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GEORGE SPENCER TERRY

Demanding Subjectivity: The Radical Right's Use of Discursively Empty Referent Objects within a Post-Foundational Logics Framework

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Author's Contribution

I. The author of the present dissertation contributed all the analysis and data collection on the Italian-centric and Salvini-centric sections, as well as contributed to the introduction, conclusion, and conceptual background.

II. The author of the present dissertation produced this article independently, from the development of the main research question to the synthesis of relevant literature, to research design, and to empirical data collection and analysis. Additionally, the author managed the submission process, incorporating feedback and comments from reviewers.

III. The author of the present dissertation contributed all the research and analysis on EKRE and *Sinine Äratus*, as well as collaborative writing for the rest of the article, most primarily the introduction, conceptual and theoretical background, and conclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2015 onward, political and societal upheavals have made the rise of populist and radical right parties all the more salient. The election of Donald Trump in the 2016 and 2024 US presidential elections are but two examples. The conservative, anti-establishment rhetoric and purported sentiments of disenfranchisement in the United Kingdom that led to Brexit is another. The European migrant crisis, the COVID pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, economic recessions and stagnation – all of these crises have correlated with and punctuated this trend. Each of these events has created new opportunities for the populist and radical right to gain support by exploiting grievances and resentment.

As of 2025, the situation has not radically changed, and in some circumstances, the salience of populist and radical right parties has grown. The *Rassemblement National* is the largest party in France, only kept from government by Emmanuel Macron's *cordon sanitaire*. The *Alternative für Deutschland* has won the *Länder* elections Thuringia in 2024, making these regional victories the first since 1945. Giorgia Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia* has overseen the country more stably than many of the previous coalition governments since the 2022 Italian general election. In Poland, although *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* is kept out of government, it still the first party in the country, commanding the support of 35.4 percent of the electorate as of the 2023 Sejm elections. Similarly, Hungary and Slovakia are headed by parties and individuals who have been consistently labelled as populist radical right actors. This is only to speak of the institutional European Union, not to go into more detail regarding developments in the United States and other regions. The populist and radical right is here to stay.

Partially due to these social and political developments, the study of the populist radical right has become an established research field. This growth is driven by both individual scholars and state-funded projects. Within this research program, however, no matter the ideological, stylistic, or discursive analytical frameworks proposed, the radical right, coeval with populism, is analyzed as peripheral yet encroaching family of actors outside of the normative framework and conventions of liberal democracy. As a result, they are primarily interpreted through the logics of these norms and conventions, and consequently, this dissertation seeks to contribute to a broadening of academic debates on the populist radical right.

1.1 Guiding Questions and Analytical Focus

This dissertation explores the complex interplay of how the radical right demands and defines its own identity. It seeks to answer the question of ***how the radical right articulates its own subjectivity in relation to discursively empty referent objects,*** as well as how these relations implicitly structure its actions. First, the 'radical' in radical right indicates its political monism, anti-pluralism, and

"rejection of universalistic and egalitarian, sometimes called democratic, values" (Rydgren 2007, 243). While the center right may operate with some of these universalistic and egalitarian precepts, the radical right tends to treat them as illegitimate. Second, subjectivity is to be understood as a construct born of the interplay of social structures and discursive practices instead of anything objectively measurable or inherent. Subjects are not passive in this sense, and they act within the confines and opportunities provided to them by these social structures. Third, these discursively empty referent objects are either vague or undefined points of reference that the radical right can use to situate and communicate its identity. These objects can come from various sources – reference to other countries, current events, or cultural heritage – and serve as flexible symbols that can be adapted depending on context. Concurrently, the meanings that the radical right assigns to these objects reflect a unified logic of radical right subjectivity. Through engagement with these objects, the radical right demands its own subjectivity. Each article in this dissertation will engage with sub-questions related to this same overarching topic to illustrate this dynamic of demanding subjectivity:

Article I. *How do radical right interlocutors exploit international relations to position their subjectivity domestically?*

Article II. *How does the radical right re-articulate its subjectivity following a discursive rupture?*

Article III. *How has ethno-cultural identity been instrumentalized and negotiated to situate the subjectivity of the radical right?*

The articles selected for this dissertation engage with these broader sub-questions – broad in terms of analytical scale – through specific empirical contextual cases. The first article examines this dynamic within Italy, focusing on Matteo Salvini as a radical right interlocutor for *Lega*, interrogating how he constructs and positions Italy's relationality with Russia as a means of legitimizing his own position to speak on behalf of the *demos* and advancing particular ontological claims regarding the constitution of the *demos*. The second article engages with the discursive rupture and dislodgement induced by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, tracing how various actors within the Italian radical right struggled to re-articulate previous affective and symbolic investments in Russia and negotiate its shifting significance in relation to their own subject-positioning as radical right actors. Finally, the third article explores the Estonian radical right's invocation, instrumentalization, and contestation of Finno-Ugric ethno-cultural or civilizational identity. This triangulation of cases illustrates the applicability of the proposed interpretative framework, demonstrating how it enables a more nuanced reading of empirical phenomena through the methodological approach advanced in this dissertation.

To this point, each of these articles demonstrates how radical right actors can position discursively empty objects in relation to their own demanded subjectivity across various international and domestic contexts, engaging in an act of self-interpellation. Interpellation, as understood by Judith Butler, is a process through which individuals are assigned social roles or identities by external forces (e.g., Butler 1990). However, as the analysis in this text will demonstrate – rather than the articles themselves, which engage only implicitly with this conceptual innovation and do not operationalize it *per se* – these radical right actors are actively engaged in the performative constitution of their own roles and identities through discursive formations and the articulation of logics. As they are not passively accepting what they are and how they should act by these external forces, these radical right actors are actively defining and reinforcing these roles for themselves. This definition is achieved through a constant reference to a *demos*, that is, the people or the nation.

As nationalists or populists, they speak on behalf of the nation and people, and by speaking on behalf of this nation and people, they consequently shape, define, and condition what that nation is and how its constituent people should be understood. Nevertheless, as they speak on behalf the nation and people and strive to define their own position vis-à-vis this group, they are nonetheless a part of this same nation and people whose subject position they are attempting to define and establish. This dynamic is nuanced from the previously outlined understanding of interpellation, which views interpellation as a process that assigns and imposes identities. While this aligns with Ernesto Laclau's understanding of the "construction of the people as a collective actor" (Laclau 2006, 675), this process also demonstrates how radical right actors attempt stabilization within this framework, presenting themselves as a part of this configuration rather than external to it.

1.2 Statements of Defense

This dissertation posits that *the radical right's discursive engagement with ambiguously defined referent objects represents an act of self-interpellation in reaction to the dominant socio-political logics of liberal democracy*. The radical right, which emphasizes inequality among both individuals and groups, still requires an articulation of a defined people, a *demos*, on whose behalf it can speak and represent its political demands in order to legitimize itself within the conventions of liberal democracy. Inequality is seen as the belief that differences in "merit, need, rank, work," and other criteria are natural rather than socially conditioned, and do not require rectification (Bobbio 1996, 61). These political demands are understood as the transformation of a "request into a claim as far as people see themselves as bearers of rights that are not recognized" (Laclau 2006, 655). The subsequent publications will demonstrate how the radical right claims an exclusive right to speak for 'the people,' strictly defining who qualifies as 'the people' and how they are defined, which conditions an explicit antagonism with other actors claiming the same speaking position. This articulation, keeping in

line with the premise of the inequality of the individual and the collective, contradicts the diametrically opposed premise of liberal democracy, which presupposes the equality of all individuals and groups as a normative foundation.

To this point, these referent objects *provide a space for the radical right to articulate socio-political logics of inequality, enmity, and exclusivity exactly due to their inherent vagueness while still maintaining a position of legitimacy vis-à-vis the demos*. This type of argumentation represents a legitimating strategy for the radical right within a democratic framework, as it allows the radical right to re-articulate the normative premises of liberal democracy without challenging them structurally. More fundamentally, it is also argued that, when abstracted from the empirical cases in the publications, the general structure of the logics deployed by radical right actors justifies using an interpretative demands-centric logics approach as a primary analytical method for studying the radical right, separate yet parallel to populism, which constitutes the principal methodological contribution of this work. The aim of this dissertation, therefore, is to propose a broader interpretative theory of the radical right through the development of such a methodological approach.

1.3 Structure of the Dissertation

The following section on conceptual engagement will address the contemporary debates about the radical right, thematically focusing on common definitions and articulations that have arisen from scholarly consensus on the radical right and populism, which will be presented in the following section. This conceptual engagement with the radical right as concept and also with interrelated developments within the radical right as a qualifier will be followed by a discussion of the growing synonymy of the people with the nation for the *demos* to which radical right actors refer. This engagement with extant approaches to theorizing the radical right allows this work to position itself within these debates, as well as reach a working articulation as to what essentially constitutes the radical right as the object of the current study. These investigations will unveil the richness of the radical right as a complex concept, marked by diverse interpretations and expressions, thereby making it suitable for use as a discursive rationale situated within a spectrum of socio-political logics.

The third section will outline some methodological and epistemological considerations centering on a post-foundational understanding of discourse. This methodological and epistemological engagement will provide an overall framework and uniting epistemology for engaging with the articles, as well outline what a post-foundational logics approach entails. This means looking into the post-structural approaches to discourse as understood by Michel Foucault and more importantly by Ernesto Laclau, then looking into conceptualizations of subject position, interpellation as understood by Laclau and Judith Butler, and functions of legitimation. Following this, the post-foundational logics approach of the Essex School (e.g., Glynos and Howarth 2007), centering on its under-

standing of social, political, and fantasmatic logics, will be explained, all united in that subject position is the situation from which all three can even arise or exist in the first place.

The fourth section will situate the three articles in the constellation of the overall research question, looking at how the chosen logics approach functions within the three articles framed as theory-building interpretative cases for radical right actors in diverse fora and contexts. *Article I* investigates how affective positioning of international relations can be used for situating subjectivity in the case of a single interlocutor, Matteo Salvini. *Article II* explores how different parties on the right struggle to rearticulate their own subject positions in the paradigm of a discursive rupture in the case of how the Italian right attempted to refix relative meanings to Russia and Ukraine after the 2022 invasion. Lastly, *Article III* will demonstrate how the Estonian radical right instrumentalizes and situates civilizational identitarian ascriptions to provide an essence and grounding for its own contemporary subjectivity and legitimized speaking position.

The fifth section will conclude the dissertation, drawing commonalities analyzed from the three publications, delineating the limitations of the chosen approach, and intimating directions for future research programs. Most importantly, this summary will reaffirm the thesis statement by showing how the interpretative case studies, using the logics approach, illustrate how the radical right's engagement with ambiguous referent objects is a reaction to the dominant sociopolitical logics of liberal democracy and a demand for its own subjectivity.

2. CONCEPTUAL ENGAGEMENT

This section critically examines the current state of scholarship concerning discursive approaches to the radical right and populism. It begins by analyzing the focal points of contemporary studies – analyses of individual actors and comparative frameworks – before investigating into the shared conceptual and methodological elements inherent in these approaches. Subsequently, it explores recent methodological advancements within the field of populism studies. The section concludes by elucidating how these empirical investigations, along with their conceptual and methodological commonalities, inform and contextualize the present dissertation.

Most discursive analyses of the populist radical right are either in-depth case studies of radical right dynamics within specific countries or comparative studies across different, primarily national, contexts. A notable emphasis in these studies is on the United States and Western Europe, attributed to their perceived social relevance in driving global transformations and reshaping international normative and ideological considerations. Research has concentrated on phenomena such as the rise of Donald Trump in the United States, the *Rassemblement National* in France, *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany, and *Lega* in Italy (e.g., Öner 2022; Schmidtke 2021; Gattinara and Froio 2019; Kelly 2020). This focus has extended to discursive examinations of the populist radical right in Central and Eastern Europe, with additional studies – both comparative and otherwise – on countries such as Poland, Hungary, Estonia, and Latvia (e.g., Lipiński and Stępińska 2018; Fielitz and Thurston 2018; Braghiroli and Petsinis 2019). Comparative analyses have also been conducted regionally, contrasting Western and Eastern populist radical right actors (Pytlas 2018). However, these studies often historicize and treat the populist radical right as an intrinsically Eurocentric or Western-centric phenomenon. Simultaneously, while populism is recognized as a globally applicable concept for a diverse range of actors across the so-called ideological spectrum, the label 'radical right' is predominantly applied to Western or European entities. Non-Western counterparts are more commonly described as authoritarian, totalitarian, or imperialist, with the term 'fascist' occasionally ascribed to countries adjacent to Europe.

While these comparative or country-based case studies have illuminated the specificities and nuances of particular situations, certain methodological and conceptual commonalities are evident through the discursive study of the radical right. These include diverse ascriptions of Otherness by the radical right, wherein specific groups or actors are discursively positioned as external to the self-identified political community (Sakki & Pettersson 2016). This positioning is subsequently tied to a Manichean tendency toward fixation, which thereby essentializes identities into rigid moral dichotomies. Another element is the discursive articulation of resentment by radical right actors toward perceived wrongdoings, injustices, or misalignments of position (Bonikowski 2017). Furthermore,

populism, ethno-nationalism, and authoritarianism are identified as forming the discursive core of the radical right (e.g., Mudde 2007; Carter 2018; Pascale 2019).

From a discursive perspective, studies of populism contribute significantly in terms of methodological depth. Similar to this dissertation, they are grounded in interpretative paradigms, ranging from critical to poststructuralist analyses (Kranert 2020; Dijk 2024). These discursive approaches converge in their examination of how populists reify exclusionary identities. In this regard, populist discursive structures are less concerned with concrete policy proposals or development of political doctrine – as would be the case in an ideology-centric approach – and more focused on the process of generating affective bonds for their referred political community (Stavrakakis et al. 2017; Nikisianis et al. 2019). This is achieved through appeals to common sense, moralizing language, and the simplification of political demands into dichotomies that can supposedly mobilize support, even in the absence of a comprehensive ideological program.

Such a discursive and demands-centric approach to analyzing the radical right speaks to the Laclauian notion of horizon, that is, those spaces wherein demands can be articulated, which in the German case of the *Alternative für Deutschland* demonstrates of how these demands can emerge both from the political elite or the populace themselves (Schneider 2024). However, such approaches primarily examine how these discourses emerge in relation to external objects, rather than any inherent essence of the subject. To this point, this dissertation engages with, builds upon, and remains sympathetic to this demands-centric approach of the Essex School, examining the intercourse between political demands, subject dispositions, and processes of self-interpellation.

At the same time, the interplay between the concepts of populism and the radical right has led to some conceptual blurring or stretching due to the establishment of a disciplinary focus on a construct of the populist radical right. Consequently, explicit focus on the radical right does not always emerge clearly, and populism is not always treated as its own analytical locus. Therefore, this dissertation is situated within this broader debate, centering analytical focus on the radical right over populism, and proposing its own adjacent yet alternative discursive approach to the radical right. The proposed interpretative methodological framework stems from a reevaluation of the conceptual premises embedded within current discursive studies. Specifically, it centers on the foundational discursive concepts of authoritarianism, nativism, and nationalism within the radical right, while applying the discursive structural approaches and logics derived from studies of populism. However, this approach differs from those previously undertaken in that it centers the radical right actor, tracing the logics of discourse formulation from the immanent objects presupposed therein.

2.1 The Radical Right

The radical right, as the primary object of research within the research question, is the first of the guiding concepts that must be defined. With the rise of the populist radical right in Europe and the West more broadly in the last decade, the concept itself has become more contextual and, as a result, has evolved vis-à-vis pejorative usages in political and journalistic rhetoric as well as in academic lexica. Because popular and academic understandings of a concept act hermeneutically on one another (Giddens 2013), meaning that lay concepts and discourses from the social sciences intrinsically shape and condition each other, a careful and robust review of the concept is required before using it as a qualifier for the actors in this work in the first place. The goal of this section is thus to present all relevant aspects of the radical right as academically situated – avoiding popular, vernacular, and pejorative formulations – to arrive at a definition for radical right as a qualifier. After conducting such a review, the term 'radical right' can be used as a qualifier for those parties and actors, going beyond a simple citation to the typological attributions already made by other scholars.

The radical right's anti-egalitarian nature is one of its main organizing concepts. This anti-egalitarianism manifests itself in a variety of ways, the most prominent of which is the rejection of social justice programs and, more broadly, human equality (Bobbio 1996). Furthermore, when historicized, anti-egalitarianism remains the most consistent pillar of the radical right. The radical right, conversely, has also been defined by its particularism. In this context, particularism means emphasizing individual or group characteristics as more salient and essential than universal ones (Eatwell and Mudde 2003). Particularism can manifest itself in a variety of ways, including various forms of elitism or exclusionary practices, but it has most recently manifested itself in nationalistic formations. An anchoring in one of these understandings, however, does not clarify the larger picture. Others have observed that the radical right in ideological positioning can be anti-egalitarian and universal at times, or egalitarian and particularistic, which calls into question most of these basic definitions (Rydgren 2007).

However, before going any further with this tangent, there should be some kind of restriction of scope when looking at the radical right, rather than going back to the roots of the right and tracing all the developments and shifting contextual definitions thereafter. The radical right as a concept is examined in this work through the context of the post-Cold War era for the purposes of both focusing on and contextualizing the contemporary radical right. The justification for this choice is that the radical right has essentially functioned in a relatively stable ideological environment since 1991, with the 'end of history' (and thus, of politics) supposedly ruling the day.

One of the first attempts to situate the radical right in this post-Cold War context came from Italian scholar Piero Ignazi, who identified two types of radical right in this period: those that could be genealogically traced back to fascist parties that persisted after the end of the Second World War and newer, anti-systemic parties that had emerged after the Cold War's end (Ignazi 1992). What

he observed in common between these two groups is that both consist of social elements and demands ignored by conventional conservative parties and the center right, resulting in a general antagonism toward the political establishment at the time, characterized by a sense of underrepresentation and unmet demands through democratic participation. Since that time, the synthesis of these two elements has historically conditioned understanding of radical right parties and actors, and thus of any radical right actors within the described in the present study. In some cases, e.g., *Fratelli d'Italia* in Italy or the *Rassemblement National* in France, these two subtypes of radical right actors hybridized, bringing together anti-elite marginalized groups with those ideologically-linked historical fascist movements. In this way, a genealogical approach is not necessarily an ideal strategy of definition, as the lines of heredity cannot be traced easily or convincingly.

Most of these post-Cold War definitions have all been compared in a matrix to see how well they explain the essential characteristics of the radical right (Carter 2018). The five central pillars of this systematic overview of definitions are strong state/authoritarianism, nationalism, racism, xenophobia, and anti-democracy. Furthermore, populism, market-liberalism, and other types of anti-democratic tendencies supplement these attributes in singular definitions, and populism becomes a more prominent definitional category over time. Such a chronological progression also demonstrates that the anti-systemic parties identified by Ignazi in 1992 would come to dominate the Western European context. Some degree of moderation or 'taming' of positions other than on immigration has been noted in Western Europe while the mainstream was radicalized in Eastern Europe (Minkenberg 2001; 2013). Nevertheless, in both cases, the radical right's grounding in authoritarianism, nationalism, racism, xenophobia, and anti-democracy has not substantially changed. Each of these essential characteristics, at the same time, are predicated on an understanding of sort of inherent inequalities: inequalities in ability to lead, inequalities of position, inequalities in the value of ethnicity, race, or culture, and inequalities in who has the right to speak on behalf of the people.

These inequalities can be expressed either implicitly or explicitly. From the Italian case from *Article I*, Matteo Salvini's ascription of Russia as having agency in the international system, as it is similar to his idealized Italy, while Ukraine is not afforded this same subjectivity, is one of these implicitly articulated inequalities. *In Article II*, inequalities in speaking positions emerged through competition among various actors from the Italian right, each attempting to position themselves vis-à-vis the Russo-Ukrainian war. Although their strategies varied, each actor presented their own situation as the most legitimate and representative, framing it as closest to the idealized vision of what the Italian nation itself would embody. From the Estonian case explored in *Article III*, the Finno-Ugric civilizational grounding, especially as articulated by *Sinine Äratus*, essentialized this identity through public action in order to delegitimize a 'Western' understanding of a Europeanness based on values. Such a framing explicitly positions Finno-Ugric civilizational identity as intrinsically superior to the modern Western European one, meaning that those speaking from the position of European values are not afforded any legitimate political subjectivity. Outside of those instances

within the analyzed articles, this same articulation of inequalities can be found in other movements and parties identified as radical right; the '*Polak-Katolik*' in Polish discourse often deployed by the radical right parties of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* and *Ruch Narodowy* acts as a totalizing logic of homogenized national identity (Trzebiatowska 2021), as it demands an equivalence between Polishness and the Roman Catholicism that delegitimizes any actor not ascribing – at least performatively – to the Faith.

Similarly, Cas Mudde has provided one of the most seminal definitions of the radical right up to this point. In his configuration, he defines the radical right as being authoritarian, nativist, and populist (Mudde 2007; 2010). These three points come together to provide both attitudinal and belief-based explanations for these popular political demands in this definitional framework, all of which stem from the assumptions of the modernization thesis in this understanding (i.e., Betz 1994), which states that modernization and globalization have resulted in 'winners' and 'losers.' In this paradigm, supporters of the radical right represent such 'losers' who have suffered as a result of globalization that are striving to find some alternative means of political representation and voice. However, viewing the radical right as a *post factum* articulation of these demands provides an alternative starting point for conceptualizing radical right subjectivity as an active nodal point for these demands, rather than focusing on the demands themselves as a pre-existing social condition, as these demands could have equally been represented in a left-populist formulation. Mudde's tripartite definition, concurrently, remains grounded on the same foundation, as both authoritarianism and nativism rest on the assertion and political demand of so-called "natural" inequalities – in terms of individuals or group characteristics – with the focus on populism solely serving to demonstrate how the other two considerations could be reproduced and legitimized within a democratic or popular logic.

Nativism, taken on its own, is an attitudinal inclination or preference for one's own co-nationals over non-citizens, a consideration that has shifted from economic nativism, that is, a weighted preference for citizens over non-citizens or immigrants for wealth distribution and economic policy, to symbolic nativism as the defense of national culture (Betz 2019). Symbolic nativism is then closer to nationalism in that it intimates collective political action rather than individual or social preference. Therefore, nativism treated as nationalism or national exceptionality – the qualitative difference of the nation, with the nation treated as superior to others – remains a pillar of each of these definitions of the radical right, and if nationalism is also understood as actively exclusive, i.e., not allowing for the assimilation of those groups and individuals deigned to be related enough to the core ethnos, then xenophobia and racism could equally be subsumed into this definitional pillar as well. Furthermore, it has been argued that the contemporary radical right, with its qualifier as inherently populistic, represent as much "a response to the erosion of the system of 'ethno-national dominance', which characterized much of the history of modern nation states" (Betz and Johnson 2004). These discourses centering on ethnicity and nationality continue to guide the debates on the radical right and on populism that are central to

Mudde's definition. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that this point additionally rests on a qualitative assertion of difference amongst individuals and groups.

While providing a relevant and well-argued background as a point of departure for explaining political demands, Mudde's definition has several analytical distortions, the most serious of which stem from the description of populism as a "thin-centered ideology" without explaining or extrapolating what exactly is meant by populism qua ideology and ideology as a definitional plank more broadly, other than its equivalence with a specific configuration of people against the elite. It has been argued, however, that this 'thin ideology' runs parallel to 'thicker' ideologies or ideological families, such as the radical right (Stanley 2008), adjacent to a more developed ideological core that would classify this populism as left or right. Recent work on the populist radical right has attempted to define populism as an ideology in and of itself, characterizing its core as a diarchic "popular sovereignty and majority rule" (Medeiros 2021).

Nonetheless, there have been subsequent attempts to deal with this incomplete definition of populism and, more broadly, the radical right. Mudde took one approach, expanding this radical right to a specifically 'populist radical right,' in which the 'thin-centered ideology' of populism functioned as the main organizational element for this radical right as a party family (Mudde 2004), rather than for the radical right as a whole. He identified the 2015 European Migrant Crisis as the start of the 'fourth wave' of the radical right in Europe, marking when this populist radical right became dominant in the Western context. Unlike the third wave, where the radical right was starting to be mainstreamed, the fourth wave saw greater normalization and electoral success that was not necessarily paired with deradicalization in all cases (Mudde 2016). Mudde's approach, conceptual understanding, and early attribution of populism as a thin-centered ideology close to the radical right have affected many other researchers' views of the 'ideology,' whether in rejecting or accepting the premise that populism constitutes an ideology (e.g., Elchardus and Spruyt 2016; Aslanidis 2016; Torre and Mazzoleni 2019). What this debate does establish, however, is that populism, or a grounding in the people, is something inextricable from the radical right.

Returning to the most comprehensive typological ascriptions by Ignazi and Bobbio, it can then be stated that at a minimalistic level that anti-egalitarianism and exclusivity as dispositional assumptions unite both anti-systemic actors and those actors with their heritage traced back to fascist groups, i.e., as populists and post-fascists. In this way, other conceptualizations can be nested within this broader encompassing categorization without necessitating a justification of their specifics. Consequently though, to fully situate the radical right within this framework, a deeper exploration of populism in its conceptualization and how it orders and influences other conceptualizations is necessary. Populism therefore requires further clarification in relation to its relationship to the radical right, and it is after this investigation that populism will be shown to be neither definitionally central to nor mutually exclusive with the radical right but a logic that exists separately from the demands and assertion of socio-political inequalities. First, however, an articulation of post-fascism as it relates to radical right can help to clarify the

label beyond a tracing of historical heritage. The contraposition of post-fascism and populism then allows us to look into the most common point of reference for their own representative function – that of the vanguard of the nation as the people or the people as the nation – which in turn becomes the center of gravity for actors of the radical right in their discursive practices.

2.1.1 Post-Fascism

Fascism, like populism, is frequently associated with the radical right, either as a description of a subset of the radical right or as a broad-brush and analytically empty description of a party family as whole. Furthermore, as with populism, accusations or labels of fascism are frequently just as polemic or pejorative. This, along with journalistic and vernacular interpretations, distorts the deeper understanding of the concept through a process of mutual influence. To ground these considerations in the present argument, the interwar experience and structure of fascist movements is frequently linked to the contemporary radical right in terms of conditioning their practices and behaviors (Prowe 1994). At the same time and informing this view, other authors (Keim 2021) consider the contemporary radical right to be "post-fascist" rather than populist, with the populist label derived more from stylistic ascriptions.

Umberto Eco, an Italian semiotician and political philosopher, has provided a checklist for what he refers to as '*Ur*-fascism' or 'eternal fascism' (Eco 2020). Eco mentions hyper-traditionalism, a rejection of modernism, fear of difference, conspiratorial thinking and theorization, cults of heroism, and populism, among other things as constitutive of fascism – each of these points, other than the fear of difference that might better be ascribed to a disgust with the non-conventional, either being based on the assertion and political demand of inherent inequality or a logic or explanation of why these legitimate hierarchies of inequalities have not become manifest. Many of the points raised by Eco are consistent with contemporary definitions of the radical right in general, which does not elucidate the radical right any further in contrast to fascism. He also claims that fascist behaviors and viewpoints can be found in everyday social practices and statements, so constant vigilance is required to combat them from a normative standpoint. However, most of these points are equally applicable to other political programs outside of the radical right, making Eco's understanding of the right through fascism difficult to qualify as anything more than a polemic that links historical fascism with the right more broadly.

In a more nuanced way, political historian Roger Griffin defines fascism as a revolutionary subset of the radical right that employs populist rhetoric in order to stem the tide of perceived national or cultural degeneration (Griffin 1995). The concept of national rebirth – or *palingenesis* – is central to this viewpoint of the fascist interlocutor, as it is the only way to turn the tide against this perceived degeneration. Most commonly, this reversal is also in reference to some sort of a lost golden age that fascist actors can resurrect if given national leadership. Nonetheless, the collectivity capable of achieving this revival is always linked to a

strictly defined nation or ethnicity, as defined by the hierarchal vertical of authoritarian leadership, and those who belong to these groups. In this sense, fascism can be understood as a right-wing "epitomized version of cultural modernism" bordering on the revolutionary (Griffin 2013).

Fascism, in relation to this definition but from a different perspective, can be understood as an active project to realize the creation of a 'new' culture with its inspirations drawn from the past (Sternhell, Sznaider, and Asheri 1994). Sternhell also traced the evolution of fascism from its nomological roots in Italy to what he sees as its forerunner, radical – often anarchist – syndicalism in nineteenth-century France, and how it would later fuse with conservative movements to restore various iterations of the Kingdom or the Empire. In this way, fascism's conservative and revolutionary tendencies can be seen as a historically conditioned synthesis of traditionalist and syndicalist beliefs, practices, and aesthetics rather than an ideological incoherence or political anomaly.

Based on Griffin and Sternhell's considerations, post-fascism is to be understood as an even more radical form of the radical right that employs a more explicitly normative exclusionary and inegalitarian approach wherein the organizing feature of nationalism is given an even more defining centrality, to the point where, while the nation grounds hierarchy as an organic growth of the people, being coeval with the people, those radical right actors with control of state power would additionally demand a specific, exclusionary definition of the nation as well. In the contemporary political environment, however, these considerations must be tempered by maintaining at least some deference to liberal-democratic legitimacy or refracted through its legal or institutional norms. At the same time, although relegated to the history of the twentieth century, most of these episodes of fascist radical right actors with state power – e.g., Germany under Hitler, Italy under Mussolini, Primo de Rivera's articulation of Falangism, Romania under Antonescu – all resulted either in pogroms or genocides justified on these exclusionary definitions of the nation. More recently, although not holding any governmental positions, radical right actors such as the Identitarians that have their roots in post-fascist movements have mainstreamed the concept of 'remigration', or the forced expulsion of those perceived as not belonging to the nation regardless of citizenship status. Nevertheless, because contemporary post-fascism in this context is understood as a subset of the radical right rather than an ideology distinct from it,[1] post-fascist practices and statements will also be considered in the following analysis, however not as a separate category due to the dual engagement with an articulation of natural inequalities and an engagement with popular or pseudo-democratic premises that situate a legitimate speaking role on behalf of the people, titular nation, *ethnos*, or race.

[1] After all, the doctrine of 'fascism' mutated situationally throughout its infancy in the Italian context (e.g., shifts in what constituted fascism between the March on Rome and the Lateran Treaties, reconfiguration of racialist discourses in the 1930s, up to the formation of the Italian Social Republic), which only allows us to discuss the fascism of neo-fascist groups, as this sort of doctrinal fascism only became contingently fixed after Mussolini's death.

2.1.2 Populism

Mudde's thin-centered ideology – populism – remains definitionally underdeveloped to the point of obfuscation and situational adaptation, with each author having the possibility to develop his or her own slant of populism that best fits his or her own case studies. Therefore, the goal of this section is to make explicit the dissertation's analytically separate but contingently intertwined understanding of the concept of populism as a socio-political logic. As previously stated, a slew of recent scholarship has married discussion of populism as a thin-centered ideology to the radical right (Mudde 2016) as a separate research program, making it difficult to discuss the radical right as a concept in and of itself. While acknowledging the explanatory value of this school of thought that considers the populist radical right to be its own valid ideological node within the larger party family of the right, this work demonstrates that there are many other issues to problematize when viewing the radical right as a dispositional practice or a socio-political logic rather than simply as a qualifier, also considering populism in that same way. In fact, sound defenses of populism as a valid analytical category have been made with these points in mind (Brubaker 2017b). Nonetheless, contemporary thought on populism is divided into three camps in terms of how the concept should be analyzed: populism as an ideology, populism as a logic, and populism as a style (Ekström, Patrona, and Thornborrow 2018). This work is most sympathetic to the second assessment – populism as a logic – that nevertheless manifests itself as both stylistically and a through the discursive prescription of normative values in its practice.

These issues with populism, however, are not new and even predate the fusion of populism with the radical right, and scholars have been grappling with the fundamental conceptual understandings of populism for the last two decades in the context of a resurgent radical right. While some authors, including Mudde and Rogers-Brubaker (Brubaker 2017b), continue characterize populism as a thin-centered distinctive ideology outside of their historically contingent original manifestations in late-nineteenth century United States and Russia, others seek to situate populism as a discursive style or practice rather than an ideology, and thereafter a 'social logic' that stems from the assertion of the discursively constructed people and the modes of social division that would inevitably and inexorably arise from this structure (Laclau 2005a; Mouffe 2005). Again, this social logics approach or understanding is important within the current work because it is seen as a substratum and analytically prior to other approaches or views on populism.

Nonetheless, other authors have recognized the contemporary need to move beyond populism as a disciplinary field in and of itself (de Cleen and Glynos 2021), a debate which this dissertation is situated within. According to this point of view, the 'populist moment' in academia has resulted in a near reification of the concept to the point where it can be considered a phenomenon *eo ipso* that can explain social and political events, which necessitates a return to that central concept before moving beyond it. De Cleen and Glynos argue that the best way

to decenter populism is to examine it through a post-structuralist discourse analytical lens, though they do so in a different way than other post-structuralists who still give populism analytical precedence (e.g., Laclau and Mouffe 2001), and thereafter to situate populism as an "analytical entry point" (de Cleen and Glynos 2021, 4) rather than an end goal or telos for a larger research program. This dissertation will take the same approach, because existing critical analysis of the radical right demonstrates that its 'populism' as a logic and practice serves neither as a central organizing concept nor as an inherent characteristic. Furthermore, this impulse is perceived as an obligation to decouple the study of the radical right as an ideology from the study of populism as a logic in general, and studies of the populist radical right should thus be explicitly labelled as such. Even within this paradigm, it is nearly impossible to recognize populism apart from its manifestation in a specific political context.

Nonetheless, most contemporary scholars of populism recognize the issues inherent in popular understandings of the term and how such understandings have heuristically influenced academic ones. Several scholars have even stated that populism has been abstracted to the point of near insignificance, stating, "Unlike any other equally contested concepts such as democracy, it has become an analytical attribution rather than a term with which most political actors would willingly identify" (Panizza 2005). As a result, the problem is that populism has increasingly become a derogatory or academic categorization rather than anything used in self-interpreting practice. Furthermore, due to the previously mentioned double hermeneutic effect, such readings of populism are tinged with vernacular, pejorative, polemic, or journalistic characterizations if they are not explicitly ontological in nature. As a result of this situation, populism as a term has been obfuscated or made synonymous with the radical right, necessitating an examination of populism in relation to the radical right. Furthermore, nationalism is cited as the defining feature of the radical right rather than anything specific to populism even in populist radical right discursive practices (Stavrakakis et al. 2017), which emphasizes the same conclusion as reached by Jens Rydgren. As a result of this, the academic analytical attribution of populism necessitates further investigation.

Attempts at such definitional positioning aid in situating populism via a retroductive attribution of its practices and logics. Populism is a configuration in which an actor positions himself as the sole unitary speaker of the 'people' (Müller 2016). Müller's definition is both succinct and rich in that it encompasses both the so-called ideological and performative readings of populism and allows for analytical freedom in that it does not explicitly tie the conceptual to the political right or left – indeed, his analysis takes into account exemplars from both the political right, such as George Wallace in the segregationist South, and the political left, such as Evo Morales' leadership in Bolivia. Such an understanding allows for conceptual overlaps, such as when the people are construed as the nation within radical right ethno-nationalist discourse, which also explains why such radical right anti-systemic parties can maintain populist strategies even after gaining political power – a question that Mudde's people versus elite nexus does not adequately address.

Furthermore, when applied to non-democratic contexts, the ascription of the populist label in any of these senses becomes much more difficult, as the classical Hobbesian logic of the sovereign could also be understood as populist if constructed along the same lines as the *pars pro toto* metaphor against eternal threats to the security of the people; any state with a strong emphasis on central leaders would be considered populist under this understanding. This is especially relevant when one considers that the populist radical right as a political qualifier is only applicable in European and Western contexts in general. When it comes to benignly conservative, radical, or extreme right trends on a global scale, the term populism is most comfortably applied to democratic states without any qualifications. As a result, populism can be defined as a descriptor of radical right practices and ideas as only as they relate to and suture to democratic ones. In this sense, it has been noticed that in a democratic framework, right- and left-wing populists do not even question the democratic basis of political action, that is, the premise that "sovereignty should reside with the ordinary people" (Zaslove and Meijers 2021). Additionally, although ethno-exclusionary readings of liberalism tend to color the post-fascist right (Griffin 2000), the liberalism or illiberalism of these democracies is unrelated.

Populism, as a result, cannot be considered a defining feature of the radical right as a whole. However, the current populist zeitgeist necessarily conditions the radical right's discourse as well, as these actors must navigate a political terrain that presupposes the hegemony of liberal democracy. Nonetheless, the assertion of the 'people' as such – to use Laclau's understanding of the populist logic's alpha point – overlaps with the assertion of the nation or *ethnos*, allowing the two to be treated as a synonymous presupposition. Following the *pars pro toto* formation used by many ostensibly populist actors in their rhetoric and wider discourse, it can then be said that these 'people' as a part of the nation thus represents the nation in its entirety. Whereas the current academic debates on the radical right and populism have focused on the mystification of the synonymy of 'populist' and 'radical right,' it is actually more fruitful to examine the asserted synonymy of people and nation that colors the speech acts and discursive formulations of these radical right actors. To paraphrase Laclau, this work would analyze the logic of the discursively constructed *patria qua popolo* and the modes of social division that would inevitably arise from this structure. Furthermore, by viewing radical right populism as an articulation of nationalism in specific terms and a socio-political logic of inequality in more democratic contexts (or, at the very least, a representation of coequal logics), we gain a richer explanatory framework than that which is offered by a study of populism treated as an ideology alone.

2.2 The Nation

While this dyad of synonymy has already been discussed – the people and the nation as the object of reference for both the populist and post-fascist wings of the radical right – the concept of the nation as the people should also be discussed. As the review of literature on the radical right has revealed that practices affirming exclusive ethno-nationalism act as one of the single most important centering factors for the radical right as an ideology, developing the logic of populism in its connection with the radical right's imagination of the people in particular can provide a more elucidating explanatory framework than simplistically looking at populism on its own or as a thin ideological ascription for the radical right. The tendency of the populist radical right to deploy a situationally foundational "people" and "nation" has been already noted (Schmidtke 2021). However, in order to advance this discussion, the field of nationalism studies provides a rich source from which to develop this historically conditioned understanding of the radical right.

Benedict Anderson's definition of the 'imagined community' is one of the most dominant scholarly conceptualizations of the nation. In this context, the adjective 'imagined' does not mean imaginary or fantastical; rather, the nation as a social fact is a very real thing, productive of conventions, *nomoi*, and mutually perceived relations and interdependencies in its own right, despite the fact that members of this nation – no matter how small – would not be able to practically know all other members of this nation (Anderson 2000). In addition to this central point, Anderson contends that while the nation is limited and bounded by other nations, sovereign in that it represents the pinnacle of legitimate political power, it is still a community in that it is perceived as a horizontal, relatively equal network of individuals who come together to form this community.

According to this viewpoint, the nation arose as a result of the convergence of the use of vernacular languages across Europe after the Protestant Reformation and the consequent Wars of Religion, which were followed by the invention and spread of the printing press and the introduction of mass schooling. Each of these developments dissolved the social and political ties that had marked the cosmopolitan essence of the Europe of the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, shifting from continent-spanning alliances and the *lingua franca* of the Roman Catholic Church to local identification that focused primarily on the standardization of linguistic vernaculars and traditions that parochialized those former loyalties to those seen as descending from the same primordial ethno-historical background.

As a result, despite the ancientness of its perceived roots among nationalists, including the contemporary radical right, the nation is understood by many modern political interlocutors and scholars as modern in its conception. While the precise causes of the rise of nation vary according to scholarly arguments – whether it is a result of the social processes of industrialization (Gellner and Breuilly 2009), an elite invention of tradition (Hobsbawm 2012), or as a group choice grounded in utility maximization (Laitin 2007) – each of these arguments is nonetheless based in some degree of social constructivism, though the locus of

such construction shifts depending on perspective. Despite inherent contradictions that come from moving from one these *loci* to another for the sake of argumentation, the nation remains a social fact and potential sign of individual and collective self-identification in each of these configurations. Equally important is the fact that the modern concept of the nation popularly developed in tandem with that of liberal democracy from the French Revolution onward.

Otherwise, the imagining and assigning of Otherness is seen as an essential practice in the formation of the nation in order to delineate members of nation from foreigners by negative definition. This act of naming the Other does not have to be a negative one, and in the case of Estonia, it leads to a bifurcation of both positive and negative internal ascriptions (i.e., Baltic Germans and Russians) as well as externally bounding ones (i.e., European civilizational affinity against Russian or Eurasian civilizational affinity) (Petersoo 2007) that might inscribe the nation into a wider civilizational discourse. There is still the unresolved issue of assigning a first step to this process, i.e., whether the process of Othering stems from societal convention or elite ascription. Scholars of nationalism are divided on this point, attributing it either to elite processes of power legitimation, as Hobsbawm did, or to folk developments (Baycroft and Hopkin 2012), Nonetheless, they are historically contingent, marked by an organic nature that is nonetheless susceptible to elite shaping.

Other than Gellner's thesis that nations are 'invented' where they did not exist previously, forming a retroactive relational node, these differing understandings of the birth of nations and nationhood come together alongside the concept of the imagined community in arranging the three main trends that guide contemporary nationalism studies, namely the macro-political, behavioral, and ethnographic (Mylonas and Tudor 2021). While not a 'study' of the nation in the post-modern *per se*, contemporary radical right conceptions of the nation drift in a middle ground between these three trends, essentializing and tying each of these readings together (Teitelbaum 2020). These radical right actors additionally act to articulate the nationalist tradition and constellation of relations, albeit from not always a hegemonic speaking position.

However, such views of nationalism study tend to follow academic appraisals of nationalism on more theoretical levels rather than a view from the ground, so to speak. To this point, "Sociopolitical analyses of nationalism have tended to focus on modernization processes and public-sphere activism rather than on the rarefied and often nostalgic realms of philology, folklore, literature and traditionalism" (Leerssen 2006) that informed and shaped early nationalist thought. This perspective on the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century does not contradict sociopolitical analyses that have focused on modernization but rather informs them because these processes occurred concurrently and influenced one another. While philology, folkloristics, literature, and traditionalism are all 'nostalgic' in their own right, and sometimes lead to the invention of traditions where they had not previously existed (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012), they were codified and methodized during the Enlightenment, allowing them to be used to articulate both the ideas of what constitutes the nation and people. This point of view is critical

in understanding the radical right's approach to the nation, as it is tinged with the Enlightenment's basic positivism, which seeks to fix, essentialize, and universalize such categories – this, exactly, is the Herderite articulation of the nationalism, which treats language, culture, and shared history as the salient traits for defining a nation (Schmidt 1956). In the same way, the concreteness and immutability bestowed upon the objects of study for the scientific disciplines that first coalesced to form romantic nationalism in the late 1700s serve as ordering assumptions among contemporary nationalists and radical right actors.

There are three trends in nationalist practice that characterize procedures for articulating nationalism in general terms. The first of these trends is the "purification of culture through authentication," which implies that there is only one authentic mode in which to belong to a national community (Smith 1996). The universalization of ethnic chosenness, which treats a particular ethnic group or nation as superior to other ethnic groups and nations, is the next of these trends, which both essentializes and exceptionalizes that community by both attributing inherent qualities to that group and ranking other groups as inferior or equal based upon that national standard; this process will be seen in each of the analyzed articles. Finally, shared memory is given a bounded territorialization, meaning that a particular geographical locations are tied to these memories, which legitimizes the nation state as being bound to a specific place because of its historical presence there. Each of these procedures leads to the creation of a qualitative paradigm; the pure culture of the *demos* is superior to a mixed culture or those cultures that lie outside it, the *demos* of the nation is superior to any other, and the *demos* has an unquestionable right to a specific space. The radical right subject, therefore, represents nothing more than the legitimate voice of this *demos*.

Returning to the contemporary radical right, ethnic nationalism has been situated the single most important principle in defining a radical right party (Rydgren 2017), as the previously mentioned paradoxes of universal anti-egalitarianism and particularistic egalitarianism can be resolved by examining nationalists' understanding of the nation in their various local contexts. In this way, by applying these peculiarities that are uncovered by nationalist studies to radical right studies, spaces of nuance and incoherencies are clarified.

2.3 Articulating the Radical Right

Therefore, several characteristics of the radical right can be deduced from this review of the relevant literature on the subject. To begin, each of these interpretations of the radical right outlines its construction of exclusivity and oppositional enmity to varying degrees, whether through active or passive racism and xenophobia, anti-egalitarianism, particularism, or nationalism in general. Second, what is currently understood as populism in the liberal or democratic context is ascribed to radical right political actors, linking populism to the radical right through its construction of authenticity or its structural assertion of the people-nation synonymy. The nation as an ordering concept for political subjectivity is

primarily modern, and one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the nation's position through its interlocutors is the claim of the exclusive political legitimacy of the nation. This exclusive political legitimacy of the nation refers to the nation's foundational role in justifying political authority and representative subject position. At the same time, when this demand leaves the realm of democratic politics of negotiation in the post-fascist paradigm, each of these practices become more strictly exclusionary and inegalitarian and punctuate the role of the people-nation even more distinctly. Each of these conceptual formations – the radical right, populism, the nation, and post-fascism – is anchored in specific configurations of inequality, enmity, and exclusivity. *Table 1.* delineates how these nodalities have been constituted as structuring logics across the respective conceptual frames in extant representative scholarship.

Table 1. The Constitution of Inequality, Enmity, and Exclusivity within the Radical Right, Populism, Nationalism, and Post-Fascism

	Constitution of Inequality	**Constitution of Enmity**	**Constitution of Exclusivity**
Radical Right	Anti-Egalitarianism (Bobbio 1996); Strong-state authoritarianism paired with opposition to liberal democracy (Carter 2018)	Racism, xenophobia (Carter 2018); exclusion of anti-systemic and post-fascist demands in liberal-democratic politics (Ignazi 1992)	Ethno-national dominance (Betz and Johnson 2004); Particularism (Eatwell and Mudde 2003); exclusionary nationalism (Stavrakakis et al. 2017)
Populism	Claims vertical equality via the populist as sovereign proxy (Müller 2016); the people as the site of sovereignty (Zaslove and Meijers 2021)	Immutable antagonism between the people and the elite (Mudde 2010)	Moral dichotomy between a 'pure' people and a 'corrupt' elite (Mudde 2016); *pars pro toto* logic of the people (Laclau 2005a)
Nationalism	Hierarchy embedded in the nation as the apex of sovereignty (Anderson 2000)	Purification of national culture from subversion (Smith 1996)	Ethnic chosenness (Smith 1996); Internal and external Othering (Petersoo 2007);
Post-Fascism	Authoritarian verticality (Griffin 2013); rejection of liberalism, cults of heroism, and anti-difference (Eco 2020)	Domestic and foreign enemies cast as agents of cultural and national erosion (Griffin 1995)	Ethno-exclusivist interpretations of liberalism (Griffin 2000); Cultural palingenesis through exclusion (Sternhell, Sznaider, and Asheri 1994)

With these considerations in mind, we can finally advance a definition of the radical right as a *constellation of political demands, practices, assertions, and logics centered on radical inequality, enmity, and exclusivity*. First, by conceiving of the radical right as a relational constellation amongst the radical right actor, the *demos* and connected referent objects, and those actors and referent objects not granted inclusion in the *demos,* local transformations can be accounted for in their

respective contexts. Second, including practices allows for the attribution of a radical right to individuals, movements, and actions rather than acting solely as a description of a party family or of any ideology. The final point of demands and logics allows for the interplay of various unfixed, localized, understanding of what constitutes the nation or the *demos*, as well as how this *demos* relates to discursively empty referent objects. Regardless of how the nation, people, or polity is articulated in these logics, the radical right is bound by its assertions of radical inequality, *i.e.*, inequalities in the human condition that are essential, immutable at the root of all socio-political development.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Post-Foundational Discourse

Discourse, as a concept is central to both the linguistic and relational turns in the social sciences, can elicit widely differing meanings depending on context, but due to the breadth and conditionality of meaning, this dissertation will primarily engage with more contemporary iterations of Post-Foundational Discourse Theory, also known as the Essex School. The Essex School is inspired by Saussurian structural linguistics (de Saussure 1959), the Derridean understanding of the retroactive labelling of the processes of articulation (Derrida 2010), and Ernesto Laclau's understanding of discourse (Laclau 2017), all of which are centered on philosophical and methodological strands coming from what would come to be known as post-structuralism. While acknowledging the many other foundational scholars who have contributed to the evolving concept of discourse, for the purposes of this work, we will focus on two strands of thought on the concept of discourse from the two camps of post-structuralism: those of Michel Foucault and Ernesto Laclau, as well as those who have been methodologically inspired by them.

While never labelling himself as belonging to one delineated school of thought – and frequently opposing against such labelling (Foucault 1994) – Michel Foucault and his philosophical framework serve as useful points of departure for understanding the concept of discourse as it relates to the political. In his seminal work, "The Archeology of Knowledge," Foucault defines precisely what he means when he speaks or writes on discourse. More explicitly, Foucault sees discourse as a collection of statements about the same object, with these statements serving as the primary unit of analysis (Foucault 1972). In this sense, discourse is the arrangement of discursive elements, that is, those signifiers that give meaning to a central concept, making it a crucial structuring element in all processes of meaning making. However, Foucault saw discourse as always material, even if ephemeral, as in the case of the spoken word (Foucault 1971). Nonetheless, because relationality serves as the foundation for the process of making political meaning (Selg and Ventsel 2020a), such divisions or assertions into spheres of materiality or idealism have no bearing on the affinity of the nodes with the aforementioned process.

Other works in Foucault's oeuvre practically demonstrate what is meant by an analysis of discourse either through the tracing of the shift from the punitive to the disciplinary (Foucault 1977) and the formation and positioning of sexuality in the modern episteme (Foucault 1990), re-evaluating the Nietzschean genealogical method for his own objects of study (i.e., Nietzsche 1913). Each of these positions demonstrate the importance of tracing the effects of exogenous factors on the formation and conditioning of discourse. Because the Foucauldian slant of the genealogical approach has also influenced Judith Butler's understandings of gender (Butler 1990), which in turn shaped her theory of performativity and interpellation (Butler 2010; 2015), connecting the two is especially salient as the Butlerian slant of understanding interpellation theoretically informs this work.

However, due to the variations within and between Foucault's written manuscripts, lectures, and later interviews, speaking of a strictly Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as a delineated method would be bold, if not outright ludicrous. This is not to say that such a task has not been attempted before, and these attempts can still be useful in selecting a suitable methodology for the task at hand. One of the more succinct and direct definitions of this Foucauldian post-structuralist definition of discourse is the "institutional patterns of knowledge that govern the formation of subjectivity" (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2008). Gilles Deleuze, another seminal interpreter of Foucault, characterizes the Foucauldian view of discourse as a "place of mutation" that allows for the formation of subjectivity (Deleuze 2016). Lastly, this discourse is to be "seen as symbolic representations that serve to communicate information in a cognitive sense and to significantly evaluate the object of focus" (Alexander 1992). Despite these lexical divergences in discussing Foucault's conceptualization of discourse as a methodological foundation among his diverse readership, several themes emerge repeatedly – the first of which is relationality as an assertion about the nature of discursive objects, the second as a system of discerning subjectivity, and the third as a methodological assumption.

First, relationality refers to the idea that each discourse, statement, and idea can exist only in relation to other discourses, statements, and ideas (Webb 2013), representing one of the crucial assumptions of post-structuralist theory. As a result, it is impossible to disentangle any discourse, statement, or idea from the social contexts in which it was articulated, and they can only be explained through concepts in the same discursive formation. This articulation takes place when "every form is a compound between relations between forces" that is based on the ability to generate knowledge, which in turn legitimizes the exercise of power (Ferry and Renault 1994). As a result, subjects can only exist through symbolic language, i.e., discourse, and their social identity is neither existentially nor eternally (Sauvagnargues 2016) nor even synchronously secure.

This understanding reveals the methodological school's second theme and assumption, which is the concept of ungroundedness or unfixedness. Objects of discourse are constantly re-inscribed in relation to new statements within the discursive formation that creates meaning, which is a continuous process. As a result, this methodological assumption of subjectivity through discourse meshes well with the same theoretical assumptions underlying both understandings of interpellation and performativity. Only through an external actor's discursive interpellation of a subject does such social identity – along with any duties, responsibilities, and roles – become tangible, malleable, and definable. A more robust articulation of the relationality of statements and objects within the discursive formation, on the other hand. Although Foucault describes the presence, absence, and concomitance of statements within discursive formations (Foucault 1970), his specific understanding of relationality remains theoretically underdeveloped through its abstraction, as a "second bracketing that [shows] meaning itself presupposes conditions of production which are not themselves reducible to meaning" (Laclau 2017). Another aspect of the Foucauldian reading of discourse

is that subjects emerge from it (Sauvagnargues 2016) in that they are articulated in the Gramscian sense. Referring to Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, this discursive hegemony provides for the priming conditions of discourse before they are articulated.

In this case, Ernesto Laclau's understanding of discourse, hegemony, and chains of equivalence and difference can lead to a more complete and operationalizable view of relationality, providing us with a more suitable foundation before enunciating a methodology in its entirety. These chains of equivalence and difference connect disparate objects – again, in relation to what each link implicitly implies about the others (Laclau 1989). These chains of equivalence and difference are founded upon an initial 'ontology of lack' in which identities are articulated *post factum* and through negative relationality, e.g., A is not B and B is not C. As a result, the articulation of C's relationship to A is the locus of any discourse analytical approach informed by the Laclauian understanding of discourse.

In this situation, discursive hegemony serves as the foundation to these patterns of knowledge that both condition and govern the formation and construction of subject identities (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). This hegemony, as the environment in which such discursive meiosis occurs, provides the initial point of reference in meaning making, which may be taken for granted, justified, or contested. Nonetheless, its citation as the locus of meaning is unavoidable. Nonetheless, each of these processes focuses on specific discursive objects and their similarity or dissimilarity to other objects linked by these discursive chains. In this broader paradigm, Laclau defines discourse as "the primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity as such" within "any complex of elements in which relations play the constitutive role" (Laclau 2005a). This 'terrain,' in turn, enables the condition of cognitive possibility for social identities composed of social and political practices rather than vice versa (Laclau 2005b). As a result, rather than ideologies or political parties and movements, political practices, acts, and logics become the unit of analysis. However, this leaves the empirical issues of the well from which these practices are to be drawn relatively fluid, with the subsequent methodological foundations still being determined on a case-by-case and theorist-by-theorist basis, allowing for some creativity in case study research design.

Taking these two considerations into account, the philosophical foundation of this methodology cannot be understood as purely Foucauldian or Laclauian, but rather as having been inspired by Foucault and Laclau with a stronger sympathy in the Laclauian direction due to the development of the Essex School. Nonetheless, many of such influences on the understanding of discourse for this work are post-structuralist in nature, necessitating a type of discourse analysis that makes the same methodological and epistemological assumptions. As a result, the methodological framework for analyzing discourse in this dissertation takes into account and integrates this precise post-structural understanding of what constitutes discourse. Instead of a Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2012; Weiss and Wodak 2003), this relational and unfixed understanding of discourse necessitates a methodology that takes these two points as both assumptions and

ordering principles. This is where Post-Fundamental Discourse Analysis, in its broadest sense, comes into play.

3.2 Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis

Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis is a subtype of discourse analysis that is both based upon and inspired by such strands of post-structuralist political philosophy. However, due to the inherent aspects of the internal unfixity of such a philosophy, it is difficult to incorporate all these assumptions in a single methodological approach. The Essex School of discourse analysis, which has its roots in the thought of Ernesto Laclau, will serve as the initial point of departure. Furthermore, this work will employ the logics approach to Post-Fundamental Discourse Analysis developed by Jason Glynos and David Howarth (Glynos and Howarth 2007), which takes this assumption of discursive relationality as a guiding concept (Selg and Ventsel 2020b).

The logics approach to Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis grounds discourse analysis in social, political, and fantasmatic logics, followed by a retroductive tracing of the overall argument articulated in this discourse (Glynos and Howarth 2007). The social logic – that which is sedimentary within the discursive – is 'coterminous' with the social practice that it implies in this context. In this sense, it is synonymous with the hegemonic formation of what constitutes a discourse and the regime that constitutes it. Political logic, on the other hand, is viewed as an act and articulation in a diachronic moment in time when certain social practices are discussed, debated, legitimized, or questioned. The political logic can be said to motivate each speech act in the realm of politics, while the social logic synchronically represents the succession of the articulations of these political logics. However, this coterminous social practice requires further interrogation. Glynos and Howarth state that these practices are the way in which something is articulated rather than the object articulated in its own right. In this way, these practices are the "institutions of civil society," with these institutions understood as that which allows for the reproduction of social order and its structuration (ibid. 104–105).

The questions that this methodological approach attempts to answer are radically ontological, posing existential questions to not only "what sorts of things exist, but that they exist and how they exist" (ibid., 11). They respond to these questions using the aforementioned triad of logics, in which social logics explain what exists, political logics explain how these things exist, and fantasmatic logics explain why they exist. Because they only serve as a broader discursive explanation for social phenomena, each of these logics – social, political, and fantasmatic – deserves to be investigated in greater depth than that which has previously been outlined.

However, one critical methodological note must be communicated first in order to clarify the reasons for certain methodological assumptions. Glynos and Howarth emphasize at this point, "Methodologically, we argue that the develop-

ment of an explanation must start with intentions and self-interpretations" (ibid., 161). This means that the initial unit of analysis for this approach must be speech acts – in the case of this dissertation, demands – from various actors that state such intentions and self-interpretations, wherein these intentions and self-interpretations are laid bare. These logics can then be formulated, both in terms of how the actor retroactively articulates them from discursive objects and in terms of how they provide a logical structure beyond this.

When it comes to *social logics*, Glynos and Howarth define them as the sum of "the substantive grammar or rules of a practice or regime, which enable us to distill their purpose, form, and content" (ibid., 106). It is synchronic in the sense that it defines the status of a specific point in time in normative terms. Because of their foundational nature in providing the framework for social practices and regimes, social logics do not require discursive justification and are not contested in any way, instead explaining why a social practice is the way it is; in this way, it is more of a cosmology than a theology of the social. Because of this, social logics are a substratum to other logics, but a social logic always has the potential to become a political logic in their articulation, assuming that specific preexisting condition of possibility.

Next, "*political logics*, by contrast, enable us to understand the way a social practice or regime *was* instituted or *is being* contested or instituted, thus contributing to our description and analysis of it." The political logic is thus to justify or challenge any hegemonic social practice, which places the realm of the political in opposition to that of the social in this methodological understanding. Similar to the act of subjectification, in which the subject has its identity retroactively ascribed to its own past actions and being, the political logic does the same by ascribing politicality to social practices *ex post facto*. Furthermore, because political logic is inherently diachronic in how it explains the evolution of its object of focus over time, it serves as the alpha point for positioning this analysis, as how culture is used to justify or challenge the radical right's subjectivity is the central focus of this work.

As such, it is based on Laclau's theories of logics of equivalence and difference. The logic of equivalence represents the discursive tendencies of assertions within a discourse that claim and demand sameness between different objects. In theory, these connections between objects in a larger chain of equivalence are what constitute a social and make discursive closure impossible. Similarly, but in the opposite direction, logics of difference describe what exactly is the Other, or more broadly, what does not or should not belong in a particular discursive structure while still providing the room to express identity around such a node. However, both logics are codependent and capture the process of discursive meaning formation.

Finally, Glynos and Howarth state, "Fantasmatic logics furnish us with the means to account for the grip of an existing or anticipated social practice or regime" (ibid., 107). The fantasmatic logic incorporates some thoughts from Lacanian psychoanalysis, most specifically his highly developed and untranslated concept of *jouissance* as the transgression of pleasure or comfort inherent in the unchal-

lenged subject position into something more akin to an agony due to the impossibility of achieving an idealized state. The issue then in the logics approach is a spectrum of hypothetical events and socially and politically oriented transgressive dreams that explain why a regime of meaning should exist in a certain way, regardless of how this regime would look like in reality. The fantasmatic logic is a discursive sword of Damocles in that it separates the inevitability of social or political utopia that are demanded from the forces that are presented as eternally holding them back.

The logics approach, taken as a whole, poses the following questions: not "*what* sorts of things exist, but *that* they exist and *how* they exist." Each logic that serves as a column in this technique attempts to address each of these questions in turn. Thus, the social logic answers the question of what exists, the political logic answers the question of how such things exist, and the fantasmatic logic addresses the issue of why such things can exist; this dynamic treats the subject's actuality and potentiality as coeval. The analysis of political logics is the single most significant aspect of this study since the key research topic for this work is above all a how question – how the extreme right employs relates to discursively empty referent objects discourses in the articulation of its subjectivity. Nonetheless, because political logic derives from social logics and generates fantasmatic logics, all three parts of the method will be addressed in the ultimate analysis.

Taken together, Glynos and Howarth explain the analytical connection amongst the three logics within their methodological approach:

> "In the first place, it is clear that social logics are context-dependent constructions that are retroductively posited as a function of the rules and structures that inform practices and regimes. They thus allow us to characterize the relational practices and identities under investigation. By contrast, political and fantasmatic logics are formal constructs that enable us to account for orders and practices in a variety of historical contexts." (ibid., 161).

The purpose of Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis in the logics method is to identify articulations of social, political, and fantasmatic logics within discursive formations as its endpoint (Glynos and Howarth 2007), and as such, this methodological expression of a logic is entirely consistent with Laclau's incremental explanation of the social logic of populism as expressed in *On Populist Reason* (Laclau 2005a), which refers to the hegemonically implicit structure and rationality by which society should be organized on the basis of certain assertions about the nature of the social. The assertion of a people as representative of the entire society (i.e., the *pars pro toto* argument) is Laclau's understanding of the alpha point of populist social logic, with the implication that all politics and social practices should be conducted in defense of and benefit of these asserted people.

As a result, the genesis of political logic is the precise process of articulation of the justification of this assertion or the contestation of alternative assertions. What follows is a constant restatement of the relationality of this asserted people to other objects in language akin to Schmittian conceptualizations of the political (Schmitt 2007), linking other statements and ideas to the people in dispositional

terms of amity or enmity. In practical methodological terms for this work, this means that an analysis of this is operationalized by taking radical right actors as interlocutors who make these assertions about not just the people, but the people in synonymy with the nation and themselves as subjects, and how precisely this process constitutes subjectivity through these discursively articulated logics.

However, this methodical approach is not without its sceptics. Marttila contends that the Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis logics approach lacks methodological coherence, emphasizing the underconceptualisation of the approach in that it cannot be applied to empirical examples and cannot clearly explain social practices (Marttila 2015). His main concern is with the sources of articulation of these logics, which he sees as either arbitrary or ambiguous. Furthermore, Marttila concisely describes what he perceives to be the key problems with Post-Fundamental Discourse Analysis, with an indicated solution.:

> "PDA's methodological deficit should be solved by attaching analytical attention to reciprocal relations between discourses and practices of articulation both structured by them and structuring them. In other words, it is not logics but discourse and practices of articulation producing them and produced by them that should adhere to the phenomenal focus of empirical discourse analysis" (ibid, 123).

Marttila's argument here continues to assert that the logics approach operates only on a secondary level, as it does not ground itself in the discourse as a whole, but rather on allegedly implicit interconnections between these logics, without a suitable explanation for why the locus of study is not instead on the foundational and phenomenological level of discourse. According to him, this enables an organic empirical basis for the object of emphasis for the discourse analysis as a whole.

Marttila, like Glynos and Howarth, bases his methodological understanding of post-foundational discourse analysis on an "ontology of lack" manifested through its focus on the Other. In this sense, the lack here is not so much a definition through negation but is instead an "overabundance" or "incoherence excess" (Krips 2006). Because of the historical, social, and political situations that supply their relational context, certain words become over-abstracted and unfixed in their meaning. In theory and practice, this indicates that the existential qualities of any object are limited by their location in relation to what they are not or do not include, a viewpoint comparable to the expounding of speech and its boundaries, or Laclau and Mouffe's *A* and non-*A*.

The fundamental premise that underpins all these assumptions is relational epistemology, which holds that the social reality of meaning can only be signified through constructive social interaction. Along with this relational epistemological model, post-foundational discourse analysis presupposes a de-centered subject and relational power relations that constrain the social while also allowing for critique (Marttila 2019). Again, despite their various conflicts, Glynos, Howarth, and Marttila generally agree on these points, and while Marttila's criticisms of the logics approach raise some concerns, there is no reason to abandon the approach totally. Beginning with the diachronic statement or statements that

discursively describe the political logic, the coequal and coterminous logics that follow can then be seen.

Two remarks from Glynos and Howarth can steer us in the right way. The first of these assertions situates political logics in relation to subjectivity: "There is an official side to political practices, in the sense that *political demands are typically addressed to and expressed by individuals acting in their official capacity*" (Glynos and Howarth 2007. 122, emphasis added by the authors). In this approach, persons acting in their official position, whatever that capacity may be, are situating themselves, their listeners, and their subjectivities through a process comparable to, if not identical to, more nuanced understandings of interpellation.

As a result, we are drawn back to the concept of interpellation vis-à-vis the subject, which might serve as a guide for determining the empirical source of such utterances. The specific meaning of interpellation here is the same one Ernesto Laclau takes in *On Populist Reason*, in which the populist interpellator produces the populist subject by equalizing these demands to an existential identity by voicing certain political demands on behalf of this 'people' (Laclau 2005a). However, because this work understands this logic as an articulation within the confines of liberal democracies more broadly, the synonymous conception of the people and the nation for the radical right becomes even more important to appreciate in this context. In this sense, the "subjecting subject" of the radical right actor who acts as an interpellator for his nation provides a broad field of speech acts that can thus be used to unpack the radical right's political logics, allowing for the parallel study of concurrent social and fantasmatic logics as well.

Judith Butler's understanding of performativity and subjectivity as presented in "Gender Trouble," drawing on this initial formulation of the theory (Butler 1990), wherein the consummating speech act asserts the subject's social identity, informs this dynamic. Because the speech act functions to consummate the subject's identity outside of the subject's own agency, this understanding is also deeply intertwined with a re-reading of interpellation, because the actor who consummates this identity through the speech act is also external and inscribes the subject within a certain field of predefined social relations and relationality. However, according to Butler, this process entails a mode of being as doing, "though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (ibid.). In this sense, the subject exists only as far as it performs its interpellated identity.

For the purposes of this work, radical right actors serve as political interpellators, providing the necessary citation for the subject to manifest its subjectivity – in this case, by interpellating the essence of the ideal radical right subject vis-à-vis the *demos*. This view of performativity is not without its own issues and has been consequently developed with such an answer to such issues in mind. Primarily, Butler consciously developed her theory of performativity as part of a critical political program to critique and challenge certain social norms, rather than as a philosophical perspective on subjectivity *eo ipso*. Identity subversion through performance is a misperformance for the misinterpellated subject. As a result, performativity serves as the foundation for radical subjectivity, with performative politics serving as the basis for self-constitution (Butler 2010).

However, Butler's goal, beyond theorizing performativity in this context, is the overall development of new subjectivities through performative renaming and subversion, which she primarily employs through a post-Marxist lens (ibid.). It is explicitly stated that such a goal beyond the mere assertion of a Butlerian performativity is neither the objective nor the scope of the current work, as only the initial articulation of performativity as understood by Butler is assumed. As a result, this understanding of Butler must be framed by such considerations, and interpellation as used in this work is released from the contextual confines of Butler's normative considerations to allow for a broader range of analytical applicability, specifically through the reiteration and demand of a subjectivity for the radical right through an equivalent process of discursive renaming and subversion.

At the same time, performative political identity and the processes of interpellation are not part of a program that allows for the fulfilment of a single or group of goals. As the telos of such an act is the performance of identity through various practices and speech acts, it necessitates and requires constant reiteration (Penney 2021). This situation implies that the performative political act is both "goal and praxis" and is not founded on any polemic proof of right or wrong, correct, or incorrect, or otherwise. As a result, a performative interpellative act is concerned with the assertion and maintenance of an identity. Theoretically, this understanding is consistent with the previous point about the assertion of the primacy of these people and the synonymy of this people and nation within radical right discourse, demonstrating that this is a constantly iterated practice.

With the preceding section in mind, the methodological approach adopted in the dissertation can be regarded as largely an adjuration of Glyno's and Howarth's logics approach informed by Laclau's articulation of discourse and Laclau and Butler's complementary theories of interpellation. In this approach, the radical right furnishes a rich supply of empirical, analyzable data by producing claims about cultural and national identity in its capacity as an interpellator, with all subsequent performative citations stemming from this paradigm. The articulation of these logics is the space wherein these statements disconnect from merely describing what has come to be (i.e., the social logic) and link to explanations or contestations of social activity (i.e., the political logic). This nexus acts as the "most important analytic principle in doing discourse analysis," which is "noted [as] the idea that discourse is constructed in the service of particular activities which lead to variation, and that variation can, in turn, be used to help identify features of construction"(Potter and Wetherell 1994), which thereafter allows for the act of interpellation or self-interpellation to function as an analytical unit – the demand of subjectivity.

Following this explanation of the complexities and debates surrounding Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis as a methodology and how it relates to the current study, it is important to highlight its shortcomings and limitations, as well as justify this approach over other qualitative alternatives, such as Content Analysis or Critical Discourse Analysis. In other paradigms, Content Analysis might be an appropriate substitute for discourse analysis. However, the relationality and con-

textuality of claims within discursive formations is critical in answering the research questions and is an absolute requirement in terms of methodological choice. As relationality and the relevant discursive environments are important for this dissertation, content analysis accidentally "isolates" significant material from its context (McNabb 2015). As a result, content analysis would only extract certain themes that would be repeated within radical right speech acts, with the best outcome establishing the presence of certain objects of discourse. A response to the issue of *how* is impossible to provide without relevant background and pragmatics.

Nonetheless, the reason Critical Discourse Analysis was not chosen demands a more robust explanation. The epistemological and ontological assumptions of Critical Discourse Analysis and Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis have many overlapping premises. This involves, for example, the intentionality of discourse production, the interaction of power in the meaning-making process, and the establishment of subjective modalities. However, because of the possibility of freeing Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis from normative commitments in terms of critique, its pure relationality outside of the realm of meaning making, as well as the explicit statement of the approach's assumptions, situate a Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis as better fit for the current study.

Following this justification of Post-Fundamental Discourse Analysis, the limitations and criticisms of this methodology can be delineated. To begin with, Discourse Analysis, even in a non-qualified form, has its detractors, particularly among those who hold a more positivistic view of the social sciences. Discourse Analysis, whether qualitative or quantitative in character, is said to equivocate between speech acts and tangible actions or tactics, reading such utterances in a naive or subjective manner. Widdowson defines this tendency as the equivalence of interpretation and analysis, as well as the equivalence of language and text to genuine political will and action (Widdowson 1995). As both critiques are true on their own, any discourse analytical methodology must respond to them.

Primarily, as Widdowson pointed out, any observations must include the actual link between empirics and conclusions rather than relying on subjective (re)interpretations. As a result, the conclusion must be either bracketed as plausible or likely or altogether removed from the analysis. In this general case, linguistic pragmatics, i.e., the context and environment in which such statements and phrases are located, must constantly be considered in order to avoid such problems (Verschueren 2001). This pragmatic backdrop can then be given out by justifying features of research design in order to complement and enhance all theoretical assumptions through actual foundations and constraints.

The fundamental limitation of this work is that the logics approach is based on the discursive rather than the practical side of study. It can provide in-depth explanations of the logics articulated by actors, mapping out relationships between various objects and assertions, but it cannot remark on the legitimacy or validity of these logics to those addressed by such speech actions, although it does represent a process of legitimation from the side of a legitimator (Schoon 2022). This approach then has no material predictive capacity, and it cannot explain why or

why not, as it can only exhibit regularities that develop after specific dislodgements of logics after unexpected events or demanded essences. Nonetheless, within this current episteme of the radical right, the regularities of discourse that do emerge following such events can be expected to continue until its next dislodgement.

Despite having reached this conclusion concerning the limitations of Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis, some closing remarks on the work's unique methodological assumptions must be made here at the outset. The following quote captures a basic principle that underpins the methodology employed here:

> "If the normative dimension is abandoned discourse theory can get on with the business of doing what it is best at, analyzing political ideologies, without having to look over its 'radical' shoulder as well as having to answer the question of whether it is epistemologically or ethically relativist" (Townshend 2003, 141).

By deviating from such normative dimensions – or, in some cases, missions – Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis as a methodological foundation provides such an interpretative mapping of relationality as well as an explanatory framework that, while subjective in its understanding of its nodes, is objective in its tracing of these webs of relationality and affectivity from contingently fixed subjectivities.

4. CONTRIBUTION

4.1 Research Design

The three publications are to be treated as three interpretative theory-building case studies united by a reading under this previously outlined post-foundational logics framework. While each of these articles was written with separate research questions from those posed at the beginning of this dissertation and subsequently revised based on reviewers' suggestions, the post-foundational epistemological assumptions are consistent in each and allow for each of the empirical engagements in these articles to be viewed through the prism of the overarching logics approach and concepts as outlined in the previous sections.

To this point, *Table 2.* illustrates how each of the analytical concepts is articulated within the methodological framework of the logics approach. The first concept of discursively empty objects is already intrinsically linked to the logics framework as its basis is the relationality of these objects to the subject and any other referent objects. Therefore, under each of the logics, it is outlined exactly what role this object is to play. Following this, the definition of the radical right as a *constellation of political demands, practices, assertions, and logics centered on radical inequality, enmity, and exclusivity* is divided into the three logics, demonstrating exactly how inequality, enmity, and exclusivity manifest themselves in each of the logics separately. Populism, nationalism, and post-fascism, as concepts linked to the radical right as either subtypes, overlapping concepts, or foundational ones, are given further articulation.

Table 2. Analytical Concepts and their Articulations in the Logics Approach

	Social Logics	**Political Logics**	**Fantasmatic Logics**
Discursively Empty Referent Objects	These objects are treated as ontologically extant and existing without any discursive contestation.	How this object relates to potential realities or explains the current one, either contesting or defending current realities.	How the object relates to an impossibility of discursive closure or relations of antagonism, that is, what blocks the emergence of an idealized reality.
Radical Right	*Inequality* is treated as an ontological condition; the *demos* is treated as superior in terms of salient qualities.	An *exclusive* speaking position on behalf of the *demos* is required, and the radical right actor claims both this representation and right to action.	*Enmity* exists among the radical right actor, representing the *demos*, and forces that do not allow it to achieve its goals, leading to irreconcilable antagonisms.
Populism	The people should be sovereign and given a primacy of subjectivity.	The people is presented as requiring legitimate representation that can only be achieved by the populist actor.	Elites or other systemic forces stifle the agency of the people, either denying political subjectivity or binding it.

	Social Logics	Political Logics	Fantasmatic Logics
Nationalism	The nation, a community treated as exceptional and bound together by shared language, history, and culture, should be sovereign.	The nationalist actor and its allies are the only legitimate representatives of the nation in the political arena, both in terms of speaking and action.	The nation is beset by internal problems caused by narrow self-interest or other nations or states with competing, contradictory interests.
Post-Fascism	The nation is intrinsically superior to all others, and although degenerated, it deserves a privileged subjectivity compared to other actors	National rebirth must be led by the post-fascist actor in political action and only the post-fascist actor can provide the means to achieve this rebirth. Enemies of the post-fascist actor are to be dealt with by all means necessary.	Enemies of the nation, internal and external, do everything possible to smother this rebirth.

As the first of the cases, *Article I* examines how the realm of international relations can be used for situating such subjectivity through affective relations and potentially pragmatic idealizations. As the second, *Article II* explores how different parties on the right attempt to reposition and rearticulate their own positions and subjectivity in the paradigm of a discursive rupture and dislodgement, one that dissolves previously extant chains of equivalence that have become somewhat contingently stable. Finally, *Article III* investigates how the radical right articulates its own subjectivity vis-à-vis wider civilizational and identitarian formations. Throughout the examination of these three articles, one key assumption is maintained: that these actors, labelled as populist radical or radical right already by other scholars, perceive themselves as representatives of the nation or people, i.e., the *demos*, as confirmed by existing literature.

In terms of case selection and justification, the articles are unified through several criteria. As case studies, each requires both a subject and an object – what Thomas (2011, 513) terms a "practical historical unity" and an "analytical or theoretical framework," respectively. While the theoretical framework is established through the preceding conceptual engagement, serving the purpose of theory testing, the justification for the practical historical unity of the selected cases requires further elaboration. Additionally, following Thomas' typology of case selection strategies, three strategies for case selection can be identified: a selection of the local knowledge case, of the key case, or of the outlier case. Local knowledge cases are selected based on the researcher's subject positionality, offering "intimate knowledge and ample opportunity for informed, in-depth analysis" (ibid., 514). Key cases, by contrast, are not chosen for their typicality but for their ability to "exemplify the analytical object of … inquiry" (ibid.). Finally, the outlier case is defined by its deviation from established patterns, serving to "illuminate the object by virtue of its difference" when compared to the primary analytical focus (ibid.).

These case studies focus on the radical right in two differing national contexts, Italy and Estonia. To this point, few studies compare Mediterranean countries to those of Eastern Europe (Meardi and Guardiancich 2022), citing the "incomparability" of the two regions. However, if this comparative interpretative case study is to have a foundation, there must be at least one criterion that justifies the validity of these case selections (Merkens 2004). Despite their historical and cultural differences, both contexts include countries that have had radical right parties in government within the past decade, winning transparent and fair elections. Therefore, this unifying criterion is socially and politically salient radical right. While not all these parties remain in power at the time of this writing, radical right parties continue to draw significant societal and electoral support, which influences the overall national political environment whether or not they are in power (Minkenberg 2001). This approach directly engages with the presumed incomparability of these regions and the radical right actors operating within them – an assumption further problematized by existing comparative studies that have directly juxtaposed the Italian and Estonian right (Braghiroli and Makarychev 2023). As such, the selected cases satisfy the criteria for both local knowledge cases and key cases. They qualify as local knowledge cases due to the author's embedded familiarity, shaped by positionality compassing familial ties, professional experience, and geographical location. Simultaneously, they function as key cases, as the radical right in both national contexts exemplifies broader patterns and dynamics that are analytically significant for the study at hand.

However, given the similarities between the cases, the differences between these countries provide an interesting point of departure. While there is a radical right in each of these countries, each represents a vastly diverse cultural, historical, geographical, and social experience. Estonia offers a northern and eastern perspective and did not have the legal basis for an organized radical right until the 1990s, whereas Italy has had a complicated historical relationship with its fascist past since 1945. Despite these and other differences between Western and Eastern radical right actors (Minkenberg 2013), the radical right persists in both countries. Therefore, any salient commonalities in the logics uncovered by a study comparing supposedly "incomparable" regions lend a greater degree of generalizability and abstraction to the conclusions drawn, with this analysis explaining how these discursive formations articulate radical right subjectivity through the regularities in socio-political logics.

Nonetheless, a central consideration should be reiterated; the current work does not seek to examine nor establish a causal mechanism the radical right's success or reasons for support, but rather to analyze how the radical right uses discursively empty objects of reference to interpellate its own subjectivity and consequently situate the *demos* as a part of itself. The radical right's presence in each of these national contexts is more than sufficient to justify their inclusion in the current analysis as exemplary cases, although additional cases with wider geographical scope would strengthen the validity of the conclusions.

4.2 Article I. Strategic Affection: *Lega*'s Invocation of Russian Relations to Construct Domestic Subjectivity

Article I looks at how a specific populist radical right interlocutor, Matteo Salvini of Italy's *Lega*, discursively situates Russia in relation to Italy. The article itself investigates explaining the mutual affection of the Italian populist radical right and Russia and second in elucidating why *Lega* has held sympathies both for Vladimir Putin and his regime as a strategic part of their public-facing rhetoric and electoral strategies. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, these research puzzles are condensed and taken more generally: *How do radical right interlocutors exploit international relations to position their subjectivity domestically?*

In order to do so, the article frames the paradigm of Italian-Russian relations through two different conceptual lenses, the first being Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of populism as a hollow concept (Laclau and Mouffe 2001) and the second coming from popular geopolitics (e.g., Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016; Smith 2016) as a response to depoliticized and technocratic geopolitical imaginaries that do not leave space for the intrusion of these radical right discourses. Three considerations justify this articulation of populism, the first being the overemphasis in academic accounts of populism as an ideology, the second being a problematization of the people-elite distinction, as Salvini is a member of national elite-level political leadership in this paradigm, and the division between Euro-skepticism and EU-skepticism, as Salvini and *Lega* present their opposition to the supranational, sovereignty-restricting bureaucratic structures of the European Union and not of the idea of Europe and cooperation in Europe amongst similarly-minded actors.

The consequent analysis of Salvini's engagement with Russia in this conceptual framework thereafter unveils three broad thematic groups of engagement. First, Russia has functioned as a tuning fork for ideal structural subjectivities, having previously been peripheral to Italian foreign policy discourses compared to its European, transatlantic, and Mediterranean dimensions. Russia, as peripheral and 'non-European' can be treated with a certain ignorance of its own dynamics and specificities, with Putin treated as man of "iron nerves" guiding a Russia that "defends the interests of its own citizens" from a context that is positioned as markedly not European but nonetheless purported more effective and democratic in terms of its governance. Second, Russia is treated as a proxy and symbol of active EU-skepticism, which is not to be obfuscated with a more broadly defined Euroscepticism against the idea of Europe per se. Equivalences are made between lifting sanctions on Russia to limiting the power of Brussels, autonomism in diverse forms as a foundation for contesting the EU, and popular legitimation in reference to the 'voice of the people' for the election of Donald Trump, the political subjectivity of Lega itself, and the so-called referenda on the annexation of Crimea. Nonetheless, this formulation is unstable, as the 'common sense revolution' in the EU would necessitate the formation of a 'reformist' alliance with other populist radical right actors who might not hold the same positive affective

relations toward Russia due to their own historical experiences. The last element that arises is a post-colonial solidarity – one more rooted in post-imperialism and a feeling of 'constrained' sovereignty' that arises from certain assumptions nested in popular geopolitical dispositions. This dynamic arises from a reversal of the perception of past sovereign, autocratic power before 1945 paired with a perceived loss of agency that has led to unresolved trauma for some sections of society that sectors of the radical right have tried to capitalize upon from within the confines of democratic competition. Together, this leads to a situation in which affective relations lead to one sided labelling and degrees of closeness on the one hand with another certain degree of distance when it comes to areas wherein different articulations of conservatism might clash and become contradictory; this is most prominent in the conditional framing of affect toward Russia to challenge to the EU as a neo-imperial project while justify Russia's own neo-imperial ventures in Ukraine and elsewhere.

In terms of social logics, Salvini attempts to stake out a representative speaking position for Italy vis-à-vis Russia, which he situates as a symbol of EU-skepticism and perceived patron of conservatism. Putin's Russia is presented as an ideal form of active subjectivity to be emulated by other nations, including Italy, and this idealized Russia shows that sovereign action, free from the fetters of the international law and international institutions, is more than a possibility. Inequality of subject position legitimacy was articulated within the post-colonial formulations, as Italy and Russia are afforded positions of sovereign nations, granted agency to act in their own so-called interests. Ukraine, conversely, is not afforded such an agency or sovereign subject position. In this way, a type of situational affectivity is produced in this articulation, with Russia acting as a placeholder for an idealization of how a normal state should act. In terms of political logics, EU-skepticism or opposition as the main point of departure, as the presence of common political enemies – either in Brussels or Washington – represent why affective ties are able to be cogently forged through a dual premise-conclusion that Russia has the same enemies as Italy. Finally, in terms of fantasmatic logics, the negative dispositions about the EU similar reflect the same sort of structuring as the political logics, as these actors represent the main opponents to realizing a truer sort of democracy for Italy within the aegis of a European framework,

Therefore, in the framing of the approach in the current dissertation, we can see how a radical right interlocutor in the form of Matteo Salvini situates his own subjectivity vis-à-vis reference to Russia from his speaking position, one in which he represented both *Lega* and claimed to represent the Italian *demos* as a whole. The exploitation of international relations demonstrated how the structural affectivity of different actors was born as a result of a qualitative demand for subjectivity, making ligatures with a peripheral object of reference, in this case Russia, that had become discursively linked to understanding Russia as a representative of a sovereign and conservative nation in a way that Italy should also strive to be. This process, however, leads to the contingent legitimation of other Russian foreign policy goals as well as a part of this overall constellation that remains unstable due to possible inclusions of other actors within this framing.

4.3 Article II. Discursive Rupture and Rearticulation: The Italian Right's Subjectivity Post-Russo-Ukrainian War

Rather than examining the dynamics of affectivity from the perspective of a singular actor, *Article II* interrogates the positioning of subjectivity and the fluctuating legitimacy of empty signifiers amidst a significant discursive rupture: the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This article instead scrutinizes the mutability of these referent objects and the competition surrounding them. Specifically, it explores how Ukraine and Russia become entangled with various issues and the attempts to legitimize speaking positions on behalf of the *demos*. Another critical dynamic is the context of an election season, characterized by inter-right competition during the 2022 elections. For the purposes of this dissertation, this article elucidates the question of *How does the radical right re-articulate its subjectivity following a discursive rupture?* by contextually examining the discursive reformulations of the Italian right after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

To contextualize the article, the full-scale war was unforeseen. Radical right actors – not only in Italy – who had previously maintained amicable relations with Russia faced a strategic challenge in rearticulating their stance towards Russia. Italy serves as an exemplary case due to the historically and contemporarily complex relationship of the Italian right with Russia. The principal figures of the Italian right – Matteo Salvini of *Lega*, Giorgia Meloni of *Fratelli d'Italia*, the late Silvio Berlusconi of *Forza Italia*, and Simone di Stefano of *CasaPound Italia* (hereafter, *CPI*) – had either openly expressed positive affective ties with Russia in the past or had portrayed Russia as an emblem of conservatism and sovereignty in various ways.

Conceptually, this article engages with conceptualizations of legitimacy as the foundation of subjective validity (e.g., Levitov 2016; Mair 1995; Schoon 2022), and empty signifiers from a Laclauian perspective (Laclau 2005a; 2017), treating references to Russia not as references to Russia per se but as part of a broader, unfixed discursive construct. It also examines discursive rupture from a narratological approach (Hühn 2014; Wagner-Pacifici 2017), which clarifies the contingent fixity of certain points of reference, in this case, Russia and Ukraine. Empirically, the article analyzes publicly available social media statements on the war, focusing on Russia, Ukraine, peace, and war as their objects, from these interlocutors during the first one hundred days of the conflict. The analysis reveals that Salvini and Berlusconi, who had previously maintained open and personal affective relationships with Russia and Vladimir Putin, had excised Russia from their discourses and shifted towards calls for peace, positioning themselves as the sole guarantors of achieving such conditions. Meloni had transferred some aspects previously attributed to Russia within the right – namely patriotism and sovereignty – to Ukraine. Concurrently, di Stefano portrayed Russia as justified in its actions, acting as any nation should in the face of 'provocations,' implying what an Italian nation under *CPI*'s leadership would do if similarly provoked.

In this constellation, there was no unified articulation of these new referent objects of Russia and Ukraine, but commonalities in the logics of each analyzed actor from the right emerged. In terms of social logics, all actors presumed they spoke on behalf of the Italian nation and people, with their speech acts either openly or implicitly presented as such – real Italians support the stated approaches, while false ones do not. The engagement with or discursive articulation of the emerging situation transmuted into a dynamic where the actor's own subject position was exclusive – presenting their prescribed practices and behaviors as not only optimal but as the only ones available to a genuine member of the nation. Alternatively, support for one external actor or another reaffirmed certain foundational values or ethical positions considered prerequisites for inclusion into the *demos*.

In terms of political logics, the prescribed practices and affectivities functioned to delineate the radical right actor from either its competitors on the right, vying for the same potential electorate and representative speaking position, or in the national domestic or international contexts. For instance, they presented themselves as fighting against the *Partito Democratico* and supposed warmongers such as the United States, United Kingdom, and EU in Salvini's case, or more conspiratorially against the United States, NATO, and EU in the case of di Stefano. Finally, in terms of fantasmatic logics, the cases of Salvini and Berlusconi construct a situation where war only occurred because they were not at the helm of the nation and able to deescalate the situation. A state of peace is treated as the utopian condition, opposed by conspirators against the nation-people dyad from within or without in the form of anti-katechontic forces.

Nonetheless, the dynamics from each right-wing actor yield several conclusions. Firstly, discursive rupture reveals the contingent fixity of certain formations adjacent to subject positions, specifically what Russia symbolized for the right. Secondly, the rearticulation of these formations exposes dynamics around the center of gravity of the subject position, wherein radical right interlocutors assert their stance – whether personal or party-based – as exclusive and singular, with no equal measure for alternative approaches; one approach is deemed legitimate and valid. Furthermore, these new articulations create a space for the articulation of radical enmity as a disposition, situating the *demos'* subject position through negation. Those opposed to the *demos* in this demanded social and political reality define what constitutes the *demos* through a process of diametric inversion.

4.4 Article III. Cultural Instrumentalization: Finno-Ugric Identity and the Subjectivity of the Estonian Radical Right

Article III, in comparison with the previous two articles, looks at these dynamics of self-positioning and discursive articulation of the Estonian radical right in relation to the referent object of Finno-Ugricity. While the article specifically looks to discover how this contemporary Finno-Ugric identity has been politically instrumentalized and negotiated in Estonia more broadly, in this context of this

dissertation the operative question is *How has ethno-cultural identity been instrumentalized and negotiated to situate the subjectivity of the radical right?* However, at the same time, the radical right approach is just one of three analyzed within the article. It also looks into how the state plays with the same object of reference, as well as how local articulations from the Seto people position and attempt to fix some sort of intrinsic Finno-Ugricity as a part of their subjectivity.

In this article, Finno-Ugric identification as either a cultural label for identity or basis for affective relations arose multiple times from each of the analyzed actors, with a specific punctuation of both considerations by the Estonian radical right. The locus of cultural discourses as a source for legitimizing subject positions is well justified by the extant literature. Modern radical right practices have problematized the structuring of cultural attitudes due to their hybridity (Daenekindt, Koster, and Waal 2017) and populist sentiments can be traced back to culturally significant beliefs (Jami and Kemmelmeier 2021). Because of such considerations, the locus of cultural identity is justified as a referent object for the radical right actor.

EKRE engages with Finno-Ugricity by attempting to fix three main attributes to it. First, it is treated as a secondary qualifier for Estonianness, with a reference to potentially genetic Finno-Ugric heritage as a way in which to claim Donald Trump as a Finno-Ugrian or to ascribe clashing temperamentalities to certain politicians, specifically in this case Alar Karis and Volodymyr Zelenskiy. Next, it is treated as a reference for relations of enmity and affectivity for external actors, primary with reference to Russia as an oppressor and cultural colonizer of Finno-Ugric nations. Lastly, it is used as a civilizational cultural-historical grounding to legitimize subject position. *Sinine Äratus*, the youth wing of *EKRE*, is more explicit in drawing out these connections that the mainstream party plays with. Finno-Ugric identity becomes a central consideration, as the organization considers part of its mission to be the inspiration of a "new national awakening of Estonians" that would see them recover a consciousness of their position amongst other Finno-Ugric and European nations. Common genealogical "Finno-Ugric ancestry" is situated as the reason for supporting a fraternal Hungarian nation against EU sanctions, and this ancestry also is framed as an explanation for why Hungarians share the same essential temperament and would have the same political goals as Estonians would.

In terms of social logics, this grounding of subjectivity in Finno-Ugricity makes the ascription substratal, foundational, and existential. It locates and affixes temperaments to the Estonians on whose *EKRE* and *Sinine Äratus* speak and represent, additionally situating other peoples and nations in a constellation of closeness in that they share not only the same genealogical and linguistic roots but spiritual values. This dynamic directly translates into a political logic of subjectivity in which the Estonian radical right, more specifically *Sinine Äratus*, with an articulation of its own subjectivity as Finno-Ugric in essence, contests the Estonian nation's inscription in European or Western constellations of identity or collective subjectivity. Authentic nationhood and representation of the nation-civilization are contraposed against a purported counterfeit, cosmopolitan universalism that is represented by the EU and West, but also in reference to Russia

as an imperial oppressor of Finno-Ugric peoples. *EKRE* obliquely does this, but it acted as a platform for a more culturally and civilizationally explicit *Sinine Äratus*, following the populist radical right to post-fascist spectrum extant in the radical right more broadly, hinting at the sympathies and positions for the next generation of interlocutors for the Estonian radical right. Fatasmatically, this allows for the creation of a condition of anti-katechonic politics understood in the Schmittian sense (e.g., Schmitt 2006), where Russia and the West are equally immoral katechons who withhold the conditions that would finally allow for the establishment of a world to come, one in which, after intense struggle, would result in the desired utopia wherein all European peoples would be "led back to the forest" could occur.

To answer the nested research question for the express purposes of this dissertation, Article III demonstrates that this turn toward civilizationalism articulates the same demanded exclusive subject position and relative relations of enmity, following similar conditions and logics as the representation model in the nationalism-populism construct. In comparison to the state-centric attempts use Finno-Ugric points of reference for pragmatic articulations of cultural diplomacy and local articulations in Setomaa, that either deploy a logic of depoliticization or commercialization, respectively, the radical right articulation of this Finno-Ugric subjectivity affirms the continuing shift toward civilizationalism already seen in other strands of the European radical right (Brubaker 2017a).

5. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion

Framed through this demands-centric logics approach to the radical right, each publication substantiates the utility and applicability of this interpretative methodological paradigm by empirically tracing the logics of the radical right within its respective case study. Each article operationalized this theorization through distinct analytical prisms: the first examined the articulation of discursively empty referent objects within international relations, the second explored the re-articulation of these logics in response to a moment of discursive rupture, and the third engaged with their construction through an ethno-cultural or civilizational lens.

More directly, *Article I* outlined this process in the populist radical right sense of a singular interlocutor and self-interpellator, who traced equivalences in ideal subjective form of the *demos*, being sovereign and value-impregnated, which was framed as contingently exclusive, only afforded to certain nations and actors. This form of exploiting international relations established how structural affectivity of different actors arises out of qualitative acts of self-interpellation, making political logics of action coeval to one another between friendly actors and against adversarial ones in this construct. This process, however, leads to the contingent legitimation of other goals as a part of this overall constellation. that remains unstable due to possible inclusions of other actors.

Article II demonstrated the same dynamics with competition between populist and post-fascist radical right figures domestically after a discursive rupture. These discursive ruptures expose the unfixity of formations relative to demanded subject positions, while the rearticulation of these formations exposes their conditionality around the center of gravity of the subject position, wherein interlocutors thereafter assert a new exclusive speaking position and discursive construct. Lastly, these constructs articulate radical enmity as a disposition, situating the *demos*' subject position through negation.

Article III looked into this dynamic in a wider sense, outlining how the engagement with civilizational identification with the Finno-Ugric world factored in the articulation and negotiation of the subjectivity of the Estonian radical right. Although a spectrum in this articulation was noted between EKRE and its youth wing, *Sinine Äratus,* with the main party primarily leaning into loosely conditional deployments of Finno-Ugricity that established certain temperaments and dispositions for action and *Sinine Äratus* providing a more explicit, suprematist, and culturally essentialistic structuration of their logics. Nonetheless, the two are united in the existential centrality afforded to this Finno-Ugricity despite its contingent expression.

Each of the three cases reaffirmed the radical inequality and exclusivity presumed by radical right actors in the statement of thesis. In *Article I*, the interlocutor self-interpolates through references to an ideal, affixing this ideal to another *demos* and their perceived subjectivity. At the same time, it was only possible to reference and inscribe this ideal agency with a wider array of meanings

due to the distance of this referent object, in this case, Russia, from other domestic discourses. In *Article II*, all interlocutors presumed they spoke for the nation, framing their views as those of authentic co-nationals while dismissing others as inauthentic, and positioning their prescribed behaviors as the only viable options for genuine members of the nation. In *Article III*, the positioning of cultural identity was always done in contraposition with other types of temperamentalities and affectivities that thereafter was done in order to affix essential qualities and exclusivity of representation. In each paradigm, the actors involved reproduced similar logical structures predicated on similar premises: a demanded, self-interpellated exclusive representational speaking position on behalf of a superior group that had adjacent to it immutable genealogical characteristics or intrinsic moral values that constituted existential inclusion into this group, with this group coeval to the nation and people, enmity beyond mere agonism toward any other perceived actors who either claimed this same representation or depressed the expression of the purported existential values of this group, with these adversarial actors acting as the *prima causa* for the nonachievement of utopian socio-political goals or as reason behind extant socio-political ills. The political demand underlying these logics was precisely an attempt to fix an essential subjectivity within these discursive formulations. In this way, the logics approach directly mirrors this expression of subjectivity within the social, political, and fantasmatic dimensions.

While these commonalities allow for the emergence of a radical right structure, the differences in each of the cases also bring out some important nuances. In *Article I*, self-interpellation comes primarily through idealization rather than demands in the cases of *Articles II* and *III*, however the self-interpellation through negation is still present. Conversely, *Article II* highlights the dynamics of inter-right competition, showing how the process of self-interpellation functioned in the context of populist right, populist radical right, and post-fascist radical right interlocutors. Those that were self-declared fascists related positions beyond enmity to animosity and conspiratorialism. *Article III* contraposed the fixation of the object of cultural or civilization identity with other, non-radical right actors, demonstrating how this radical right construct emerged from the same object of reference in opposition to other constructs produced through similar processes of negotiation. However, these nuances still function as permutations within the overall structural framework, not changing relationalities between subject and object or dispositional nodes, as the discursive regularities therein are still reproduced.

5.2 Limitations and Broader Application

As discussed in relation to post-foundational discourse analysis, the core limitation of this approach is its commitment to the discursive over the practical. The logics approach can map how actors articulate their positions, trace the relational configurations of objects and assertions, and reveal the structural conditions shaping discourse. However, it remains silent on the legitimacy or validity of

these logics for those interpellated by them. Without material predictive capacity, it does not explain why certain logics take hold or fade but only registers the regularities that emerge after moments of discursive dislodgement – whether through unexpected ruptures or the introduction of new objects of reference into the discursive constellation. Other studies forward their own causes for this support, albeit through different epistemological assumptions (e.g., Betz's modernization hypothesis), and this theoretical approach can function solely as a critical and informative fashion, given that there is not a necessary causality between depressed socioeconomic status and support for the radical right due to the contingency of such political demands.

The issue of causality and prediction, however, exposes broader limitations of the dissertation, rendering it susceptible to the positivist critiques of interpretative methodologies. Central to these critiques is the claim that interpretively-derived findings are overly subjective, shaped by researcher positionality and bias, and too contextual, thus making generalization impossible. Without getting too deeply mired in the inter-paradigm debates grounded in the philosophy of science, this work does not aim to challenge the more positivistic approaches to the radical right but rather to complement them by emphasizing the multicausal nature of political phenomena. In this case, the focus is on the radical right, with a critique of the ontological assumptions that form the basis of the premises in more quantitative methods. Consequently, this dissertation prioritizes the relational dynamics between discursive elements, rather than concentrating on deterministic causal mechanisms.

In addressing the limitations from both theoretical and methodological perspectives, additional constraints arise from the research design and the selection of cases. While the selection process prioritized a locus of analysis on radical right actors over countries, expanding the case studies beyond Italy and Estonia would both strengthen the applicability of the framework and enhance theory-building and testing through an increased representation of additional key cases. At the same time, because these actors were identified through established conceptual frameworks within radical right studies, the cases inevitably centered on the radical right, aiming to elucidate the logics underpinning their discursive practices. The exclusion of actors not classified as radical right limited engagement with potential hybridities and overlaps in logics.

Future research could broaden this demands-centric logics approach to include political actors more generally, focusing on the subjectivity demanded by such actors. On the one hand, this approach could be applied in the cases of other actors who have been classified as radical right, including the *Rassemblement National* in France, *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany, or the Make America Great Again movement in the United States, each of which has undergone discursive rupture and reformulation over the last decade while retaining the same classification as radical right. Such an expansion would strengthen the claims made about the radical right in the present dissertation. At the same time, this approach need not be restricted to the radical right as object of study. By identifying other critical dispositional structures, demands, and premises of self-interpellation for other actors or typological ascriptions – liberalism, leftism, and so on – one could

extract and distil their affirmatory premises in a similar fashion, then methodologically apply them in diverse empirical contexts in any realm of the political. Such a broader application of this approach, not centered on the radical right but more broadly, would not only refine or challenge the conceptual boundaries of the radical right as presented in this dissertation but also yield insights into the logic and structures other so-called ideologic categories more generally.

5.3 Analytical Outcomes and Theoretical Implications

The current dissertation has explored an alternative reading of the radical right through the logics approach. By engaging with extant scholarship on the radical right, the overall ascriptions of populism and post-fascism as overarching conceptual descriptors opened a space for further clarification of both concepts for the elucidation of the radical. Post-fascism, genealogically and ideologically, manifested itself as a more explicitly authoritarian, hierarchical, and revolutionary formulation of the radical right. Similarly, populism emerged as a construct of different articulations about the primacy of the people or nation in ideological, discursive, and stylistic formulations. As both the post-fascist and populistic nodes centered on some sort of contingent attempts to define the people qua nation, the concept of the nation and people as it has been articulated historically, socially, politically, and academically. All these engagements led to a definitive operationalized understanding of the radical right as a *constellation of political demands, practices, assertions, and logics centered on radical inequality, enmity, and exclusivity* that maintains a reference to an unstably defined *demos.*

From this conceptual engagement, a post-foundational approach to discourse, as epitomized by the understanding of Ernesto Laclau, was chosen to engage with the radical right as this constellation. Additionally, the concepts of interpellation, as understood by Laclau and Butler, as well as legitimation, were touched upon as supporting considerations. This was followed by a framing of post-foundational discourse analysis as an epistemological framework for analyzing and connecting the diverse approaches in each of the publications, uniting them through a Laclauian reading of discourse and analyzing them through the logics approach of the Essex School. As mentioned in the research design, one of the main limitations of this dissertation is that it only maps the discursive strategies and articulations; that is, it draws out these attempts at legitimation and self-interpellation without measuring their results or credence amongst the interpellated nations of Italy and Estonia. As such, this dissertation can neither affirm nor deny the legitimacy and subscription of these views amongst the target audiences and electorates, i.e., the nation, and it can therefore only provide the ideals and imaginaries of these actors themselves, i.e., their own self-interpellation and articulation of their own subject position. As such, exploring the feedback loop of self-interpellation as legitimation and legitimacy per se still remains an extant task for future research. However, such an exploration is outside of the purview of the assumptions of a post-foundationalist methodological epistemology and its premises.

From the individual conclusions of each of the refenced publications, this dissertation reaffirms its initial statement of defense: *the radical right's discursive engagement with ambiguously defined referent objects represents a fundamental act of self-interpellation in reaction to the dominant socio-political logics of liberal democracy*. A radical right self-interpellation therefore consists of those demands founded on the premises of radical inequality, enmity, and exclusivity. This dispositional structure of self-interpellation therefore orients discourse toward the affirmation of these demands as both normative and existential imperative. This logic, as such, cannot be reduced to the mere ideological content that it might happen to draw upon contingently; it is, instead, the condition of possibility for this content to be intelligible as radical right discourse.

Therefore, both theoretically and methodologically, the interpretative qualification of political demands – and the subject's demanded relation to those demands – takes analytical precedence, followed by the tracing of social, political, and fantasmatic logics within these discursive formations. Analytically, this reaffirmation and applied methodology enable a conceptual disentanglement of the post-fascist and populist radical right, as well as a differentiation between populism per se and the radical right. By illustrating how the radical right as an ideology is an empty or hollow concept that nonetheless has a robust logical structure, it can be asserted that a post-foundational logics framework needs to be given analytical priority for the radical right, as this allows future scholarship to look beyond post-fascism, populism, or the radical right as ideologies or styles. In the same way that the Laclauian understanding of populism and demands as the prime unit of analysis has allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the emergence of a hybridity of logics and supposed ideological negations or contradictions, similarly this analytical locus on the radical right as the dispositional premises of inequality, enmity, and exclusivity allows the observer to cut the ideological gordian knot, so to say, in order to elucidate potential equivalences, inclusions, exclusions, and hybridities through this logics approach.

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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Subjektsust nõudes: diskursiivselt tühjade referentobjektide kasutus paremradikaalide poolt post-fundatsionalistlikus loogikas

See doktoritöö pakub alternatiivset tõlgendust paremradikaalsusele, lähenedes sellele nõudmistekeskse loogika kaudu. Toetudes eeskätt paremradikaalsuse, populismi, postfašismi ja natsionalismi varasematele kontseptualiseerimistele, püütakse nende kriitilise käsitlemise ja paremradikaalse diskursuse struktuurse kalduvuse uurimise kaudu analüütilist raamistikku ümber orienteerida. Tunnustades nende valitsevate paradigmade heuristilist kasulikkust ja kirjeldavat ulatust, on selle doktoritöö keskseks väiteks, et kuigi need kategooriad on ajalooliselt kujunenud ja empiiriliselt rikkalikud, ei suuda need piisaval määral seletada paremradikaalsuse subjektsuse kujunemise aluseks olevat dispositsioonilist loogikat. Nendes lähenemistes jääb toimijate identiteet pigem seotuks väliste tähistajatega nagu liidrid, liikumised, poliitikad või isegi ideoloogiad, selmet tuleneda sisemisest enesemääratlemise protsessist ehk enesekõnetusest (*self-interpellation*), mille kaudu osalejad esitavad nõudmisi oma positsioonile, kogevad või legitimeerivad end paremradikaalsete subjektidena. Vastates küsimusele, ***kuidas paremradikaalid artikuleerivad omaenda subjektsust diskursiivselt tühjade referentobjektide kaudu***, väidetakse käesolevas doktoritöös, et *paremradikaalide diskursiivne seotus ebamääraselt defineeritud viiteobjektidega kujutab endast enesekõnetuse akti vastusena liberaalse demokraatia valitsevatele sotsiaal-poliitilistele loogikatele.*

Olemasolevad kontseptualiseeringud raamistavad paremradikaalsust läbi egalitarismivastasuse ja partikularismi, jälgides selle kaasaegse tähenduse põlvnemist süsteemivastastest või postfašistlikest poliitilistest liikumistest. Genealoogiliselt ja ideoloogiliselt võib postfašismi mõista autoritaarse, hierarhilise ja palingeneetilise natsionalismi kaasaegse versioonina, mis võngub minevikule ja selle taasloomisele viitamise vahel. Populismi on seevastu sageli käsitletud kui õhukest ideoloogiat – artikuleerimisviisi, milles moraalselt puhta kollektiivina konstrueeritud „rahvas“ on vastandatud korrumpeerunud eliidile. Natsionalism, mis ajalooliselt kujunes oma modernses tähenduses välja kõrvuti liberaalse demokraatiaga, on aga kujunenud paremradikaalsuse üheks keskseks korrastavaks kontseptsiooniks.

Neis käsitlustes on analüütiline rõhuasetus siiski kaldunud ideoloogilise sisu või stilistilise tooni poole, mille kaudu rahvast või rahvust – *demos*'t kui poliitilist kogukonda – esile kutsutakse. Selle tagajärjeks on püsiv ebamäärasus. Selle lahendamiseks pakub käesolev doktoritöö käsitluse, mille kohaselt paremradikaalsust tuleks mõista kui *poliitiliste nõudmiste, praktikate, väidete ja loogikate kogumit, mille keskmes on radikaalne ebavõrdsus, vaen ja eksklusiivsus,* ja mis samas säilitab viited umbmääraselt defineeritud *demos*ele.

Selle ebamäärasuse ületamiseks on käesolev doktoritöö oma analüütilise sekkumise aluseks võtnud postfundatsionalistliku diskursusteooria, eeskätt Ernesto Laclau ja Essexi koolkonna tööd. See raamistik võimaldab diskursuse onto-

loogilist ümbermõtestamist kui ühiskondliku võimalikkuse tingimust. Selles kontekstis ei ole subjektide positsioonid kunagi täielikult määratletud, vaid kujunevad diskursiivse fikseerimise aktide kaudu, mis on alati mittetäielikud ja muudest teguritest mõjutatud, kuid ometi laetud sisulisuse ja vältimatuse pretensiooniga. Töös on ka viiteid Judith Butleri interpellatsiooniprotsessile ning legitiimsusküsimustele – mõistes legitiimsust mitte kui omandatud või kaotatud omadust, vaid kui identifitseerimis- ja enesekehtestamise protsessi tagajärge. Nendele teoreetilistele tugisammastele ehitatakse metodoloogiline lähenemine, mis on kooskõlas paremradikaalse diskursuse loogikaga: sellega, kuidas toimijad muudavad end arusaadavaks läbi eelmainitud radikaalse ebavõrdsuse, vaenu ja eksklusiivsuse nõuete.

Nagu töö sissejuhatuses välja toodud, piirdus uurimisdisain teadlikult nende diskursiivsete artikulatsioonide kaardistamisega. Töös ei esitata ühtegi väidet nende diskursuste empiirilise vastuvõtu kohta vastavate avalikkuste poolt; see teema, kuigi sotsioloogiliselt ja poliitiliselt huvipakkuv, ületab sellise nõudmistekeskse post-fundatsionalistliku analüüsi epistemoloogilise pädevuse. Ehk teisisõnu – käesoleva doktoritöö rõhuasetus ei ole ideede vastuvõtu ja valimisedu mõõtmisel, vaid selle sisemise loogika kaardistamisel, mille kaudu paremäärmuslikud toimijad positsioneerivad end autentse kogukonna ehk *demos*e legitiimsete esindajatena. Seega on doktoritöö keskseks analüütiliseks objektiks enesetõlgendus keset vastukäivusi ja välistamisi.

Iga doktoritöö artikkel uuris paremradikaalide eneseväljenduse loogikat eristuvate, kuid temaatiliselt seotud juhtumiuuringute kaudu. *Artikkel I* vastab alamküsimusele *kuidas paremradikaalsed kõneisikud kasutavad rahvusvahelisi suhteid oma subjektsuse kujundamiseks siseriiklikus kontekstis*? Uurimuse keskmes on, kuidas populistlikud paremäärmuslikud jõud konstrueerivad suveräänset ideaalset kõneisikut, keskendudes Itaalia *Lega* ja Vene Föderatsiooni vahelistele suhetele. Rahvusvahelisi suhteid käsitletakse siin kui afektiivsete samaväärsuse (ekvivalentsuse) ja antagonistlike vastanduste diskursiivseid ahelaid. Välismaiste toimijate legitiimsus sõltus nende lähedusest sellele ideaalsele kõneisikule, mis omakorda aga kujundati rekursiivselt ehk iseendale viitavalt läbi *Lega* poliitiku Matteo Salvini kui seda hinnangut esitava toimija subjektsuse. Selle tulemusel tekkis muutlik samastumiste kogum, milles liitlassuhted sõltusid afektiivsest kooskõlast ja representatsioonist.

Artikkel II vastab alamküsimusele, *kuidas paremradikaalsus oma subjektsust diskursiivse murrangu järel uuesti sõnastab*? Uurimus keskendus Itaalia parempoolsete omavahelistele vaidlustele esimese saja päeva jooksul pärast Venemaapoolse täiemahulise sõja alustamist Ukraina vastu. Selle artikli fookuses olid afektiivsed lahknevused, mis tekkisid Itaalia paremtiiva sees, iseäranis populistlike ja postfašistlike diskursuste vahel. Tähistaja „rahvas“ volatiilsus tuli nendel diskursiivsete murrangute hetkedel ilmselgelt esile, ning vastastikudes delegitimeerimised paljastasid varem eksisteerinud ekvivalentsusahelate hapruse. Teisalt andsid need katkestused tõuke uutele artikulatsioonidele, milles kehtestati uued välistused ja legitiimsus taaskehtestati läbi nõudmiste sügavamatele, tugevamalt genealoogiale toetuvatele identiteetidele. Radikaalne postfašistlik subjekt ei ilmnenud nendes reartikulatsioonides pelgalt liberaalse korra eitajana, vaid

kujunes iseseisvaks vastusuverääniks, kellele oli omistatud konspiratiivne nägemus demokraatlikust allakäigust ja rahvuslikust reetmisest. Samal ajal suunasid toimijad nagu *Fratelli d'Italia* senise Venemaa-suunalise afektiivse sideme ümber Ukrainale, kujutades ukrainlasi – viidetega konservatiivse ja parempoolse identiteedi sümbolitele – suveräänsust nõudva patriootliku rahvana.

Käsitledes alamküsimust *kuidas etnokultuurilist identiteeti on instrumentaliseeritud ja läbi räägitud paremradikaalsete subjektsuse kujundamiseks*, rakendas *Artikkel III* analüütilist raamistikku Eesti kontekstis, uurides, kuidas paremradikaalsed toimijad mobiliseerisid soome-ugri tsivilisatsioonilist identiteeti kui viitepunkti. EKRE ja selle noorteorganisatsioon Sinine Äratus artikuleerisid erinevaid, kuid osaliselt kattuvaid diskursuseid: EKRE kasutas soome-ugri tähistajat lõdvalt instrumentaalsel viisil, raamides tegevust konservatiivse natsionalismi piirides; Sinine Äratus seevastu esindas eksistentsialistlikumat ja ülimuslikkust propageerivat diskursust, milles soome-ugri tsivilisatsiooniline identiteet toimis metapoliitilise ontoloogilise ankruna. Siiski oli mõlemal juhul loogiline struktuur kooskõlaline: identiteeti konstrueeriti eksklusiivse omandina, mis on ühtaegu habras ja olemuslik ja mille säilitamine eeldas vaenulikkust, ebavõrdsust ning teistsuguse piiritlemist.

Nende juhtumite võrdluses ilmnes järjepidev muster. Paremradikaalsed toimijad osalesid enesekõnetuse aktides, millega konstrueeriti subjektrühm – olgu selleks rahvas, rahvus, või tsivilisatsiooniline tuum – olemuselt eksklusiivse, hierarhiliselt eristuva ja eksistentsiaalselt ohustatuna. Esimeses artiklis toimis viide Venemaale kui suveräänsele ideaalile, mille kaudu tõlgendati nii ennast kui Teist. Teises artiklis nõutasid toimijad „autentsete itaallaste" esindajate ja nendega identifitseerijate rolli, delegitimeerides oponente petturite või reeturitena sildistamisega. Kolmandas artiklis ei olnud soome-ugri identiteet mitte ainult rõhutatud, vaid seda esitleti moraalse ja ajaloolise eeldusena legitiimseks rahvuslikuks eluks. Kõikide nende juhtumite puhul ei tulenenud legitiimsus mitte protseduurilistest normidest või pluralistlikust valideerimisest, vaid kindlaksjäämisest kujuteldavale olemusele, mida artikuleeriti läbi diskursiivsete paiknemise ja välistamise, ekvivalentsuse ja erituse aktide.

Need järeldused toetavad doktoritöö keskset väidet: *paremradikaalsuse diskursiivne suhestumine umbmääraselt defineeritud referentobjektidega kujutab endast enesekõnetuse akti, mis on vastuseks liberaalse demokraatia valitsevatele sotsiaal-poliitilistele loogikatele*. See on subjektsuse loogika, mis tuleneb radikaalse ebavõrdsuse, vaenulikkuse ja eksklusiivsuse nõuetest. Tegemist on eelhäälestusliku ehk dispositsioonilise struktuuriga, mis suunab diskursust nende nõudmiste kinnitamisele nii normatiivse kui eksistentsiaalse imperatiivina. See loogika ei ole taandatav ideoloogilisele sisule, mida ta ükskõik millisel ajahetkel mobiliseerib; see on võimalikkuse tingimus, mis aitab seda sisu mõista paremradikaalse diskursusena.

Sellest perspektiivist võib populismi, post-fašismi ja natsionalismi ümber mõtestada paremradikaalsuse alusloogika konkreetsete avaldumisvormidena. Kui paremradikaalsed toimijad rakendavad populismi, võtavad nad üle mõned selle eeldused, eeskätt rahva kui moraalselt õige kollektiivi ülistamise, kuid jäävad siiski osaliselt kinni demokraatliku tunnetuse eeldustesse kaasavasse retoorikasse.

Postfašismis seevastu ilmneb see loogika puhtamal kujul, loobudes täielikult liberaaldemokraatlikust legitimeerimisest ning võttes avalikult omaks hierarhilisema ja välistava vaate. Ometi jäävad mõlemad allutatuks neid käivitavale sügavamale loogikale, mille kohaselt paremradikaalsus kui subjektivatsiooni ehk eneseloome struktuur defineeritud oma vaenuliku hoiaku kaudu pluralismi, sattumuslikkuse ja võrdsuse vastu.

Seetõttu võivad populism, postfašism ja natsionalism küll säilitada heuristilise väärtuse empiirilise eristamise kategooriatena, kuid neid ei tohiks pidada fundatsionalistlikeks kategooriateks. Nende tähendus tuleneb sellest, kuidas nad kehastavad või moduleerivad paremradikaalsuse keskset loogikat, mitte mingist nende enda olemuslikust omadusest. Kuna nad aitavad esile tuua ebavõrdsuse, vaenulikkuse ja eksklusiivsuse struktuurseid toimemehhanisme, jäävad nad analüütiliselt kasulikuks; ent nende taksonoomiline jäikus tuleb asendada voolavama, dispositsioonipõhise analüüsiga.

Kokkuvõttes on käesolev doktoritöö panustanud paremradikaalsuse uurimisse nii teoreetiliselt kui metodoloogiliselt, käsitledes seda mitte staatilise objektina, vaid dünaamilise diskursusena, mida kannab järjepidev, nõudmistepõhise subjektsuse loogika. Seades esiplaanile paremradikaalide identiteeti kujundavad enesekõnetamise aktid, on loodud raamistik, mis suudab ühendada nii selle poliitilise moodustise stabiilsuse kui etteaimamatuse. Paremradikaalsus ei ole ei jäänukideoloogia ega ka pelgalt afektiivne väljendusviis – see on eelhäälestuslik loogika ning „enese“ ja „poliitilisuse“ konstrueerimise viis.

PUBLICATIONS

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