be made explicit any longer.

The Concept of the Family in the Discourse of the European Far Right

Below, we focus analytically on the discourse of illiberal politics of the far right wherein, as an empirical example, we trace ideas and mindsets that have been attached to the wider concept of the family and to its various sister concepts. We show how the latter—in our case, in particular, the notion of equal opportunities between men and women, women's rights, or even of anti-discrimination— would be strategically redefined for the purpose of recontextualizing a strongly conservative vision of family, of women's rights and of gender. As we argue, they would be flipsided conceptually in order to, paradoxically, support the apparently stable and unitary understanding of family as heteronormative and nuclear, as it is consequently emphasized in illiberal discourse. Hence, in the analysis below, we sample the discourses that entail various definitions of family in party-political strategies represented in programmatic documents. We do so in order to show how conceptual flipsiding of the nodal concept of the family—and particularly of its key sister concepts—not only solidifies the hegemonic understanding of family as heteronormative but also allows the far right to, on its back, normalize and make acceptable various further exclusionary notions and views.

As we argue, the concept of the family requires attention as it has recently become one of the most widely used notions in far-right politics, up to the point of even becoming a central tenet of its electoral success in various contexts (for the most recent case, see Italy and Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia: FdI).[53] However, the concept of the family has also been used in the illiberal imagination more widely while frequently becoming an entry point to the public narratives on issues of, among other things, gender, fertility rights, women's rights, equal opportunities, parenting practices, anti-discrimination, etc., which therefore have often been the targets of illiberal ideological actions, especially of the far right.[54] Indeed, as we show, the meaning of all these concepts and ideas would often undergo dynamic change—especially via their translations into the illiberal and deeply conservative catalog of values as we show below. While being, effectively, conceptually flipsided, these concepts would, at the same time, endow the de facto strongly traditional meaning of family with an aura of modern approach while obscuring its still deeply traditional understanding.

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51 Hugo Ekström, Michał Krzyżanowski and David Johnson, "Saying 'Criminality,' Meaning 'Immigration'? Proxy Discourses and Public Implicatures in the Normalisation of the Politics of Exclusion," *Critical Discourse Studies* (2023), https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2023.2282506.

52 Ekström, Krzyżanowski, and Johnson, "Saying 'Criminality.' "

53 Joseph Cerrone, "Italian Far-Right Discourse in the 2022 Election Campaign," *Illiberalism Blog*, October 6, 2022, https://www.illiberalism.org/italian-far-right-discourse-in-the-2022-election-campaign; Alessia Donà, "The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy: The Case of Fratelli d'Italia," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 27, no. 5 (2022): 775–794, https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2022.2113216; Claudia Torrisi, "The Anti-Women Agenda of the Woman Set to Be the Next Italian Prime Minister," *Open Democracy*, September 26, 2022, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/giorgia-meloni-far-right-brothers-of-italy-election-prime-minister-racism-gender.

54 Weronika Grzebalska and Andrea Pető, "The Gendered Modus Operandi of the Illiberal Transformation in Hungary and Poland," *Women's Studies International Forum* 68 (2018): 164–172, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.12.001; Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan, and Andrea Pető, eds., *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Natalia Krzyżanowska, *Kobiety w (polskiej) sferze publicznej* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo A. Marszałek, 2012); Natalia Krzyżanowska, "Konstruowanie macierzyństwa jako kwestii społecznej na przykładzie dyskursów polskiej sfery publicznej," *Kultura i Edukacja* 4, no. 104 (2014): 142–166, https://doi.org/10.15804/kie.2014.04.11; Natalia Krzyżanowska, "The Commodification of Motherhood: Normalisation of Consumerism in Mediated Discourse on Mothering," *Social Semiotics* 30, no. 4 (2020): 563–590, https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2020.1762986.

Indeed, given the concept of family is one of the most complex in the social sciences, its illiberal simplifications favoring fixed understandings, such as those highlighted below, must be viewed as purposeful and strategic. They allow, namely, to discard a modern vision of family as a process, and as subject to changes taking place with time, with the evolving life-course of its members, and within the dynamics of the wider society and social change[55]. Therefore, family as a concept—and a denotation of a certain community, intimacy, and a set of practices and of a shared responsibility[56]—would be subject to many processes of idealization and ideological misappropriation that would also chime in with its reinforcement in illiberal mindsets. The latter would often not only combat the plurality of the family's contemporary forms and foreground heterosexual and nuclear family[57] while negating plurality of contemporary family forms including, inter alia, same-sex and trans-gender families[58] or families based on assisted reproduction,[59] all of which would often be often targeted by illiberal visions. The latter would also enable obscuring the fact that, as such, family is not only a locus of socialization but also a space where gender inequality would often be incepted and sustained[60] prior to its recontextualization into wider society. It is for those reasons that conceptions of family would be particularly open to politicizations as made evident in far-right illiberal discourse with its focus on the implied stability of family and on simultaneous conceptual dynamism of its closely-related sister notions.

The Context

Our analysis below looks at the discourse about family of the Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs: FPÖ) present in the Austrian and European political scene since the 1940s. Its ideological catalog has continuously revolved around nativist ideas and claims though with specific policies to enforce those changing over time.[61] The FPÖ came into the international spotlight at the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s, when, under the then leadership of Jörg Haider, the party brought to Austrian political discourse a focus on anti-immigration and nativist politics (for example, under the famous strategically ambivalent slogan, "Austria First") thus forging a discursive link that in years to come would become a standard tenet of the European as well as international far right. As a result, the FPÖ of the late 1990s enjoyed radically increased public support and even entered the Austrian federal government as the coalition partner of the conservative Austrian People's

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55 Mirosława Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk, *Transformations of Social Bonds: The Outline of the Theory of Social Change* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2018).

56 Gerard Delanty, *Community* (London: Routledge, 2018).

57 Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences* (London: Sage, 2002).

58 Joanna Mizielińska and Agata Stasińska, "Beyond the Western Gaze: Families of Choice in Poland," *Sexualities* 21, no. 7 (2018): 983–1001, https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460711771850.

59 Jenny Gunnarson-Payne, "Reproduction in Transition: Cross-Border Egg Donation, Biodesirability and New Reproductive Subjectivities on the European Fertility Market," *Gender, Place & Culture* 22, no. 1 (2015): 107–122, https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2013.832656; Zeynep B. Gürtin and Charlotte Faircloth, eds., *Conceiving Contemporary Parenthood: Imagining, Achieving and Accounting for Parenthood in New Family Forms* (London: Routledge, 2020).

60 Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender, and Society* (London: Routledge, 1972); Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Claudia Goldin, "A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter," *American Economic Review* 104, no. 4 (2014): 1091–1119, https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.104.4.1091.

61 For details on FPÖ development and its key ideological tenets, see Michał Krzyżanowski and Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Exclusion: Debating Migration in Austria* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009); Walter Manoschek, "FPÖ, ÖVP and Austria's Nazi Past," in *The Hider Phenomenon in Austria*, eds. Ruth Wodak and Anton Pelinka (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002): 3–17; Anton Pelinka, *Zur österreichischen Identität: Zwischen deutscher Vereinigung und Mitteleuropa*, (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 1990); Anton Pelinka, *Die Kleine Koalition. SPÖ-FPÖ 1983–1986* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1993); Anton Pelinka, *Vom Glanz und Elend der Parteien: Struktur- und Funktionswandel des österreichischen Parteiensystems* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2005); Anton Pelinka, "How Austrian Politics Went from Over-Stability to Unpredictability," *World Politics Review* (2017), https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/how-austrian-politics-went-from-over-stability-to-unpredictability.

Party (Österreichische Volkspartei, or ÖVP) in 2000—yet with this famously leading to political repercussions of both national and international nature.

Given the FPÖ's apparently pervasive inability to remain efficient while in government,[62] the party has since the early 2000s enjoyed some isolated stints in government (within repeated coalitions with the conservatives in 2000 to 2005, and 2017 to 2019), yet spent the majority of the new millennium in opposition. While in government, the FPÖ would strongly proliferate its policies – which could best be described as a highly ambivalent to outright paradoxical combination of welfare and neoliberal logics with FPÖ remaining nativistically "proletarian" as well as welfare-chauvinist.[63] On the other hand, while in opposition, the party would continue to master its anti-establishment, populist-nativist claims as well as being focused on what has been called "constant campaigning[64], in particular with regard to channeling its anti-immigration, nativist, or ever more explicitly Islamophobic politics. However, while the FPÖ has remained out of government recently, it has, under the current leadership of Herbert Kickl since 2021, again managed to rebuild its base gradually yet quite significantly, with polls indicating even around 30% support in early 2024.[65]

Methodology: Discourse-Conceptual Analysis

Given the theoretical and analytical focus on the conceptual character of the analyzed discourse, the analysis below utilizes the "discourse-conceptual analysis" (or DCA; Krzyżanowski 2010, 2016, 2019) that combines key insights from, on the one hand, the Discourse-Historical Approach in Critical Discourse Studies[66] and, on the other hand, the so-called conceptual history (or *Begriffsgeschichte*) of Reinhart Koselleck[67] and of his key followers.[68] DCA has previously been deployed extensively in the analyses of illiberal discourse of the far right (for example, the Austrian FPÖ[69] but also the Polish Law and Justice [PiS] party),[70] or of the far right's key ideological projects (such as, for example, Brexit).[71]

In terms of the actual analysis, the DCA follows a typical multilevel discourse-historical analysis.[72] Therein, at first, the entry-level thematic analysis is usually

62 Reinhard Heinisch, "Success in Opposition—Failure in Government: Exploring the Performance of the Austrian Freedom Party and other European Right-Wing Populist Parties in Public Office," *West European Politics* 26, no. 3 (2003): 91–130, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380312331280608.

63 Philip Rathgeb, "Makers against Takers: The Socio-Economic Ideology and Policy of the Austrian Freedom Party," *West European Politics* 44, no. 3 (2021): 635–660, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2020.1720400 .

64 Bernhard Forchtner, Michał Krzyżanowski, and Ruth Wodak, "Mediatization, Right-Wing Populism and Political Campaigning: The Case of the Austrian Freedom Party," in *Media Talk and Political Elections in Europe and America,* eds. Mats Ekström and Andrew Tolson (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 205–228.

65 "Austria—National Parliament Voting Intention," in *Politico–Poll of Polls* (2024) https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/austria/.

66 Krzyżanowski, *The Discursive Construction of European Identities*; Martin Reisigl, "The Discourse-Historical Approach," in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*, eds. John Richardson and John Flowerdew (London: Routledge, 2018): 44–59.

67 Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979); Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

68 Jan Ifversen, "Text, Discourse, Concept: Approaches to Textual Analysis," *Kontur* 7 (2003): 60–69, https://kontur.au.dk/fileadmin/www.kontur.au.dk/OLD_ISSUES/pdf/kontur_07/jan_ifversen.pdf; Jan Ifversen, "About Key Concepts and How to Study Them," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6, no. 1 (2011): 65–88, https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2011.060104; Hagen Schulz-Forberg, *Zero Hours: Conceptual Insecurities and New Beginnings in the Interwar Period* (Brussels: PIE-Peter Lang, 2013); Schulz-Forberg, "The Spatial and Temporal Layers of Global History"; Schulz-Forberg, "Crisis and Continuity."

69 Krzyżanowski, "From Anti-Immigration and Nationalist Revisionism to Islamophobia."

70 Krzyżanowski and Krzyżanowska, "Narrating the 'New Normal' or Pre-Legitimising Media Control?"

71 Krzyżanowski, " 'Brexit' and the Imaginary of 'Crisis.' "

72 Krzyżanowski, *The Discursive Construction of European Identities,* chap. 2.

performed in order to map the text-semantic aspects of the contents of discourse (and devise relevant discourse topics) before moving on to the in-depth analysis that covers a variety of discursive strategies including, centrally, various argumentation frames (summarized via different *topoi*). At the intersection of these levels, yet mainly while drawing on the in-depth analysis which is also the main focus of our examination below, the key aim is to explore the main arguments in the discourse surrounding the concept of family. This results in empirically forming the concept's semantic field: that is, a cumulative map of thematic-argumentative connections which are formed in the process of relating the central or basic concept in question to its sister- or counter-concepts that would either help, respectively, to particularize or oppose its meaning.

Analysis

The FPÖ's approach to conceptualizing the family as well as wider gender relationships embodied by the family's sister concepts has, especially in recent decades, remained more or less consequently framed by the party's wider far-right and ethno-nationalist stance anchored in a rather set number of issues and ideas.[73] Among these, there have been, for example: definitions of family as such, especially via strictly heteronormative ideas of partnerships and traditional ideas, in addition to criticizing homosexuality and same-sex relationships and/or foregrounding (though in many cases rather cursorily) family- and elderly-related welfare provisions.

In recent years, this catalog has also been extended by the idea of women's rights, often subsumed to a wider gender equality which, as has been shown extensively before,[74] has long been in focus of the FPÖ as the notion enabling, among other things, the party's anti-multiculturalist and especially more recent Islamophobic rhetoric (via arguments wherein, for example, Islam would be criticized for disregarding women's rights, including in such practices as wearing headscarves, etc.). In many cases above, however, once redefined and "flipsided" in their meanings, many family-related notions would tend to be used in a rather path-dependent way: they would mainly be used nominally or figuratively (that is, just mentioned) before being purposefully misinterpreted.

In the current FPÖ Program (which has been in place with some modifications since 2011[75] and hence, also, despite its de facto evolution, maintaining an image of certain stability of views), the notion of family would be prominent on a par with the Party's wider self-presentation as a nativist party (traditionally self-defined as *Heimatpartei*). Indeed, throughout the document, the current FPÖ slogan describing the party as a "social homeland party" (*die soziale Heimatpartei*) would be repeated on each page of the program, while the front page would also include a statement that FPÖ's "Heart Beats in Red-White Red" (*Unser Herz schlägt rot-weiss-rot*), making reference to the Austrian red-white-red national flag often used in the party's political communication materials.

References to family as a concept first appear on page 3, where a presentation of a 10-point list of "Key points of freedomite politics" (*Leitsätze freiheitlicher Politik*) is presented. Therein, point 4 speaks specifically of family and defines this as a

73 Carina Klammer and Judith Goetz, "Between German Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Racism: Representations of Gender in the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)," in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, eds. Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan, and Andrea Pető (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 79–93.

74 Krzyżanowski, "From Anti-Immigration and Nationalist Revisionism to Islamophobia."

75 For details, see FPÖ Parteiprogramm (2023). https://www.fpoe.at/en/themen/parteiprogramm/parteiprogramm-englisch. Note that, apart from its program, the FPÖ also tends to use various programmatic documents as a guideline for its politicians and officials as far as implementation of the program and its key points. These include, for example, the Handbook of Freedomite Politics (Handbuch Freiheitlicher Politik: HFP), which we have already analyzed previously; see also Krzyżanowski, "From Anti-Immigration and Nationalist Revisionism to Islamophobia."

heteronormative construct, necessarily including children, as well as alluding to the role of the family as multi-generational. Specifically, it is argued that:

> 4. The family, as a partnership between a man and a woman with common children, is the natural nucleus that holds a functioning society together, and which, with the solidarity of the generations, underpins our sustainability.[76]

The above ideas are then also further developed/particularized in Part 4 of the program, corresponding with point 4 of the initial outline of "key points," which is devoted specifically to "Family and Generations" (Familie und Generationen) and amounting to 1.5 pages.

There are, at first, two *topoi*: of *family as a foundation of a society* and of *family as a heteronormative construct*, which are further developed (see Figure 1 for key *topoi* and concepts used in relation to family in the document). The latter is emphasized from the outset, when the definition of family as a "partnership of man and woman" is repeatedly mentioned. This eventually leads to a statement, in the fifth paragraph of the section, that the FPÖ outwardly rejects "a separate legal institution for same-sex relations," thus effectively building a heteronormative (and to some extent implicitly anti-homosexual) argument. Further to that, the previous focus on children is also redeployed to argue that "only partnerships between men and women provide our society with a wealth of children," wherein children serve as a concept that pre-legitimizes the strictly heteronormative vision of family and allows for rejection of homosexuality on the one hand and of homosexual partnerships or marriages as "families" on the other.
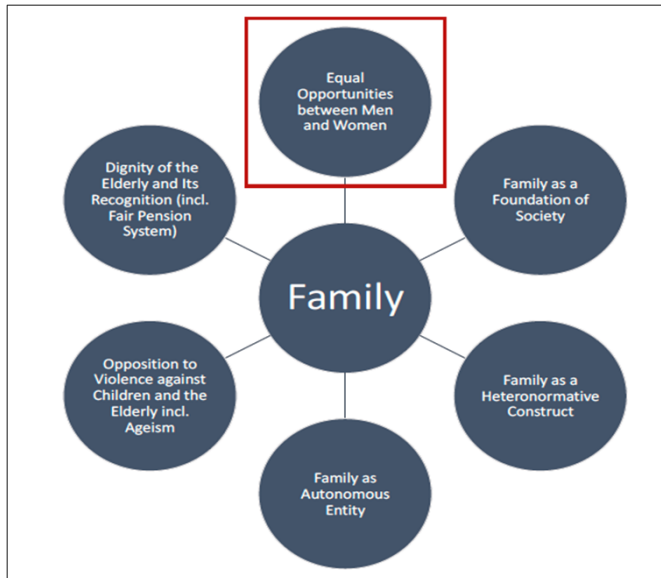

FIGURE 1: Semantic Field of the Concept of Family in the FPÖ Party Program.

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76 FPÖ Program, p. 3.

Symptomatically for the Party's programmatic as well as discursive ambivalence, the section devoted to family also includes a rather paradoxical discussion and, effectively, a redefinition of "equal opportunities between men and women" (within the set of arguments related to gender equality). Therefore, the FPÖ argues, it is "committed to" gender equality, in addition to further specifying where that equality should be evident (that is, in "mutual respect" and "fair incomes"). However, while the first two passages of discussion on gender relations pertain to the above, purely declarative and general statements, already the third paragraph of the section moves to a deeper redefinition of equal opportunities, and in particular their eventual implementation. It claims that:

> We emphatically reject the preferential treatment of a gender to overcome actual or perceived discrimination. Statistical inequalities caused by a variety of factors cannot be evened out by wronging individual people. This is why we speak out against any quota regulation or "gender mainstreaming."[77]

Hence, one witnesses here a specific "conceptual flipsiding" wherein, on the one hand, gender equality is first nominally mentioned as a concept but, on the other, it is provided with understanding that is far from its equity-based understanding. This becomes even more obvious when the FPÖ makes further declarative statements on the one hand, while on the other rejecting any actual actions and policies that would enforce gender parity in the wider society, as is the case with the openly rejected "gender mainstreaming." More importantly, in order to fulfil the above argument, the evidence of gender inequalities in society is strongly trivialized and mitigated as resorting to "statistical inequalities" while implying the problem may, de facto, not exist and only be a case of a misperception drawn from statistical distributions. This is realized via a strategy of "indetermination,"[78] which effectively allows for diluting the problem by making its various aspects unspecific. Hence, we see the FPÖ arguing that potential gender inequalities are "caused by a variety of factors," and hence one also cannot apply any specific solutions (such as, for example, the said gender mainstreaming) to eradicate the problem.

While the remaining discussion in the FPÖ program is devoted to two *topoi*—one of *caring for children and the elderly in the context of intergenerational family contacts*, and another of *violence and age-based discrimination*), an interesting set of overall arguments still transpires through the remaining discussion in the "Family & Generations" section. On the one hand, the FPÖ styles itself as an "anti-discrimination" party, which, however, knowing the party's very persistent and long-term anti-pluralist stance, seems rather dubious and a clear case of intended, "calculated ambivalence."[79] Yet, as one eventually learns, said anti-discrimination is also, in addition, conceptually flipsided as it is mainly presented as an act of fighting discrimination against heterosexual families, thus resembling wider argumentative flipsides frames known from "anti-white racism."[80] The same also applies to several arguments in favor of a variety of welfare provisions, which, communicating the FPÖ's apparently pro-welfare and pro-inclusivity stance, on the one hand emerges as a set of unsubstantiated flipsides (especially knowing the party's usually nativist welfare-chauvinist stance) while at the same time constituting the entry point into neoliberal pre-legitimation (explicitly mentioning "corporate and private pension planning").[81]

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77 FPÖ Program, p. 8.

78 Theo van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

79 Wodak, "Populist Discourses."

80 Sengul, " 'It's OK to Be White."

81 FPÖ Program, 9.

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Conclusions

Our analysis emphasizes that, as a political-discursive strategy, conceptual flipsiding requires close theoretical and empirical attention, given its pervasiveness and the often pivotal role in the contemporary normalization of anti- and post-democratic thinking.[82] As our examination above shows, conceptual flipsiding is also a complex strategy which allows public proponents of illiberalism—including, most prominently, the far right—to deploy in their discourse a variety of concepts which, in their origins, are liberal-democratic and/or egalitarian yet are in the studied discourse being openly endowed with specifically illiberal and quasi-traditionalist as well as conservative meanings. As has been shown, concepts rarely undergo the flipsiding process in isolation and the process often affects wider or longer chains and conceptual constellations. Thereby, not only the major or central notions (in our case, the family) but also—or perhaps especially—their key sister-concepts are endowed with new, illiberal meanings. This allows proponents of the illiberal stance to reverse meanings of not only isolated notions but also, effectively, of wider semantic fields of key social and political concepts.

A strategic nature of the conceptual flipsiding process highlighted in our analysis is particularly vital here. As we have shown, namely, the illiberal stance is recontextualized (in our case, by the far right) with the aim of deploying redefined concepts for pronouncedly political and ideological reasons and, first and foremost, in order to colonize concepts seen as vital entry points to related, wider areas of the social and political imagination. Therefore, as has been shown, the key concepts are often figuratively or nominally mentioned while being instrumentalized as entry points for challenging and opposing a number of further notions and ideas that do not align with the illiberal (including far-right) political-ideological catalog. In our case, the recurrent discursive focus on, among other things, gender and women's rights, same-sex relationships, etc., is emphasized in illiberal discourses to de facto strongly criticize those concepts and reject their liberal-democratic meanings.

The above, as has been shown, happens while deploying (at least initially and nominally) the concepts known to be associated with liberal-democratic thinking and hence in a strategy which not only redefines them but also, in doing so, effectively enables their takeover by the illiberal ideologies. This, crucially, poses many challenges as far possibilities of critically deconstructing and analyzing or possibly reversing this process. Namely, given that, the discourse in question still revolves around recognizable and widely acceptable notions, it also allows for new illiberal meanings to be accepted and normalized under the guise of acceptable ideas. This, consequently, hinders deconstruction of illiberal conceptual flipsiding which, effectively, hijacks the language once known to liberal democracy and its ideas/values and makes it increasingly difficult for its liberal-democratic understandings to be reinstated and brought back to the center of the public imagination.[83]

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82 Krzyżanowski et al., "Discourses and Practices of the 'New Normal' "; Laruelle, "Illiberalism."