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To cite this article: Birgit Sauer (2022) Radical right populist debates on female Muslim body-coverings in Austria. Between biopolitics and necropolitics, *Identities*, 29:4, 447-465, DOI: [10.1080/1070289X.2022.2071515](https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2022.2071515)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2022.2071515>



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Published online: 03 May 2022.



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Radical right populist debates on female Muslim body-coverings in Austria. Between biopolitics and necropolitics

Birgit Sauer 

Department of Political Science, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

ABSTRACT

The Austrian Parliament has passed three laws since 2018 that prohibit wearing Muslim body-coverings in public. This departure from a formerly tolerant approach is an outcome of ongoing anti-Muslim campaigns by the radical-right populist Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). The party has been mobilising since the mid-1980s through the creation of two antagonisms: 'the elite' and second against 'Others' – mainly migrants. Since the turn of the century, this anti-migrant mobilisation has targeted the intersection of gender and religion by focusing on veiled Muslim women. Targeting this intersection of gender and religion, the article applies a critical frame analysis of 19 FPÖ documents from 2006 to 2020 on restrictive rulings about female Muslim body-covering. It finds that Austrian radical right populist campaigns emphasise the female body and construct the Austrian 'people' (biopolitics), while necropower constructs Muslim migrants as non-belonging, excludable, and erasable.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 8 October 2020; Accepted 26 April 2022

KEYWORDS Muslim body-covering; radical right populism; biopolitics; necropolitics; Austria

1. Introduction

'Free women instead of forced veiling' (*Freie Frauen statt Kopftuchzwang*) was a national election slogan promoted by the Austrian radical right populist party, The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*) in 2006. Likewise, the left side of an FPÖ poster from the 2020 Vienna elections depicted the backsides of five fully covered women in black, who looked at a picture of St. Stephen's Cathedral with a superimposed crescent and the caption: 'SPÖ, ÖVP and Greens – radical Islam'. To their right, the poster showed the city's leading FPÖ candidate and the words 'Our homeland'¹ in front of the same cathedral.

CONTACT Birgit Sauer  birgit.sauer@univie.ac.at  Department of Political Science, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

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European countries have included Muslim women's veiling on their agenda since the turn of the century, when France adopted a law in 2004 that prohibited 'conspicuous religious signs' in schools (Scott 2007). While other European countries introduced restrictive headscarf regulations, Austria initially avoided such regulations. (Gresch et al. 2008). However, Austria's previously tolerant approach to Muslim body-coverings has changed in recent years. In 2017, a government coalition led by the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the Christian Conservative People's Party (ÖVP) enacted a law banning 'full face covering', which primarily targeted female Muslim apparel. The next year, the governing ÖVP-FPÖ majority passed a law in Parliament banning children's hijabs in kindergartens, followed by a ban on student headscarves in primary schools in 2019.

This shift to a prohibitive regime was largely spurred by the FPÖ's mobilisation and processes of 'normalizing' right-wing frames, contributing to the ÖVP's adoption of their discourse (Wodak 2021, 225–267; Rosenberger and Hadj-Abdou 2013, 154). Thus, the country's comparatively late change in body-covering regulations despite constant radical right anti-Muslim mobilisation makes Austria and the FPÖ an excellent opportunity for studying the entanglement of religion and gender.

Research on radical right populism, gender and religion represents an emerging field. My article builds on this literature, but takes a novel route in disentangling gender and religion by asserting that the FPÖ's antagonistic mobilisation is part of a strategic search for modes of governing through 'creating' the Austrian people – the 'We' (biopolitics) – and de-humanising the Muslim 'Other', who should be excluded, deported or erased (necropolitics).

The article asks how the FPÖ frames Muslim body covering. How are processes of gendering and religiosization² intertwined in these framings? How do these intersecting processes support the FPÖ's approach to governing Muslim migrants and the Austrian society? To answer these questions, I have analysed FPÖ documents that date back to 2006, when the party started its aggressive anti-Muslim campaigning.

After situating FPÖ politics in their historical context, I discuss the state of research the article builds upon. Next, I share the study's theoretical framework, data and methods, which is followed by a discussion of the findings and concluding remarks on the paradoxical entanglement of gender and religion as a form of bio- and necropolitical governing.

2. How the FPÖ discovered gender and religion: setting the context

Founded in 1956,³ the FPÖ had a traditionally anti-clerical orientation (Hadj-Abdou 2016, 30) that was grounded in its pan-Germanist and Nazi history. From the 1990s onward, party leader Jörg Haider pivoted to religion, stressing the Christian foundations of Austrian culture (Rosenberger and Hadj-Abdou

2013, 151; Forlenza 2019, 135) with the aim to attract voters because German nationalism no longer appealed to Austrians (Hadj-Abdou 2016, 44). At the same time, Islam was presented as a threat to Austrian security and culture (Hadj-Abdou 2016, 38; Hafez, Heinisch, and Miklin 2019). The strategy was successful: In 1999, the party won 26.9% of the votes in the national election and became a 'junior partner' in a government coalition with the ÖVP. The FPÖ's anti-Muslim mobilisation remained moderate out of deference to the ÖVP, and the diplomatic sanctions imposed on Austria because of the party's government participation (Rosenberger and Hadj-Abdou 2013, 151–152).

In 2005, the FPÖ split following ideological quarrels and power struggles, with Haider establishing the BZÖ (*Bewegung Zukunft Österreich*) which remained in government (Rosenberger and Hadj-Abdou 2013, 153), while former head of the regional Vienna FPÖ, Heinz-Christian Strache, became the national party's new leader.⁴ Since then, the FPÖ's transformation 'from xenophobia to Islamophobia' has been especially pronounced (Betz 2017, 384). For example, the party founded the *Verein SOS Abendland* (SOS Occident; Rosenberger and Hadj-Abdou 2013, 153) in 2007, which pledged to save Austria's Western culture and values. Strache followed anti-Muslim discourse from other European radical right parties and amplified their strategy (Krzyzanowski 2013, 140): In 2008, the FPÖ joined the Belgian Vlaams Belang's 'European City Alliance Against Islamisation' and 'Women against Islamisation' in 2012 (Hadj-Abdou 2016, 39).

Despite the FPÖ's anti-Islam mobilisation, Austria did not restrict the religious rights of Muslims until 2015, due to the religion's legal recognition under the 1912 'Islam Law' (*Islamgesetz*) (Mattes and Rosenberger 2015, 129). The law's 1979 amendment states that Islam, like other faiths, enjoys several rights and duties, such being able to cooperate with the Austrian state, that is, participation in consociationalist decision-making, and to 'support' the state in the field of education, that is, religious instruction for pupils (Pötz 2012, 32; Gresch et al. 2008). In February 2015, Austria adopted a new Islam Law, which curtailed the Muslim community's right to religious self-determination (Hafez, Heinisch, and Miklin 2019).

Later that year, during the 2015 'summer of migration', Austria's then-foreign minister, Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP) pushed to closing the so-called Balkan refugee route and adopting an anti-migration strategy. Following the 2017 national election, the ÖVP and FPÖ formed a new government coalition that lasted until 2019. This development 'normalized' the FPÖ's anti-Muslim mobilisation – adopted by the ÖVP – as government policies (Wodak 2021).

3. State of research

This article's body of literature builds upon analyses of radical right populism, gender, and religion and research on Muslim body-covering, which likewise inform my own research. Notwithstanding national differences, gender has

long been an important pillar of radical right ideologies, such as notions of a natural gender binary and the traditional heterosexual gendered division of labour (Akkerman 2015; Mayer, Sori, and Sauer 2016). The importance of gender relations to populist right-wing actors has been recently visible through their mobilisation against the scientific concept of gender, gender studies and gender mainstreaming (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). This new 'gender ideology' is supposed to enrich the populists' 'thin-centred ideology' (Mudde 2004, 543). Hence, radical right populist antagonisms of the 'We' – the people up against the elite – and the 'Others' (for the two antagonisms see Mudde 2007; Aslanidis 2016; Brubaker 2020) strive to create an identity of a pure people. The 'anti-gender discourse' and its evocation of a 'crisis of masculinity', in turn, supports these radical right populist antagonisms (Graff, Kapur, and Walters 2019, 548).

A second body of literature focuses on regulating Muslim body-covering across Europe, the role of gender equality in these policy processes and ambivalent claims of secularity, all of which are framed within a gendered perspective (Saharso and Lettinga 2008; Rosenberger and Sauer 2011; Scott 2018). Portrayals of covered Muslim women in public debates show how veiled women embody 'negative representations about Islam' (Ramirez 2015, 677) and thus how the simultaneous 'Other' and 'We' are constructed (Meer, Dwyer, and Modood 2010; Moors 2011). Veiled Muslim women function as a 'visible other' (Fatima El-Tayeb 2011, 16) and, hence, debates on body-covering evoke 'orientalist fantasies about the enslavement of white women' (Marzouki and McDonnell 2016, 6; vom Bruck 2008, 51).

Bans on body-covering are interpreted as a way to discipline women and minorities and create 'sexual and ethnic stratification' (Ramirez 2015, 672; Amiraux 2013). Likewise, they are seen as exclusivist 'identity politics', 'based on the bodies of Muslim women' (Ramirez 2015, 679). At the same time, these 'culturalist gendered discourses' (Vieta 2016, 622; Anthias 2020, 19, 48, 122–123) arguably mystify a 'Christian cultural heritage' (Vieta 2016, 624).

Research also stresses that radical right populist parties usually discuss Muslim body-covering with a 'rather instrumentalised commitment to liberalism' (Dingler et al. 2017, 348). They praise gender equality in European countries and stigmatise the alleged patriarchal Muslim religion of submissive women and violent men (Krzyzanowski 2013, 145; de Lange and Mügge 2015, 63; Hadj-Abdou 2019; Wodak 2015, 22) with the aim of 'couch[ing] anti-Islamic propositions in terms of liberation and emancipation' (Betz 2017, 383).

Sarah Farris (2017) labels these frames as 'femonationalism', while Leila Hadj-Abdou (2019) describes it as 'gender nationalism'. Femonationalist arguments convey nationalist and nativist notions (Kinnvall 2015, 524); for example, Andreassen and Lettinga (2012) demonstrate that the objective of unveiling became a marker of Western, national identity (also, Meret and Siim 2012; Sauer et al. 2016).

Research on religion and radical right populism is premised on how the presence of Muslim migrants has transformed Western European societies into 'post-secular' spheres (Maussen 2015, 83). Werner Schiffauer (2007) coined the 'muslimisation of the immigrant', wherein Muslim migrants are 'reduced to a religious identity' (Mattes 2018, 186), while Mazourki, McDonnell and Roy (2016) claim that the far right 'hijacked' religion 'for a political purpose', that is, to 'maximise votes' and to 'restrict immigration' (Forlenza 2019, 138; Wodak 2015, 144). Religion became 'a matter of belonging rather than believing' (Forlenza 2019, 138) and 'a marker of identity' in order to 'distinguish between the good "us" and the bad "them"' (Roy 2016, 186; Wagenvoorde 2020, 116). Radical right populists, therefore, see Christianity as 'the secular culture of contemporary "Europe"' (Forlenza 2019, 135). Rogers Brubaker (2017) labels this strategy, found especially within West-European right-wing parties, as 'civilisationalism'.

Research concludes that religion is instrumentalised in western Europe to cultivate 'an external threat' (Hervik 2019, 533) and construct a 'politics of fear' (Wodak 2015). Islam is not perceived as a religion, but a political ideology (Marzouki and McDonnell 2016, 6), and 'Islamic values are considered to be alien, backward, and dangerous' (Roy 2016, 187). This discourse exhibits 'all the traits of a moral panic' (Betz 2017, 376).

At the same time, there has been a visible 'shift from "race" to "faith"' (Burchardt and Michalowski 2015, 7; Mattes 2018, 190), where right-wing discourse has notably developed religion into a 'racialized boundary' (Marzouki and McDonnell 2016, 6; Fekete 2009). Furthermore, Mattes (2018) references the 'securitization of religion and migration', while another strand of research stresses that the problematisation of Muslims in Europe is 'anxiously concerned with demographics' and a 'fear of replacement' concerning the Christian population (Bracke and Hernandez Aguilar 2020a, 2).

My own approach builds on this body of research and adds a perspective that includes how both migrants and the Austrian population are governed through processes of gendering and religioization.

4. Theoretical approach and methods

The analysis is based upon the argument that the neoliberal 'crisis of governability' provokes new forms of governing through gendering and religioization. This crisis produces 'new forms of intersectional racist practices' and new forms of a 'politics of belonging' (Yuval-Davis 2019, 69–71). The 'Muslim question' moved into the focus of governing and 'has become central to the regulation, management, and control of (national) populations in Europe' (Bracke, Hernandez, and Luis 2020a, 16).

At the beginning of the 21st century, radical right populists embarked on a strategic search for such new forms of governing to add to their illiberal project. This project strategically uses women's bodies to exercise power and as a means to govern (through) religion and gender. The categories gender and religion have comprised changes in how people are governed and categorised since the 19th century nation-state building processes, as well as identity creation and the politics of belonging or non-belonging.

Drawing on Foucault, these new forms of governing can be considered biopolitics because they target the population. Biopower focuses on human beings and 'processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness' – in particular, on the bodies of people (Foucault 1997, 243). It is gendered and racialised, as it vests in the notion that a nation's reproductive capacity must be defended against the 'biological threats posed by the other race, the subrace' (Foucault 1997, 61). Foucault (1997, 258, 255) argues that 'racism justifies the death-function in the economy of biopower by appealing to the principle that the death of others makes one biologically stronger'; thus, 'if you want to live, the other must die' (see also Bracke and Hernandez Aguilar 2020b, 360; Stoler 1995). Racialisation works 'through the marking of bodies' as superior or as inferior (Grosfoguel, Oso, and Christou 2015, 637; Thorleifsson 2019, 2).

Foucault's concept of 'killing' also refers to political death, which does not entail a direct act of extermination or murdering, but denotes the rejection and expulsion of the inferior races from the political body'. Biopolitical racism thus refers to 'legitimate and illegitimate positions and subjects of entitlement'. This technology has been 'central to the project of "capitalist social formations" "to facilitate inequality, subordination and exploitation"' (Anthias 2020, 59).

Because racism is flexible and always creates new conjunctures (Hall 1986), contemporary conjunctures refashion categories, such as religion, culture, sexuality and gender (Bracke, Hernandez, and Luis 2020b, 359). Therefore, racialising religion at the intersection of gender represents a new mode of biopolitical governing, forming a 'chain of racialological meanings' (Gilroy 2012, 388; Watson, Selod, and Kibria 2019, 452).

Foucault's 'biopolitical racism' has been adopted by Achille Mbembe (2003, 2019), who describes this type of governing as 'necropolitics', wherein necropolitics and 'necropower' indicate the 'subjugation of life to the power of death' (Mbembe 2003, 25, 39), using the examples of deadly wars against specific groups, for example, slavery, the Holocaust or Israel's occupation of Palestine as illustrations. Nevertheless, the concept of necropower does not only refer to the physical death of a person, but also to social and political death, that is, discrimination, exclusion or erasure through processes of de-humanisation. In a similar vein, Judith

Butler writes about the 'violence of derealization' (Butler 2004, 33), of lives who are not 'grievable' (Butler 2004, XV). This translates into what Fatima El-Tayeb (2016, 54) calls 'erasable lives'.

To operationalise the concepts of 'biopower' and 'necropower' for my empirical frame analysis I developed the following codes or categories: 'belonging' and 'non-belonging' (Yuval-Davis 2011), creation of the 'We' and the 'Other', 'racist' processes of group-related 'boundary-drawing' and exclusion (Yuval-Davis 2019, 74), gendered bodies, presentation of Islam, religiosization of gender and female bodies, hierarchy of people and bodies.

My analysis is based on 19 FPÖ policy documents, such as national election platforms, election campaign material, party handbooks from 2006 to 2020⁵ and parliamentary speeches made by FPÖ representatives at three parliamentary debates on restricting female Muslim body-covering in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The material research comprised a full survey of all FPÖ documents and material on the national level during the period under study. The final selection – based on the topics Islam and Muslim body-covering – includes all party platforms (selected is the new 2011 platform and the 'Team Strache' platform); all election programmes from 2006 onwards (2008, 2015, 2017, 2019 and the 2020 Vienna FPÖ electoral platform); all FPÖ publications that were advertised on the party website, including a lead motion from the 2013 FPÖ party conference that refers to Europe and Islam; one publication about the party's 60-year anniversary; one special publication on Islam from 2008; the two editions of the handbook for party officials; and finally, the 2017 and 2022 ÖVP and FPÖ government platforms. Moreover, the corpus includes each speech made by FPÖ representatives at the three parliamentary debates on restricting Muslim body-covering (5 speeches in 2017, 5 in 2018 and 4 in 2019) and two parliamentary motions made by FPÖ members during the 2017 parliamentary debate.

A critical frame analysis (Verloo and Lombardo 2007) was used to analyse the documents and detect the organised narratives and arguments in the FPÖ's public interventions that interpret the role of Muslim religion and gender, create policy problems and suggest policy solutions. The critical frame analysis was centred around 'sensitizing questions' (Verloo and Lombardo 2007, 35), which structured the material according to the above-mentioned categories 'belonging' and 'non-belonging', creation of the 'We' and the 'Other', 'racist' processes of group-related 'boundary-drawing' and exclusion, gendered bodies, presentation of Islam, religiosization of gender and female bodies, hierarchy of people and bodies. The categories were then clustered around problem and solution definitions that refer to the categories. These clusters of problems and solutions encompass the 11 frames that I identified in the material (Verloo and Lombardo 2007, 36).

5. FPÖ's Bio- and necropolitical project: the 'we' against the gendered 'other' religion

While the FPÖ's problem definition targeted the hijab at the beginning of the 21st century, they later shifted their attention to the burqa, that is, full face covering. The FPÖ governing platform proposed enforcing prohibitions as a solution: In the early 2000s, Heinz-Christian Strache demanded an unspecified ban on hijabs (OTS 2004; FPÖ 2008b), while the party's 2013 and 2017 *Handbuch* (FPÖ 2013a, 138, FPÖ 2017a, 125) advocated for prohibiting 'disguises' in public places and streets, in public buildings, schools and universities. After the Austrian Parliament passed laws that prohibit wearing full-face coverings in public and headscarves in kindergartens and primary schools, the party ultimately shifted their attention to the 'burkini' which finally became the party's object of rejection in their platform for the 2020 Vienna elections (FPÖ 2020, n.p.).

The FPÖ portrays body-covering as a sign that Muslim women are oppressed and denied equal rights by their communities (frame 1). This first frame shows that the headscarf 'prevents all girls in Austria from having the same opportunities for development', as FPÖ Member of Parliament Edith Mühlberghuber, states (Republik Österreich 2018, 80). As victims of their patriarchal culture, Muslim girls and women need protection from 'religious indoctrination, sexualisation, but also stigmatisation' (Ricarda Berger, FPÖ, Republik Österreich 2018, 89). Therefore, Muslim women and girls should be liberated, and the FPÖ promises to 'protect free women' on a poster from their 2010 Vienna election campaign. Elected party officials portrayed the prohibition of all forms of Muslim body-covering in a parliamentary motion as a 'liberation of those girls who are forced by their archaic culture to wear a headscarf' (Österreich 2017b, 223). By referring to an unspecified and homogenised 'culture' Muslims are de-individualised and de-humanised.

Moreover, female Muslim religious garments are perceived as a sign of the 'new discrimination against women' in Austria (FPÖ 2017b, n.p.) (frame 2). The adjective 'new' indicates that discrimination against women was previously abolished before Muslims immigrated to Austria, and assumes that this new oppression is imported from outside and endangers equal opportunities for all women within the country (Partei Österreichs 2008b, n.p., 2013a, 51). FPÖ Member of Parliament Robert Lugar argues that although the 'oppression' of women and girls by men existed in Austria, it was 'a couple of hundred years ago' (Republik Österreich 2019, 229; Partei Österreichs 2017a, 125). Muslims, thus, are portrayed as endangering Austrian women who are at the same time constructed as equal with men.

The FPÖ's biopolitical project includes the a historical image of a gender-equal Austrian society. The antagonistic slogan 'Free women instead of forced veiling' depicts Muslim women as unfree and forced to cover their hair,

whereas Austrian women are ostensibly free (frame 3). To support this femonationalist argument, the party appropriated a fundamental feminist claim: the right to self-determination, which covered Muslim women are allegedly denied. For example, FPÖ Member of Parliament Carmen Schimanek appealed for the 'right of all women to self-determination', which must not be taken away by 'antiquarian (sic!) Muslim men' (Republik Österreich 2019, 227). The FPÖ uses female Muslim body-covering to illustrate the backwardness of Muslim men and Islam, while simultaneously demonstrating Austria's historical progress towards societal gender equality. The 'Muslim question' thus rests upon framing Islam as 'alien' to European countries (Bracke, Hernandez, and Luis 2020a, 2). Hence, this necropolitical logic assumes that Muslims must be excluded, as they do not fit in.

The party's opposition to children's headscarves, moreover, uses a language of violence against women (frame 4). In the parliamentary debate about banning headscarves in primary schools, Wendelin Mölzer (FPÖ) lamented that 'young girls are abused by wearing headscarves' (Republik Österreich 2019, 215). Therefore, enacting a law to ban headscarves in kindergartens not only implies the debate about a 'piece of cloth', as Mölzer claimed the previous year, but a measure to prevent violence against women (Republik Österreich 2018, 92). Since 2008, the FPÖ has labelled Muslim headscarves as 'violence against women' and connected to honour killings, forced marriage and genital mutilation (FPÖ 2008a und, 2008b; Partei Österreichs 2017a, 125, Partei Österreichs 2017b, n.p.).⁶ This trope of 'cultural violence' ultimately entered the ÖVP–FPÖ coalition's 2017 government agenda (Österreich 2017a, 38). Female bodies are thus used as a symbol to develop punitive measures against Muslims and to legitimise and execute necropower, that is, to exclude Muslims from society and make them non-existent; to turn them socially and politically dead because they are not humans but violent perpetrators (with reference to Foucault 1997, 258).

FPÖ members of parliament, such as Carmen Schimanek, have extensively appropriated the feminist critique of the sexualisation of women, and condemn the degradation of Muslim girls and women as sexual objects through the hijab and body-covering (frame 5). Member of Parliament Peter Wurm (FPÖ) states that the headscarf 'is intended to protect women from the lustful looks of men' and to 'prevent sexual stimulation of men'. To accept such a behaviour by tolerating body-covering, he argues, would mean reverting Austrian society back to the 'middle ages' (Republik Österreich 2019, 221–222, 227). This frame, again, homogenises and derealizes Muslim men as sexually aggressive and violent.

In FPÖ discourse, sexuality is used, on the one hand, as a form of biopolitical governing. Sexually liberated Austrian women are seen as empowered to choose whom they want to marry. While the FPÖ proclaims Austrian women's right to sexual self-determination, the party criticises the country's

demographic decline and falling birth-rates at the same time. On the other hand, Muslim women's sexuality is portrayed as oppressed and abused to give birth to numerous children, thereby connecting body-covering to demography – again by misusing feminist arguments (frame 6). Robert Lugar (FPÖ) characterises the headscarf as a means to degrade women into 'birthing machines' (Republik Österreich 2019, 228–229). While this reflects what Gabriele Dietze (2015) labels Western 'sexual exceptionalism', it also includes the necropolitical argument that the Austrian society is outnumbered by too many foreign children and will therefore die out. According to the FPÖ, this predicament requires halting immigration as well as socially and politically eliminating Muslim communities through exclusion from – or assimilation into – the Austrian, allegedly sexually liberated, culture. This, in the FPÖ's argument, will ultimately result in less Muslim children. A violent rhetoric against not yet born Muslim children aims not only at the social death but also at the erasure of Muslim lives.

Another evident frame is that Muslim body-covering is not a religious practice, but a symbol for the unwillingness to integrate (frame 7). In 2004, Strache introduced this problem definition that the headscarf prevents integration and is a sign of separation from the mainstream society (OTS 2004). The narrative of 'parallel societies' remains a cornerstone of the FPÖ's agenda and is embodied by covered Muslim women (Ricarda Berger, FPÖ, Republik Österreich 2018, 89). This biopolitical idea aims to create a united Austrian society through control, but going even further and dissolving these 'parallel societies' (Österreich 2017a, 37).

These biopolitical debates simultaneously establish new requirements and preconditions for belonging, namely specific bodily characteristics and (religious) habitual practices. This feeds into the construction of 'good' and 'bad' migrants – those who are willing to integrate (and uncover) and those who are not (and claim the right to be veiled) (FPÖ 2015).

The radical right populist debates about female Muslim body-covering create an arena that maps out the field of belonging and non-belonging in a bodily, religiousized and gendered mode and ultimately exercise necropower by denying Muslim women the right to socially and politically belong. And their bodies seem to be not 'grievable' as they are allegedly unwilling to integrate.

Additionally, female Muslim body-covering is embedded in a narrative that emphasises Islam as a political ideology that strives to place its 'symbols of power' in the Austrian public sphere (Partei Österreichs 2008b, n.p.) (frame 8). Connecting body-covering to radical Islam is repeatedly stressed within this frame that Islam is an aggressive, 'bellicose religion' that fights other cultures, like the Austrian Christian majority, until it can assert its claim to power (motion by FPÖ representatives Österreich 2017b, 210). FPÖ documents allude to Vienna's 1683 liberation from Muslim siege (Österreich 2017b,

210) to create a 'collective memory' of fear and threat (Hadj-Abdou 2016, 38; Forlenza 2019, 137). This mobilisation of 'violent imaginaries of Muslim Others' again creates an 'endangered We' and reinforces biopolitical boundaries of who belongs and a necropolitical non-belonging and exclusion (Thorleifsson 2019, 15). As a solution, the FPÖ motion demands a 'package of measures to defend our homeland' against radical Islam, which seems to be bellicose itself (Österreich 2017b, 210).

In contrast to Islam's alleged aggressive and premodern culture, the FPÖ positions itself as the defender of an Austrian occidental 'lead culture' that is based on Christianity, humanism, enlightenment and secularity (FPÖ 2011, n.p., FPÖ 2013b, 2013a, 28, 50; Partei Österreichs 2017a, 29) (frame 9). Hadj-Abdou (2016) stresses that the FPÖ's conceptualisation of Christianity as culture helps mobilise their 'demands based on identity'. Hence, biopolitical and necropolitical projects are paradoxically entangled. Christianity is seen as Austria's baseline culture (and hence invisible) when confronted by an aggressive and visible Islam. When Islam is visibilised as a threat through covered women, it is no longer perceived as religion, but a political ideology.

The visibility of Islamic symbols like female body-covering forms part of the frame (frame 10) on the Austrian people's loss of identity through the immigration of a foreign religion and culture. The far-right *SOS Occident* association evokes the 'threat of a loss of the own identity – in the cultural, religious, and socio-political realm' (OTS 2007). Austria's far right combines this trope of 'identity destruction' (Partei Österreichs 2017b) with the argument that Austria's population is being 'alienated' from its culture of living (Partei Österreichs 2015); for example, in a brochure describing Austria as a 'dying culture' (Howanietz 2013, 49). This inverse necropolitical discourse legitimises the (social and political) death of the allegedly threatening and aggressive Islamic culture. Again, the Islam's threat to Austrian 'Christian-influenced culture' (FPÖ 2020, n.p.) is visibilised through how the FPÖ's frames Muslim women. Banning Muslim body-covering therefore 'safeguard[s] Austrian culture' (FPÖ motion, Republik Österreich 2017b, 223).

The frame of identity destruction connects to the argument about an impending 'replacement' of the autochthonous Austrian population (*Bevölkerungsaustausch*) (Partei Österreichs 2020; Team HC Strache 2020) through 'invasive mass immigration' (FPÖ 2016, 43) (frame 11). This discourse of replacement entails specific imaginations of life and death: The 'invaders' aspire to 'kill' the autochthon population and, hence, must be stopped by closing the borders; if the invaders are already in the country, they must be 'socially killed' through assimilation – another example of right-wing necropower.

Again, this narrative of displacement and immigration is attached to women's bodies through its association with 'demographic decline' and low Austrian birth rates. However, as the FPÖ claimed during both their 2005 Vienna election and 2017 national election campaigns, immigration must not be used to compensate for this demographic decline. Conversely, the party's 2016 *Festschrift* for its 60th anniversary roots the 'demographic development' – the declining ratio of Austrian to 'foreigner' native births – in 'invasive mass immigration' (Partei Österreichs 2016, 43). Their imaginary connects this 'mass immigration' to veiled Muslim women; for example, the (FPÖ's 2019) national election platform declares a threat of 'mass immigration' that accompanies the image of praying and kneeling, covered Muslim women (FPÖ 2019).

The FPÖ's biopolitical approach to this 'demographic crisis' is, *first*, a 'birth-oriented', 'pro-natalist family policy' (Partei Österreichs 2011, 2013b). By encouraging (and at the same time blaming) Austrian female 'birth refusers' (Partei Österreichs 2017a, 136) to procreate, the party uses family policy as a solution to the Austrian 'crisis of identity' and a means to 'revitalise collective identity' (Howanietz 2013, 130). During the leadup to the 2010 municipal Vienna election, the FPÖ's campaign slogan 'More courage for our Viennese blood' (*Mehr Mut für unser Wiener Blut*) referred to increasing the native Viennese population. Bracke and Hernandez Aguilar (2020a, 9) label such radical right discussions on demographic decline as 'biopolitics of borders, and migration, and cultures'. The FPÖ's pro-natalist family policies and demands for Austrian women to bear more children are, *second*, accompanied by calls for Muslim women to unveil and uncover as a prerequisite for belonging. Hence, biopolitical demands include a necropolitical dimension by insisting that Muslim women and migrants have to assimilate and give birth to less children – which should lead to the extinction of Muslims over time (Partei Österreichs 2015; Team HC Strache. Allianz für Österreich 2020).

Ultimately, the radical right populist narrative employs bio- and necropower by religiousizing women's bodies, implying that covered women are principally and exclusively *Muslim* women, thereby reducing their bodies to a marker of Islam and de-humanising covered Muslim women. The radical right argues that these visible religious women endanger Austria's population structure, culture and identity. Therefore, (Muslim) religion must be privatised and banned from the public sphere, and women's bodies mark the border between public and private. This gendered and religious bordering excludes covered women and the group they allegedly represent – Muslims – from the public sphere and society. Additionally, bordering implies that visibly different people must either be excluded, erased or assimilate into the Austrian culture. I therefore label this framing as racist bordering in the radical right populist necropolitical project.

6. Conclusions

This study unearthed different facets of how the FPÖ frames Muslim body-covering. The analysis shed light on the party's biopolitical project and the racist, anti-Muslim and necropolitical rhetoric from the Austrian populist radical right, which simultaneously targets the Austrian population. The article thus contributes to existing research on governing through both bio- and necropower.

The article was premised upon how radical right populist debates over female Muslim body-covering are embedded in the neoliberal reorganisation of societies and a 'crisis of governability'. I located the debates surrounding Muslim women's body-covering in the populist right's strategic search for new forms of governing that uses the gendering of race and the 'racialization of religion' (Anthias 2020, 148) as important building blocks. The necropolitical aspect of right-wing governing refers to the de-humanisation of Muslims – especially by using Muslim women's bodies.

The FPÖ's governing strategy has developed through a paradoxical bio- and necropolitical entanglement. Hence, covered women embody non-belonging, racist exclusion and de-humanisation, while their bodies simultaneously construct the boundary against those who belong to the national community, namely Austrian women, but who are also disciplined by Muslim body-covering discourses.

As a whole, this study highlights how the FPÖ uses Muslim women's bodies to represent the frontline of Austrian immigration and integration conflicts, and how gender and religion have become intertwined with a biopolitical and necropolitical project of right-wing populist governance. The article contributes to existing literature on the far right and religion by showing that Islam has not only been 'hijacked' by the FPÖ to establish a nativist political strategy but that the party aims at establishing necropolitical forms of governing Muslims and at the same time strengthens a biopolitical approach towards Austrian women and the Austrian population. From the perspective on gender, religion and governance, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of Austria's right-wing populist project of inequality, hierarchy, racism and exclusion.

Notes

1. 'Our homeland' translates as 'Unser Daham' and rhymes with 'Islam'.
2. 'Religiosization' refers to processes and practices of giving an object, a situation or a relation a religious meaning.
3. The FPÖ, founded under this name in 1956, emerged from the Federation of Independents (Verband der Unabhängigen), which was established in 1949 by former members of the National Socialist Party.

4. After Haider's death in 2008, the BZÖ became increasingly insignificant in Austrian politics. Since 2013, the BZÖ has failed to meet the 4% electoral threshold and is no longer represented in the national Parliament.
5. The election platform for the 2020 Vienna elections from the newly founded 'Team HC Strache' is included in this sample.
6. In 2001, the Haider-led FPÖ hosted a public event against female genital mutilation (Rosenberger and Hadj-Abdou 2013, 158) without distinguishing between religious and cultural practices.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Birgit Sauer  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4857-7696>

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