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Karner, Christian

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Karner, C. (2007). Austrian Counter-Hegemony. *Ethnicities*, *7*(1), 82-115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796806073920

ethnicities

ARTICLE

Vol 7(1): 82–115;073920
DOI:10.1177/1468796806073920
http://etn.sagepub.com

Austrian counter-hegemony

Critiquing ethnic exclusion and globalization

CHRISTIAN KARNER

University of Nottingham, UK

ABSTRACT This article examines select discursive contributions to Austrian civil society as counter-hegemonic forms of engagement with (trans)national structures of power and exclusion. Their ideological opposition is shown to unfold around three thematic areas: (1) conceptualizations of (ethnic) identities that subvert discourses of ethnonationalism; (2) initiatives that challenge everyday racism and asylum seekers' structural marginalization; (3) a recurring critique of neo-liberalism and economic globalization. The article also demonstrates that the political agency in question is informed by a narrative of interpretation, which partly converges with seminal contributions to the sociology of globalization and which differs radically from neo-nationalist responses to the dislocations and uncertainties of contemporary capitalism.

KEYWORDS anti-racism ● asylum seekers ● civil society ● economic globalization ● 'Fortress Europe'

INTRODUCTION

The controversial inclusion of the far-right Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) in a coalition government with the centre-right Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP) in Austria in February 2000 was widely interpreted as a disconcerting ideological shift in a European Union (EU) member state. Austria's (at the time) 14 EU (EU-14) partners responded by imposing a series of temporary sanctions on the Alpine Republic, which triggered controversy and soul-searching in Austria and which were lifted following the recommendations of the so-called 'Wise Men Report' (Ahtisaari et al., 2000), mandated by the EU-14 and the European Court of Human Rights

(Merlingen et al., 2001). While the collapse and eventual re-election of the ÖVP–FPÖ coalition in late 2002 caused considerably less international uproar, Austria continues to be thought of as a paradigmatic case of the resurgence of populist discourses of national identity and belonging observed across large parts of the globe since the end of the Cold War (e.g. Hainsworth, 2000; Camus, 2002; Eismann, 2002). Its Austrian variety is in turn most widely associated with Jörg Haider, former head of the FPÖ, governor of the southern province of Carinthia and, since his internal split from the FPÖ in April 2005, head of the newly founded Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ). In recent years, the FPÖ has experienced declining electoral fortunes, as manifested at several recent regional and municipal elections as well as in the drastic decrease from 27.2 percent of the popular vote at the parliamentary elections in 1999 to 10.16 percent in November 2002.

While it is widely acknowledged that the country's current opposition parties, the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the left-leaning Greens, embody politics and understandings of national identity opposed to ethnonationalism, few academic analyses have addressed grass-root or civil society resistance against nationalist discourse. It is this relative absence that the present article aims to address through an analysis of what we may term the counter-hegemonic[1] regional press in Vienna and Graz, Austria's two main cities, complemented by an examination of some local initiatives against the structural exclusion of asylum seekers and immigrants' experience of 'everyday racism' (Essed, 1991). While empirically focused on one of the smaller EU member states, the following discussion is of wider conceptual significance to debates about immigration and asylum in the EU, ideological resistance and (local) civil society.[2] Whilst we need to be wary of unwarranted generalizations on both national and pan-European levels, this analysis positions itself as an investigation of the themes and discursive strategies typical of some of the '(subaltern) counterpublics' (Fraser, 1992; Roberts and Crossley, 2004) frequently overlooked in the literature on 'Fortress Europe'. As we will see, alternative, inclusive constructions of ethnicity and belonging, as well as opposition to globalization and its 'human consequences' (Bauman, 1998), inform the critical discourses analysed in this article; they will be shown to offer both explanations of the social field of which they are a part and a critique of its structuring relations of power.

BACKGROUND: HISTORY, THEORY AND METHOD

Austria's 20th-century history has been the object of sustained and detailed academic scrutiny, reflected in analyses of the collapse of the Habsburg Empire (e.g. Brook-Shepherd, 1997), the troubled inter-war period beset by

unemployment, political polarization as well as ultimately civil war and fascism (e.g. Hanisch, 1994), the infamous *Anschluss* to Nazi Germany and Austria's role in World War II (e.g. Bukey, 2000), and post-war reconstruction, involving a process of 'nation building' in opposition to, and revision of, the previous hegemony of a 'pan-Germanic' discourse of identity (e.g. Thaler, 2001). By the 1970s, the country had acquired the reputation of an 'island of the blessed' (*Insel der Seligen*), a politically neutral democracy based on a consensual system of power-sharing between the SPÖ and the centre-right ÖVP, a strong welfare state, high standards of living and evidence of 'social peace' provided by the virtual absence of strikes (e.g. Fitzmaurice, 1991: 122). Much of this changed during the 1980s and 1990s, a time of rapid political change in and around Austria (e.g. Karner, 2005), of social/structural reforms, and growing discontent with the country's post-war system of Keynesianism, 'social partnership',[3] and *Proporz* (or the systematic sharing of the country's large public sector between the SPÖ and ÖVP). This period also coincided with the transnational controversy surrounding Kurt Waldheim's war-time past (Waldheim had been UN general secretary and was elected Austrian president in 1986), which triggered both an anti-Semitic backlash in parts of the tabloid press (e.g. Mitten, 1992; Rauscher, 2002) and an overdue process of critical debate and public soul-searching concerning Austria's 'dual role' as both perpetrator and victim during World War II (e.g. Sully, 1990; Pick, 2000). The late 1980s and 1990s also saw, as already mentioned, the beginnings of a crisis of legitimacy affecting Austria's main parties and dominant political culture. Haider's concurrent rise to political prominence was aided at least as much, and arguably more, by his politicization of growing disgruntlement with long-established structures of power (e.g. Pelinka, 2000), as by a populist discourse of national belonging and exclusion (e.g. Wodak 2000). The latter was associated with some much-quoted statements he made in the early stages of his political career concerning the Austrian nation (e.g. Haslinger, 1995; Auinger 2000: 52) and the history of World War II (e.g. *Guardian*, 2000).

There is a burgeoning literature on the recent resurgence of the European populist right in general (e.g. Wicker, 1997; Hainsworth, 2000; Camus, 2002) and its Austrian variety in particular: commentators have addressed its historical conditions of possibility and tactics of accommodation (e.g. Auinger, 2000), its social base (e.g. Morrow, 2000; Amesberger and Halbmayr, 2002) and rise to political prominence (e.g. Bailer et al., 2000), its rhetorical strategies (Wodak, 2000; Reisigl, 2002) and allegedly postmodern politics of 'depthless image-making' (Preglau, 2002). This has been complemented by critical analyses of xenophobic discourses and structures of exclusion (e.g. Reisigl and Wodak, 2001) as well as of articulations of an 'encoded' form of anti-Semitism (e.g. Wassermann, 2002; Bering, 2002; Mitten, 2002; Pelinka, 2002; Wodak and Reisigl, 2002).

Conversely, there has been growing recognition of some of the critical voices often emanating from the opposite end of the ideological spectrum and their alternative, inclusivist notions of identity, citizenship and political participation. Notably, there have been studies of well-known contributions to contemporary Austrian literature, including the work of Thomas Bernhard (e.g. Saville, 1999) and recent Nobel-prize winner Elfriede Jelinek (e.g. Kosta, 2003), whose plays and novels have critically engaged with Austrian post-war society in general and a now much-discussed earlier reluctance to confront the horrors of the Holocaust[4] in particular (e.g. Fliedl, 1998). The genre of the politically oppositional commentary or essay (e.g. Menasse, 2000) must also be mentioned in this context. There is further evidence that 'Austro-Pop', Austrian popular music, has on occasion served as a vehicle of ideological opposition to nationalist exclusion both in the context of the Waldheim controversy and of Haider's rise to political prominence (Karner, 2002).

In theoretical terms, this article shares some conceptual and epistemological space with versions of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which defines written and spoken language as forms of social practice (e.g. Fairclough, 1992; Weiss and Wodak, 2003); as such, a broad definition of discourse – which includes verbal statements by 'ordinary social actors', political texts, media coverage, literature as much as all other cultural signifying practices (e.g. Eagleton, 1996: 183) – conceives of all language use as ideological acts embedded in existing relations of power, which language in turn helps to reproduce (if, in Gramscian terminology, 'hegemonic') or challenge (if 'counter-hegemonic'). Empirically and conceptually relevant are thus existing studies carried out under the banner of 'the discourse historical approach', the Viennese variety of CDA, which has examined the 'discursive construction' of Austrian national 'sameness' (De Cillia et al., 1999) as well as the structural conditions and effects of discourses of racist discrimination and exclusion (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001).

However, while the following analysis shares such a focus on the interface between language and power as encountered in discursive constructions of the 'self' and its delineation from the 'other', it differs from these existing studies on two grounds. First, I am here preoccupied with 'ideological work' (Gilroy, 1992[1987]: 35) that *subverts* prominent discourses of ethnic/national identity and exclusion; re-appropriating other discourse-analytical terminology, I thus examine counter-hegemonic 'interpretative repertoires' (Wetherell and Potter, 1992), or frameworks of meaning, drawn upon in constructing inclusive identities and in challenging existing, national as well as transnational, configurations of power. Second, the following analysis departs from the 'linguistically microscopic' (Billig, 1995: 94) examination of particular items (and often small numbers) of text typical of much discourse analytical work; instead, I investigate recurring themes, frameworks of meaning and discursive/political strategies as

encountered in a particular niche in Austria's civil society. Moreover, and the aforementioned conceptual overlaps with CDA notwithstanding, instead of being guided by the technical details of linguistic analysis, my argument unfolds with reference to crucial insights offered by sociological theories of ethnicity, everyday racism and globalization. In doing so, this article casts new light on two key-questions that are of peculiarly Austrian, and more general, theoretical significance respectively.

The former insight relates to a widely observed characteristic of Austrian society: post-war (political, economic and ideological) reconstruction culminated in a political system of somewhat extraordinary stability and durability, based on consensual democracy and the (earlier-mentioned) systematic power-sharing in the country's large public sector between SPÖ and ÖVP (e.g. Morrow, 2000; Thaler, 2001). Coupled with, by western standards, unusually high levels of political party membership, such were the structural conditions inhibiting or delaying – in the analyses of two widely quoted academic commentators (Bruckmüller, 1996[1984]: 42f.; Pelinka, 1990: 24) – the development of a fully fledged civil society. In what follows, I argue that not only have recent years seen significant reconfigurations of these 'older' structures of power, but also, and crucially, the emergence of a viable and lively civil society, glimpses of which are provided by the material examined here.

The second, more general insight relates to the discursive content of many such contributions to Austrian civil society: as we shall see, the dislocations of globalization constitute both the wider context and a core-target of critique for much counter-hegemonic activity. In light of the fact that nationalist discourse, arguably its main ideological 'other', also positions itself in critical opposition to the local consequences of globalization, the question arises as to what distinguishes the political 'left' from the political 'right' in their respective reactions to multinational capitalism. Based on the following analysis and further supported by an observation first made by Zygmunt Bauman (1999[1973]), the concluding section of this article offers a possible answer to this question.

The material examined in what follows, then, represents a particular, hitherto largely unexplored ideological 'niche' within a much more wide-ranging realm of (critical) cultural production and civil society activity in Austria, a niche 'occupied' by two prominent local papers: *Falter*, a weekly Viennese newspaper (with some circulation outside the capital) and *Megaphon*, a self-declared 'street magazine and social initiative'[5] published monthly in Graz, Austria's second biggest city and sold in towns and cities throughout the south-eastern province of Styria. *Megaphon* sells 15,000 copies a month; *Falter* claims to reach at least 5.9 percent of Vienna's population of 1,5 million (http://www.falter.at/anzeigen/media.php).[6] Their different regional bases and audiences notwithstanding[7] these papers share a concern for the plight of asylum seekers, refugees and the homeless, a

commitment to multiculturalism, opposition to nationalist exclusion and a critical stance in relation to global capitalism. Going beyond such broad ideological and ethical principles, the following analysis of editions of both papers published between July 2002 and April 2004 reveals that some of their basic conceptual building blocks and discursive categories are frequently questioned and theorized: debates about ethnic 'otherness' and 'multiculturalism' thus become sophisticated discussions about culture, power and globalization. Further supported by other relevant discourses and practices in Austrian civil society, this analysis of local counter-hegemony is structured around three guiding questions that emerged from a close reading of *Falter* and *Megaphon* in the period just mentioned and that reflect both papers' characteristic and shared concerns with questions of 'difference', racism, inequality and exclusion. The three guiding (or structuring) questions are the following:

- How are culture/ethnicity and 'otherness' (re)conceptualized?
- How are structures of exclusion and racial prejudice challenged?
- How are social inequality and conflict explained?

Given constraints of space, I merely discuss a selection of articles as discursive snapshots, representative of recurring interpretative patterns and social initiatives. Moreover, I also draw attention to interpretative 'overlaps' between the critical discourses examined on the one hand, and recurring themes in the sociology of ethnicity and globalization underpinning my analysis on the other.

(RE)CONCEPTUALIZING ETHNICITY

> Austria has always been our second home – a small country with a big heart. Contacts with the local population were especially important during the [recent] war.[8] (Portrait of a Bosnian refugee now resident in Graz, Kulijuh, 2004: 13)

Repeating a sociological maxim (e.g. Baumann and Gingrich, 2004), identities require 'otherness'; the self presupposes and implies 'others'. Difference is, of course, also constitutive of identities considered to be ethnic-cultural and/or national-linguistic-territorial[9] in 'nature'. However, the self-constitution of the 'national community', or the 'ethnic majority' (Fenton, 2003), implies more than the semiotic construction and reproduction of difference and identity – it forms an ideological practice helping to reproduce the structures of power that define the modern nation state (e.g. Billig, 1995). Moreover, such practices need to be seen in historical context. As mentioned earlier, there is a rapidly expanding literature on the contemporary appeal and mobilizing potential of nationalist discourses promising

stability, community and continuity in an age of economic globalization, consumerist individualism as well as political and existential uncertainty (e.g. Beck, 1992, 2000; Bauman, 1992, 1998; Castells, 1997). In the first part of this analysis, I focus on select contributions to Austria's civil society representative of wider (counter-hegemonic) currents, which challenge, question and undermine such discourses and the 'communities' – inevitably based on exclusions – constructed, reproduced and 'naturalized' therein.

The relative explanatory power of economic inequalities and ethnic difference in accounting for social conflict and political exclusion are at the forefront of many of the contributions to *Falter* and *Megaphon*. As such, they echo a classic debate in the study of ethnicity between primordial interpretations – still widely associated with Clifford Geertz (1973) – of ethnic identities as deep-seated, 'given' and 'coercive', and 'instrumentalist' accounts (e.g. Cohen, 1969), according to which ethnic groups mobilize in response to particular historical and socioeconomic circumstances. Current debates about political Islam and its appeal to sections within Muslim diaspora communities in many ways reproduce these competing explanatory frameworks. In an Austrian context, the bishop of St Pölten recently articulated a version of primordialism in warning against the 'Islamization of Europe', in portraying Islam as 'in part a very aggressive religion' and in postulating that Islam and Christianity were 'politically irreconcilable' ('. . . können in einer politischen Einheit einfach nicht zusammenfinden') (http://www.orf.at, 12 May 2004). Shortly after, the Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich (Islamic community in Austria) thanked a range of individuals and Catholic organizations for their expressions of solidarity with their Muslim neighbours and for their opposition to the bishop's statements (http://www.derislam.at, 17 May 2004). This controversy was indicative of broader currents in public debates on Islam, multiculturalism and European/Austrian identities that also surfaced in a recent round-table discussion, subsequently published in *Falter* (John and Klenk, 2004). The discussion involved the coordinator of a Viennese 'integration association', Integrationsverein Echo, a local councillor, a social worker, and a member of the Österreichisch–Islamische Gesellschaft für Bildung und Kultur (ÖEIG; Austrian–Islamic Society for Education and Culture). Reflecting on their respective experiences of working with Muslim communities in Vienna, the discussants touched on questions as varied as international terrorism, patriarchy, and Islam's relationship to 'the West'. Two competing accounts emerged, which echoed not only the primordialism/instrumentalism debate, but also resonated with two contrasting sociological/historical schools of thought on violence in the contemporary world: first, a 'clash of civilizations' narrative analogous to Samuel Huntington's (1998) much-quoted thesis concerning the assumed conflict between Islam and the West; its sole advocate, the aforementioned coordinator of a local 'integration association', argued that political Islam was not only an obstacle to

Muslims' integration into European societies, but ideologically irreconcilable with what he termed the 'European values' of 'tolerance, anti-racism and liberalism'. This stood in stark contrast to the other three participants' critique of neo-liberal capitalism, their repeated and passionate declarations – comparable to Castells's analysis of 'fundamentalism' as a 'resistance identity' and symptom of marginalization in *the information age* (1997) – that poverty and political exclusion were the root causes of a profound alienation experienced by many (young) Muslims, for which exclusivist identities as well as reactionary and selective interpretations of Islam promised some form of antidote. In this particular case, different explanatory discourses concerning social conflict, religion and ethnicity were 'allowed' to clash without editorial intervention; this arguably amounted to an acknowledgement of the complexity of the debate and a challenge against the common assumption that ethnic identities are primordial determinants of attitudes and behaviours.

Another recent *Falter* article (Ortner, 2004) focused more directly on questions of national/ethnic identity: providing a portrait of a 55-year old shop-keeper and immigrant from former Yugoslavia, the article juxtaposed remnants of 'ethnic absolutism' (Gilroy, 1992[1987]) – or the belief in deep-seated, static ethnic essences – to a narrative emphasizing human agency and the fluidity of social identities. After 36 years in Vienna, the person in question was described as 'quite Austrianized' ('ziemlich verösterreichert'), reading Austrian tabloids, passionate about Austrian folk music, 'having adopted but not assimilated', and considering herself to be 'both Austrian and Yugoslav'. Yet, in an account comparable to Ernest Gellner's description of his reaction to the 'spell' of Bohemian folk songs (McCrone, 1998: 84), the article also quoted the shopkeeper as saying that 'deep-down' she is 'a proud Yugoslav [*sic*]', still prone to deep melancholy when listening to Balkan music. As in the previous example, *Falter* therefore offered competing accounts without proposing an easy resolution. Ethnic identities were portrayed as grounded in biography and invested with emotion, yet also as subject to syncretistic redefinition and reconstruction.

An implicit theory of ethnic identities emerges from a regular *Megaphon* feature – portraits of individual immigrants and asylum seekers in Graz. Recent editions have provided glimpses into the biographies of the established owner of a Chinese restaurant (September 2003), a Rwandan refugee and medical student (October 2003), a Turkish entrepreneur (November 2003), an Iranian translator (December 2003), African *Megaphon* sellers (January 2004), an Argentinean family (February 2004), a Bosnian psychiatrist working with trauma patients (April 2004), and the Nigerian initiator of an organization working with young Austrians and migrants (May 2004). While each of these portraits provided glimpses of hardship, exclusion and struggle, they all emphasized experiences of local acceptance and support, social integration (and in some cases the acquisition of Austrian citizenship)

as well as cultural syncretism giving rise to identities best conceptualized – in Stuart Hall's terminology (1996: 4) – as ongoing 'process[es] of becoming rather than being'. Such accounts thus avoid and challenge unambiguous delineations of the imputed national 'self' from ethnic minorities as permanently excluded 'others'. As alternative and critical discourses, they also raise key questions concerning the ongoing construction, reproduction and negotiation of ethnic-/national identities: are alternative conceptualizations of the boundary and relation between self and other[10] being articulated in Austria's civil society? How do relations of power, both within and outside 'communities',[11] impact on cultural ideas, practices and identities?

Megaphon is published by the Caritas (a non-governmental organization) of the regional diocese. Despite obvious ideological overlaps on asylum, neo-liberal capitalism (see below) and a range of other issues, however, Catholicism is wholly absent from the *Megaphon* pages.[12] Yet, the close organizational links between *Megaphon* and Caritas provide a first indication of a network of more or less integrated civil society groups, initiatives and associations in Austria, which share a concern with social justice and an opposition to exclusion and discrimination. The regional Caritas branch thus defines one of its core aims as the provision of help for anyone in need of support, 'irrespective of age, gender, religion, national or ethnic background, and political conviction'. Pre-empting populist objections to the organization's work with asylum seekers, the Caritas provides a noteworthy instance of counter-hegemonic boundary-contestation:[13] 'the Caritas [. . .] does not distinguish between foreigners and home nationals, nor between black and white, we only think of humans [. . .] in need' ('Für die Caritas [. . .] gibt es nicht Ausländer oder Inländer, Schwarze oder Weisse, sondern nur Menschen [. . .], die in Not geraten sind') (http://caritas-graz.at, 4 May 2004).

These and similar contributions to debates on asylum, ethnic minorities and social welfare reveal an understanding of the impact of external power – variously embodied in state institutions, the EU, and global capitalism – on definitions of group membership and hence on individuals' structural positions and life chances. There is, however, another significant dimension to the interplay of politics and ethnicity, which relates to the distribution of (and struggles over) power *within* ethnic groups. Certain variants of multiculturalism have been criticized for unduly reifying cultural communities as allegedly homogenous units, thus overlooking important questions of cultural change and group-internal power relations (e.g. Baumann, 1999; Kymlicka, 2001). This raises the question as to whether the discourses analysed in this article reproduce this essentialist error or, alternatively, if they conceptualize ethnic communities as both externally *and internally* structured by powerful institutions and dominant (though contested) ideologies. An organization called *Welthaus* (literally 'world house'), which constitutes another node in the aforementioned (regional/Styrian) civil

society network, engages with the multidimensionality of power[14] in a range of contexts and conceptualizes ethnic/national identities in noticeably critical and non-reifying fashion. Its many initiatives thus include a project dedicated to the representation and empowerment of women in Albania in light of their continuing exclusion from various political realms (http://graz.welthaus.at, 4 May 2004). A comparable critique of patriarchy resulting in the de-homogenization of (Austria's) 'national self' emerged from a recent *Megaphon* article (Windisch, 2004a): as a commentary on local women's struggle to balance work and family life, the article insightfully criticized the continuing patriarchal expectation that the nurturing of children is largely a maternal 'responsibility', thus confronting women with contradictory and gender-specific pressures further compounded by the decline of the welfare state.

Such awareness of power differentials and struggles within national 'communities' is complemented by attempts to forge transnational networks of solidarity. A narrative of support for persecuted or marginalized ethnic minorities outside the (Austrian) 'nation-state container' (Beck, 2000) was articulated in a recent series of articles on Roma communities, the largest ethnic minority in the 'new Europe', of Slovakia. The articles in question (Windisch, 2004b, 2004c) passionately criticized recent and controversial benefit cuts as further exacerbating the poverty, chronic unemployment and political exclusion[15] endured by many Slovakian Romanies. As in previous instances, *Megaphon* combined political critique with an implicit theory of ethnicity: underlining the primacy of their structural marginalization as 'second-class citizens', the author went on to stress that a recent renaissance of Roma music and dance had created feelings of heightened group solidarity, identity and 'responsibility' towards Roma heritage. Mapping this onto existing sociological theories of ethnicity (e.g. Vertovec, 2000),[16] this *Megaphon* analysis inadvertently corroborated the argument that crises can result in the 'politicisation of culture' (McCrone, 1998), thus transforming a group's previously taken-for-granted repertoire of cultural meaning into ethnicity as the reflexive ground of self-definition and political mobilization.

Thus we begin to discern the contours of counter-hegemonic discourses articulated in contemporary Austria, which examine – rather than naturalize and presuppose – the lived realities of ethnic identities. Contributing to public debate in the sphere of civil society, these critical discourses also contain (implicit) theories of ethnicity, identity, as well as the complex, multidimensional relationship between power, dominant institutions/ideologies and cultural ideas, practices and 'communities'. Moreover, many 'contributions' to this counter-hegemonic realm pursue overtly political objectives, complementing ideological critique with social activism and the attempt to forge networks of (often transnational) solidarity. It is to such overtly political initiatives that I turn in the second section of this analysis.

CHALLENGING EXCLUSION AND PREJUDICE

> It is dark. The group runs and stumbles through the night; behind them, the barking dogs of the Czech police. Suddenly, they stop. A river obstructs their escape route. The men carry the children on their shoulders; the women carry their modest possessions. They wade through the water. On the other side a surprise awaits them: the Austrian border guards are already waiting for them. Midnight, October 31.[17] (Horaczek and Weissensteiner, 2003)

The last two decades have seen significant increases in (south–north/east–west) forced migration (e.g. Richmond, 2002; Castles, 2003).[18] Underlying reasons include ethnic[19] antagonisms and violence, 'precarious' state structures (e.g. Fenton, 2003), and chronic poverty in an era of grossly exacerbated economic polarization (e.g. Storper, 2001), reflecting the exclusion of countless millions from the dominant nodes of 'the network society' (Castells, 1996) of late capitalism. In the destination countries of the 'north', local reactions to immigrants and asylum seekers – two categories often conflated in popular discourse – are frequently hostile. According to a recent survey coordinated by Italian sociologist Ilvo Diamanti, 33 percent of citizens of the 'old' (i.e. before 1 May 2005) EU member states feel threatened by immigration, 35 percent fear for their jobs and 81 percent consider the 'fight' against illegal immigration to be of utmost importance (http://www.diepresse.at, 8 October 2003). While populist discourses postulating asylum seekers' radical cultural 'otherness' abound, existing asylum systems in EU member states have come under attack from both ends of the ideological spectrum: the political right (if in opposition) tends to accuse current legislation of being too hospitable to 'outsiders' whom it constructs as culturally alien and a strain on national resources, whereas non-government organizations (NGOs) and the political left invoke the 'Fortress Europe' metaphor to remind governments of their (moral) obligations under the Human Rights charter and the Geneva convention. All this occurs against the backdrop of EU enlargement, a disconcerting rise in unemployment across large parts of the EU, the gradual dismantling of welfare systems, and the long-term (cultural) diversification of European societies. Austria is no exception on any of these points.

According to the Ministry of Interior Affairs, in April 2004 it was accommodating 11,000 asylum seekers (i.e. five times as many as 4 years previously) awaiting decisions on their claims (http://www.noe.orf.at, 29 April 2004). At the same time, NGOs – first and foremost Caritas Austria – found themselves embroiled in a war of words with the ministry over the plight of homeless asylum seekers and what Caritas alleged was a lack of political will to provide the necessary infrastructure and finances to deal with ever increasing numbers of people and families escaping persecution

and poverty. On 1 May 2004, a controversial new Asylum Act came into force (http://derStandard.at, 29 April 2004), which continues, at the time of writing, to be the object of debate and review. As it stood on 1 May 2004, the Act stipulated that, following a brief period in one of three reception centres where the validity of a person's claim was to be preliminarily assessed, asylum seekers would henceforth either be accommodated in one of Austria's nine provinces (according to a quota system proportional to regional population size) whilst awaiting the decision on their claim, or – if they were declined in the first instance – be faced with deportation. The FPÖ's satisfaction with the new legislation (http://www.orf.at, 4 May 2004)[20] may be read as indicative of wider European sentiments: shortly before EU enlargement, its (then) 15 home ministers had agreed to work towards a common asylum law, which would incorporate the idea (pioneered in Austria's new Act) that claims made by citizens of states deemed to be 'safe' could be turned down instantly (http://www.orf.at, 30 April 2004). The material examined below reveals the existence of local counter-hegemonic discourses and initiatives that challenge not only asylum legislation, but many of its underlying assumptions and wider politics of exclusion. Controversies surrounding asylum seekers are highly pertinent to this analysis, as they closely relate to competing discourses – variously described as hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, exclusivist or inclusivist – of ethnic/national identity in times of globalization.

Among the many critics of the asylum system, few have been as outspoken and are as well known as Frau Bock, a former Viennese social worker who has dedicated her retirement to the organization of 28 flats, in which she accommodates 130 asylum seekers. In March 2003, some 32,000 people were awaiting decisions on their claims, among them hundreds – frequently those not in possession of the required documents – who were not under 'federal care' and, hence, unless accommodated by NGOs, were frequently faced with homelessness (http://fm4.orf.at, 18 August 2003). Frau Bock's flats constitute a last safety net for some of those homeless, providing them with shelter, one meal a day and, crucially (also for many others not actually living in the flats), a registered postal address whilst awaiting a decision on their asylum claims. The project has been funded by Frau Bock's pension and savings, donations and awards, as well as an initiative in the summer of 2003 that involved some 70 bars and restaurants in Vienna, Graz and Linz donating 10 cents of every beer sold to the continuing running of the 28 flats (http://clandestino.at, 26 August 2003). The project received considerable media attention. Although widely admired and praised for her self-sacrificing work, Frau Bock also found herself confronted with some of the recurring – and, we might add, pan-European – populist objections to 'allowing too many asylum seekers in', given their alleged cultural 'differences', 'criminal tendencies' (locally often associated with drug trafficking and dealing) and

'drain of tax payers' money'. In the course of an interview with the reputable newspaper, *Der Standard* (http://derStandard.at, 9 October 2003), as well as in response to some listeners' questions in a radio programme (http://www.orf.at, 18 August 2003), Frau Bock fervently rejected such prejudicial discourses of exclusion based on notions of cultural otherness by emphasizing structural reasons for the marginalization and despair experienced by many asylum seekers. In light of lengthy asylum procedures and the fact that most asylum seekers are not given work permits (also see Bloch, 2002: 60), Frau Bock queried how these people were expected to survive if not adequately supported by the state. Clearly opposed to (tabloid newspaper) invocations of assumed cultural essences as pseudo-explanations of the difficulties encountered by many asylum seekers (and stressing the mechanisms of exclusion that define their lives instead), Frau Bock nonetheless suggested that cultural differences ('Kulturunterschiede') had mattered in the course of her own experiences: speaking of 'strict rules in Turkish families', she suggested that intergenerational conflicts were a result of culture clashes experienced by Turkish children attending Austrian schools. Yet, when contrasting the relatively smooth social integration of refugees from former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s to the difficulties more recently encountered by African asylum seekers, Frau Bock unambiguously favoured 'structural' over 'cultural' explanations, thus again criticizing asylum seekers' lengthy exclusion from legal employment (http://www.orf.at, 18 August 2003).

Falter's concern for social justice, the plight of asylum-seekers and its principled anti-racism were, on two recent occasions, instrumental to bringing subsequently much-discussed and extremely controversial incidents to the public's attention. The first incident involved the tragic death of Cheibani Wague, a 33-year-old Mauritanian physicist, in Vienna's central park on 15 July 2003. The police and ambulance were called to restrain Cheibani, who had become enraged in the course of an argument. According to the initially circulating version of subsequent events, Cheibani died of heart failure following the administration of a sedative. A week after this tragic incident, however, *Falter* published an article revealing that a video recording by a local resident suggested that the force employed by police and paramedics involved had been excessive, with one paramedic shown standing on top of a motionless Cheibani whilst a doctor – instead of keeping a check on the patient's vital functions – was standing by (Klenk, 2003). The *Falter*'s revelations of these details concerning a tragic and perhaps preventable death significantly contributed to the calling of an enquiry (http://derStandard.at, 18 November 2003) and, subsequently, the decision to prosecute 10 people involved in the tragedy (http://wien.orf.at, 12 April 2005).

The second revelation emerged through the investigative journalism of Horaczek and Weissensteiner (2003) on a group of Chechnyans, who had

fled from violence and persecution at the hands of the Russian police, awaiting their possible deportation in an asylum seeker reception centre 160 kilometres east of Prague. Less than 2 weeks previously they had attempted to cross the Czech–Austrian border near Gmünd where, the Chechnyans claimed, the Austrian border guards had ignored their pleas for asylum before 'returning' them to the Czech authorities. A spokesperson for Austria's Ministry of Interior strongly contradicted this, saying that the group had decided not to claim asylum, having been told that there were no more available places in federal accommodation (Horaczek and Weissensteiner, 2003). Such conflicting accounts notwithstanding, *Falter* coverage once again fuelled public discussion. Amnesty International called for immediate clarification of what had occurred on the Czech–Austrian border and *SOS Mitmensch*, an Austrian NGO, was considering taking legal action against the local authority in question.

Based on research conducted in Holland and the USA, Philomena Essed (1991) speaks of 'everyday racism' as subsuming a wide variety of discriminatory discourses, practices and processes that stigmatize, label and exclude on the basis of physical characteristics ideologically constructed as signifiers of difference (1991: 43f.).[21] *Megaphon*'s counter-hegemony targets and challenges such 'everyday' forms of racist exclusion as experienced by some Africans in Graz. Among a wide range of activities, *Megaphon* has supported a local scheme entitled 'connecting people' that sets up personal and, as it stresses, 'mutually enriching' links between teenaged refugees/asylum seekers and local volunteers/families (Schwentner, 2003). Some of the *Megaphon*'s other initiatives have focused on the problems encountered by African tenants at the hands of xenophobic landlords and neighbours. A recent and representative article thus told the story of a Nigerian tenant who, despite his ostensibly good relations with neighbours, had been threatened with eviction from a rented flat. When *Megaphon* contacted the landlord, he professed to have acted in response to some neighbours' complaints about his tenant's 'racial'/cultural otherness and alleged refusal to 'fit in' ('Die passen nicht zu uns'). The article complemented its passionate opposition to racist prejudice and exclusion with practical advice directed at the Nigerian in question: there were, it concluded, absolutely no grounds for eviction and the letter from his landlord could consequently be ignored (Schwentner, 2004a).

In August 2000, *Megaphon* initiated a campaign against racism in a handful of bars, which had reportedly barred 'dark-skinned' customers.[22] This initiative included a 'testing operation', whereby venues with racist admission criteria were subsequently named and shamed by the magazine. The campaign soon attracted considerable media attention and support, also involving local residents' systematic boycott of the bars in question. Politics followed suit and in the summer of 2003, the Styrian regional assembly called upon parliament in Vienna to pass a new Licensing Act,

whereby reported racism could lead to the loss of restaurant or bar licenses (Wolkinger, 2003).

On the level of public discourse, everyday racism also manifests itself in stereotypical representations of the 'other', coupled with the systematic marginalization or silencing of minority voices. *Megaphon* has repeatedly challenged a form of such ethnic exclusion based on prejudice and disempowerment: the hegemonic reluctance to grant an audible political voice to Africans juxtaposed to their discursive construction as 'visible objects' (*sichtbare Objekte*) or signifiers with stigmatizing/criminalizing connotations (Schmied, 2002a). *Megaphon*'s arguably most effective anti-racist challenge has entailed the provision of a forum of articulation for some among the stigmatized and excluded. A recent article, written by the founder of an association called 'Africans for Austria', reflected an emerging political subjectivity empowered to speak on its own behalf and in direct opposition to racial prejudice. Tellingly entitled 'Lasst uns in Ruhe!' (Leave us alone), the article fervently rejected the common conflation (in some public discourse) of sub-Saharan Africans with the availability of drugs. Reflecting on his own experiences of becoming the target of everyday racism and on his tactics of resistance, the author recalled an incident involving two teenaged girls asking him and a friend for drugs. Angered by this, he called the police while his friend made conversation with the girls; upon their arrival, the police questioned the girls who promptly accused the author and his friend of having offered to supply drugs to them. However, the author – with remarkable foresight – had recorded the girls' 'approach' on his dictaphone and was therefore able to provide evidence of what had occurred. The article concluded by repeating its plea to counter racial prejudice and by offering what amounted to a critique of contemporary social anomie: its root causes, the author suggested, included high unemployment, a withering welfare state, and divisive ethnic scapegoating that prevented effective policies addressing the 'drug problem' (Uzama, 2003).

In a critical engagement with Habermas, Derrida and others, Nick Stevenson (2004) defines the challenge facing European civil societies as the creation of 'concern and solidarity with the Other without the imperative that they eventually take on our identity'. Also echoing the earlier-mentioned criticisms of reifying assumptions that 'confine "minorities" to cultural enclaves', he goes on to argue that a 'generative civil society' requires opposition to all forms of oppression and respect for difference – 'a two-fold logic of respect for otherness and communication [. . .] [providing] a vision of a future Europe based upon a concern for [. . .] our neighbours along with the desire to make a polity free from normalizing assumptions' (Stevenson, 2004: 20).

A recent *Megaphon* contribution by a Rwandan medical student in Graz spelled out a strikingly similar vision of cultural pluralism, social integration and individual empowerment: integration, she argued, was best

conceptualized as a 'path' towards the creation of a society based on communication and respect for alterity, which would provide a safe space for every individual's expression and self-discovery ('[. . .] dass jeder einzelne einen freien Raum und sichere Bedingungen hat um sich zu entfalten') and be opposed to cultural standardization or coercive assimilation (Jeanne, 2002). Two important comments must be made on this article. First, it can be read as a paradigmatic instance or condensed articulation of the political concerns with social justice, respect for (cultural) difference and opposition to structures of exclusion, which define (some of) the discourses, networks and initiatives in Austria's civil society. Second, the conceptual parallels between the *Megaphon* article in question and recent social theoretical reflections, such as Stevenson's, on multiculturalism and citizenship are indicative of a more widely recurring characteristic of the counter-hegemonic discourses analysed in this article: combining political activism with social commentary and critique, they reveal remarkable (if inadvertent) convergences with pertinent academic contributions to sociological analysis and cultural theory. Such analytical convergence is particularly pronounced in terms of the explanations of inequality and social conflict offered in *Falter* and *Megaphon*. A recurring narrative of interpretation, as will become apparent in the next section, informs their critical agency and ideological challenges.

GLOBALIZATION AND RESISTANCE

> The flaws of neoliberal ideology have become apparent and undeniable. Not even those who profit still believe in [its] utopian myths [. . .]. It is simply not true that everyone gets a fair chance in the global market. [. . .] It is equally false to think that wealth trickles downwards.[23] (Schmied, 2003a)

Condensing an already vast and continually expanding sociological genre and following, in particular, the respective theoretical leads provided by Ulrich Beck, Manuel Castells, and Zygmunt Bauman,[24] the last quarter of the 20th-century may be described as a period of profound transformations and their manifestations and consequences sketched as follows: the revolutionary developments in information and communications technology coupled with the global integration of financial markets have given rise to the emergence of a new organizational/cultural logic based on networks and flows (Castells, 1996, 1998). The global hegemony of 'late capitalism' and the economic (and indirectly political) dominance of multinational corporations are reflected in increasingly disempowered nation states, policies of economic deregulation, privatization, and the dismantling of welfare systems (Beck, 2000; Bauman, 1998). Economic inequality and polarization have been exacerbated (e.g. Storper, 2001), reflecting the chronic exclusion

of countless millions (in large parts of entire continents as much as in the inner-city ghettoes of relatively affluent parts of the world) from the powerful nodes of the information age (Castells, 1996, 1998). Common responses to such exclusion include the emergence of 'resistance identities' (Castells, 1997) and 'neo-tribal movements' (Bauman, 1992). 'Wealth has become global', while 'poverty has remained local' (Bauman, 1998), reflecting the structural dis-articulation of now 'nomadic' capital from local and hence increasingly vulnerable labour (Castells, 1996; Bauman, 2000). A dominant ethos of individualism, consumerism, political apathy and the gradual dismantling of yesteryear's safety nets abandon isolated individuals to the daunting and solitary task of searching for 'biographical solutions of systemic contradictions' (Beck, 1992: 137).

The counter-hegemonic narratives analysed in this article share considerable conceptual, interpretative and analytical space with these influential sociological analyses of globalization, neo-liberalism and their (local) consequences. In many ways, the politically engaged coverage and initiatives encountered in *Falter* and *Megaphon* are given overall discursive coherence and a rationale by their being framed in broader and recurring accounts that interpret and purport to explain contemporary society. These interpretative narratives are discourses of sense-making and critique, which – in their assessment and understanding of the effects of economic globalization – resemble Beck's, Bauman's and Castells' respective theories. As such, *Falter* and *Megaphon* underline a phenomenon I will subsequently (albeit briefly) return to – the relative permeability of the boundaries between sociologists' analyses on one hand, and those offered by 'knowledgeable and reflexive' (Giddens, 1984) social actors on the other. For now, however, the discursive content of the narratives of explanation and critique encountered in *Falter* and *Megaphon* needs to be explored in more detail.

In May 2003, against the backdrop of the Austrian Trade Union Association's strike action against structural reforms of the pension system, a *Falter* article compared current government policies to Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberalism of the 1980s. They shared, the article postulated, not only an ideological commitment to privatization and the discursive construction of socialism and strikes as anachronistic obstacles in the path of modernization, but their (likely) consequences were also strikingly similar: rising unemployment, an increase in flexible working time and the emergence of the 'working poor', heightened social inequalities and the dismantling – euphemistically presented as 'necessary reforms' – of the welfare state (John and Weissensteiner, 2003). Remarkably similar assessments of globalization and privatization policies are regularly encountered in *Megaphon*. Importantly, they share a distinctly transnational consciousness, reflected in their criticism and analyses of the local consequences of 'late capitalism' in Austria as elsewhere. Relevant coverage has included articles highly sympathetic with the political opposition articulated by a long list of

social movements at the Fourth World Social Forum in Mumbai (Reithofer, 2004), the portrait of a street magazine in Buenos Aires and its battle against Argentina's economic crisis (Schmied, 2002b), as well as support for the protest by developing countries and anti-globalization activists against the 'ideological myths of neo-liberalism' at the World Trade Organization's 2003 conference in Cancun (Schmied, 2003a). A recurring interpretative schema thus targets the economic dominance of multinational corporations, neo-liberal hegemony leading to a decline in public spending, the poverty endured by a large proportion of the world's population and exacerbated by their economic and political exclusion, as well as a politically stifling and socially atomizing ethos of consumerism (e.g. Coudenhove-Kalergi, 2003) as its main objects of criticism. Not only do such counter-hegemonic discourses map onto the sociological analyses summarized above, but they frequently also inform *Megaphon*'s opposition to ethnic exclusion examined earlier. For example, a contribution to the above-mentioned series of articles on Roma communities in Slovakia argued that their structural exclusion was the joint product of widespread ethnic prejudice and programmes of uncompromising deregulation and privatization in the post-Communist era. However, the author certainly did not advocate a return to an over-romanticized past, but passionately argued that the provision of social welfare and of culturally inclusive (rather than assimilationist) educational policies for Roma children was necessary for their successful future participation in the information age ('[. . .] um den Menschen den Anschluss an die modernen Technologien zu ermöglichen') (Truger, 2004). Read through the theoretical lens provided by Manuel Castells (1996: 17), the article clearly accepted the now inescapable technological paradigm or the 'new informational mode of development' as a historical given, whilst opposing its colonization by unfettered capitalist relations of production ideologically naturalized by neo-liberalism.

A comparable tactic of critical accommodation emerged from another recent *Megaphon* contribution, which argued that green-/ethical consumerism was the most potent weapon against the exploitative and environmentally irresponsible practices of (certain) multinational companies. The power of such companies, the author suggested, was based on their own image-making strategies. Their financial might notwithstanding, it is precisely on image-related and ethical grounds – he went on to argue – that they could be successfully challenged: consumer boycotts of unethical global corporations would be the most effective way of depriving them of a power that is, by definition, reliant on consumer choices (Werner, 2003). We may object that the effectiveness of such consumer subversion is constrained by imperfect information and limited participation. Clearly aware of this, the author of the article in question is also co-author of a book designed to provide information and to appeal to consumers' conscience by revealing the effects of multinational capitalism on local populations in the

developing world.[25] In another contribution to *Megaphon*, the same person offered a critique of European asylum systems informed by his knowledge of multinational capitalism (see Werner, 2004). While the latter, he argued, is deeply implicated in perpetuating poverty in the non-western world, those who escape attempting to exercise their human right to the pursuit of happiness are discursively (mis)constructed as 'economic migrants' and frequently denied access to 'Fortress Europe'. In another instance of interpretative convergence, the author went on to (perhaps inadvertently) echo Hardt and Negri's 'demand for global citizenship' (2000: 400): why don't we, he queried, globalize the European model for the free circulation not only of capital but, more importantly, of people (Werner, 2004)?

Returning to some of the conceptual themes discussed earlier, selected *Megaphon* contributions thus historicize 'racial'/ethnic structures of exclusion as manifested in times of globalization. Similarly, the above-mentioned interpretative and political sensitivity to patriarchal domination (both across and within ethnic/national communities) informs the magazine's intersection with other civil society initiatives and their counter-hegemonic stance in relation to globalization. The gender-specific effects of multinational capitalism and of deregulation policies were the focal point of a conference organized by feministATTAC, a transnational network, in Graz in September 2003. Entitled 'Globalizierung feministisch hinterfragt' (loosely translated as 'feminism questioning globalization'), the conference brought together activists and academics from across the world in an attempt to increase public awareness of countless women's contemporary plight. When interviewed by *Megaphon*, its local organizers argued that the detrimental and gender-specific consequences of globalization included the following: the global sex trade and human trafficking; the persisting patriarchal association of care work with femininity, which adds to many women's domestic burden in a post-welfare age; a widening gap in the global and gendered distribution of wealth, 99 percent of which is owned by men; the disproportionate and immediate effects of many companies' 'downsizing policies' on women (Wolf, 2003).

The very same conference also revealed the diffusion of information and analytical/conceptual armoury between politically engaged academics and *Megaphon* as part of (local) civil society. One of the participants, the German sociologist Maria Mies, declared in a *Megaphon* interview – simultaneously reflecting on the conference and corroborating much of the sociology of globalization summarized above – that the Washington Consensus had been a disastrous failure, if measured by the growing gap between rich and poor, the destruction of welfare states, rising unemployment, and many people's inability or refusal to conceive of ideological alternatives to neo-liberalism (Schmied, 2003b). Two months later, *Megaphon* published a summary of a sociological study, which had – continuing in the footsteps of *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al.,

1999) – investigated the local consequences of globalization and neoliberalism through a series of interviews conducted in Graz. While the 23 informants had been asked to reflect on their biographies shaped by experiences as diverse as migration and asylum-seeking, unemployment, making a living as journalists, teachers and artists respectively, their life histories revealed several recurring themes: economic uncertainty, existential anxiety, and the conspicuous absence of political help (Wolkinger, 2003).

These last two *Megaphon* articles arguably provide the clearest illustration of a more general convergence between local civil society and seminal sociological discourses respectively: between the counter-hegemony articulated in *Falter* and *Megaphon* on one hand, and influential contributions to sociology – including Bauman's accounts of *Globalization* (1998) and *The Individualized Society* (2001) as well as Beck's definition of the search for 'biographical solutions of systemic contradictions' (1992: 137) as a central contemporary conundrum – on the other. While I have repeatedly drawn attention to such interpretative and conceptual convergences, the question remains as to how we might account for them. One possible answer is to be found in Anthony Giddens's notion of the *double hermeneutic* as a 'logically necessary part' of sociological analysis, amounting to a 'constant "slippage"' between 'the meaningful social world as constituted by lay actors and the metalanguages invented by social scientists' (1984: 374). The notion of such 'intersecting frames of meaning' is corroborated in Zygmunt Bauman's rejection of the proposition that sociology constitutes a Foucauldian discursive formation capable of 'delineating' and maintaining its analytical boundaries:

> Sociologists, as commentators on human experience, share their object with countless others, who may legitimately claim a first-hand knowledge of that experience. The object of sociological commentary is an already experienced experience, coming in the shape of a pre-formed narrative [. . .]. Sociologists cannot make a [. . .] bid for [. . .] the exclusiveness of their commentary over the interpretations produced incessantly by the direct 'owners' of experience and by other 'outside' commentators (writers, poets, journalists, politicians, religious thinkers) [. . .]. (Bauman, 1992: 73)

Yet, the convergence between the critical discourses examined in this article and relevant sociological commentaries is, though substantial and noteworthy, not complete. While *Falter* and *Megaphon* challenge both neoliberalism and nationalist exclusion, the material analysed here provides no evidence of the link between globalization and (ethno)nationalism – with the latter constituting a form of 'resistance identity' (Castells, 1997) indicative of a 'search for community' (Bauman, 1992: 134) in response to the contemporary 'de-nationalization shock' (Beck, 2000) – being theorized. As this discussion has shown, *Falter* and *Megaphon* are elements in a wider network of initiatives and associations, which – as parts of Austrian civil society – articulate a distinctly inclusivist, transnational, and critical

agenda. As such, they challenge discourses and institutions of ethnic/national exclusion, 'everyday racism', as well as the global hegemony of neo-liberalism. Political engagement and social commentary are closely interwoven: ideological opposition is informed by a recurring discursive framework, which interprets inequalities as not only encountered and experienced locally/nationally, but also as decisively structured by the forces of globalization. The boundary between pertinent sociological theories and the critical discourses analysed here have been shown to be permeable and their enunciating subjects indeed self-reflexive and knowledgeable, as well as politically engaged. However, the present meta-commentary on such political agency still needs to address wider conceptual questions related to (post-Habermasian) theories of civil society and the differences between left- and right-leaning reactions against the dislocations characteristic of the contemporary era.

SYNCRETISTIC 'COUNTERPUBLICS'

While constraints of space have allowed only for discussion of discursive snapshots of a particular mode of counter-hegemony, the politics, criticisms and analyses articulated in *Falter* and *Megaphon* undoubtedly possess a broader subcultural currency and salience. Although the nature/extent of the latter must remain the topic of future research (which would, ideally, complement the work undertaken here with relevant reception studies), the existence of a vibrant and visible Austrian civil society is not only reflected in the magazines, papers, associations and networks discussed above, but has been evident in a wide range of recent initiatives. The most prominent among them have included large demonstrations against the formation of the ÖVP–FPÖ coalition government in February 2000, followed by a day of protest staged in Vienna with the participation and support of numerous artists and intellectuals several weeks later; local 'resistance' (*Widerstand*) subsequently continued for months in the shape of weekly 'Thursday-night demonstrations'. There have also been criticisms of the government's recent handling of Austria's version of the 'asylum crisis' that culminated in the public reading of a list of homeless asylum seekers' names outside the Ministry of the Interior in December 2003 (http://derStandard.at, 19 December 2003). Moreover, there have been well-documented environmental protests (bringing together a range of otherwise ideologically heterogeneous groups and constituencies) – staged locally whilst addressing transnational issues and audiences – against the use of nuclear energy in some of Austria's neighbouring countries as well as initiatives critical of EU environmental policies, particularly the now relatively unrestricted traffic of lorries crossing the country (*Transitverkehr*). Nor are any of these

discourses limited to the civil society organizations discussed here. Austria's Green Party, which received 8.96 percent of the popular vote at the last parliamentary elections, went into the recent European elections warning against the politicization of assumed 'national interests', arguing that democratic values, social justice, environmental politics, nuclear energy and armed conflicts were global concerns that required transnational cooperation and strategies (http://www.orf.at, 14 May 2004).[26] In thus delineating two contrasting ideological reactions to some of the crises facing the contemporary world, this 'warning' also inadvertently nods in the direction of two important questions arising from this discussion: first, how to position counter-hegemonic activity of the type examined here in relation to relevant social theory; and, second, how to conceptualize the difference between such contrasting ideological reactions to a common set of social conditions (i.e. the transformations and dislocations associated with contemporary globalization).

Jürgen Habermas's seminal work (e.g. 1978, 1987, 1989) on the historical/structural conditions underpinning 'ideal speech' and the public sphere has been subject to necessary criticism and modifications, some of which resonate with the analysis undertaken here. In particular, the Habermasian conception of a seemingly unitary realm of rational debate has been taken to task for overlooking the multidimensionality and ubiquity of power, which impacts on all social/communicative practice and gives rise to a multiplicity of 'counterpublics' (e.g. Fraser, 1992; Gardiner, 2004). The latter have been defined as 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses [. . .] [that] permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs' (Fraser quoted in Roberts and Crossley, 2004: 14f.). The material examined here simultaneously corroborates and qualifies the existence and workings of such counterpublics: as illustrated by much of the discourse examined above. *Falter* and *Megaphon* are acutely aware of, and consistently address, the multiple axes of differentiation and inequality of gender, 'race'/ethnicity, nationality, and class as well as their complex 'articulations' and 'intersections' (e.g. Brah, 1996) in the local, everyday lives of ordinary social actors at a particular historical juncture, profoundly shaped by the logic and workings of global capitalism. And as parts of this analysis also corroborate, the rationale guiding (some of) the discourses and initiatives examined includes the creation of spaces, where the previously and otherwise silenced voices of some among the structurally marginalized, disadvantaged and excluded can be articulated. Critique of existing, national as well as global, configurations of power and inequality, in part voiced by those most immediately affected and most acutely disadvantaged, clearly informs the discursive practices and social activism examined above. At the same time, however, neither *Falter* nor *Megaphon* are owned, written or read exclusively by 'subordinated groups'; instead, they constitute a

counterpublic shared by social actors positioned in profoundly different structural locations, by EU citizens and others struggling to negotiate access to the political space of (relative) privilege and opportunity that is 'Fortress Europe' respectively. In this shared realm of counter-hegemonic critique, as parts of this discussion have also shown, the discursive and institutional boundaries constructed, reproduced and 'naturalized' by discourses of national/ethnic belonging and identity are subjected to scrutiny and deconstruction. The centrality of structures of power and the effects of their legitimizing discourses notwithstanding, some of the data examined above provide glimpses of biographies and everyday social practices that defy the artificial 'neatness' of the (nationalist/ethnicist) ideologies it opposes; in other words, cultural syncretism and complex, multidimensional 'identities' are counterposed to the binarism demanded by discourses of national belonging and 'rooted-ness'.

This connects with the following, earlier-anticipated question: how to conceptualize the difference between two ideologically contrasting reactions, epitomized by the pluralist civil society discourses examined above and exclusivist ideologies of national identity respectively, against a common set of conditions – the dislocations of globalization. As I have shown, the counterpublics discussed here oppose the human and local consequences of globalization and the global dominance of neo-liberal politics *as well as* the strategies of exclusion typical of neo-nationalist discourses of belonging. In criticizing globalization, however, pluralist counter-hegemony shares an ideological 'other' with its other ideological 'other' (i.e. nation-centred politics). This emerged, albeit inadvertently, from Jörg Haider's recent statement that there was a need for a 'new movement in Austria, which would address people's [social- and employment-related] anxieties [. . .] and counteract the negative consequences of globalization' (http://www.orf.at, 9 March 2005). To distinguish, then, the critical analyses of globalization characteristic of the counter-hegemonic realm analysed in this article from neo-nationalist anti-globalization, we may yet again turn to Zygmunt Bauman:

> [Nationalism] selects the securely habitual reality, spreading all around, well-founded, mirrored in scores of reciprocally reinforcing events, predictable and unobtrusively obvious, as the only tolerable (or, indeed, the only habitable) universe. It is [. . .] short of any project side-tracking from the well-trodden routes; it is, in fact, motivated [. . .] by its [. . .] fear of the unusual, the strange, the not-yet-materialized, the unknown. (1999[1973]: 121)

Bauman thus suggests that nationalism exhibits a distinctive attitude towards discursively constructed and reified notions of 'cultural tradition' and 'the nation's past'; in times of far-reaching social and structural changes, it seeks solace in an advocated 'return' to older certainties, no longer taken-for-granted (see Karner, 2005), but consciously debated and asserted against its perceived ideological 'others'. In an Austrian context, the 'return'

advocated by populism has always been selective, given its earlier-mentioned and widely appealing insistence on the reconfiguration of some entrenched political structures. It is, however, in terms of their contrasting constructions and responses to 'otherness', formulated against the same socioeconomic/political backdrop, that nation-centred reactions to globalization differ from the counter-hegemonic discourses examined above: while the former seek to reify and protect rigidly defined and exclusive identities, the latter acknowledge and celebrate the ambivalence and syncretism of lived identifications.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has focused on two voices in Austria's civil society. While one should not assume too much ideological homogeneity within and across these and similar vehicles of critique, the analysis presented here has revealed a range of recurring concerns grouped around three thematic areas: first, the articulation of counter-hegemonic alternatives to discourses of ethnic/national identity, belonging and exclusion; second, strategies of resisting and challenging 'everyday racism'; and, third, a broader interpretative framework critical of neo-liberalism and the (local) effects of economic globalization. Although *Falter* and *Megaphon* merely constitute two nodes in a considerably more extensive and diverse civil society network in Austria, they arguably epitomize a significant form of counter-hegemonic politics, which combines a distinctly transnational consciousness with local initiatives for cross-cultural dialogue/inclusion, and is informed by an interpretative framework critical of contemporary (multinational) capitalism. As such, *Falter* and *Megaphon* share considerable discursive space with some established sociological analyses of globalization, whilst constituting a form of reflexive agency that challenges existing structures of power and exclusion. Moreover, the material examined in this article bears witness to the vitality of European civil society in general, and to the contested terrain of public debate on ethnicity and multiculturalism, national identities and economic globalization in contemporary Austria in particular.

Such vitality notwithstanding, voices of pessimism have also emanated from within the (counter)public sphere examined in this paper. In a recent analysis, Armin Thurnher (2004), co-founder and editor of *Falter*, presents a more sobering verdict on the state of the (mainstream/tabloid) Austrian media and the extent of political debate facilitated therein. Occupying a different vantage point, that of academic meta-discourse, this analysis has taken *Falter*, *Megaphon* and relevant local initiatives as symptoms of a critical sphere of debate and social activism. Qualitative in nature, this has of course not been an analysis of numbers but an attempt to document and

examine the distinctive and politically significant presence of critical discourses that constitute a part of Austrian civil society. Questions of representativeness that arise from this discussion are complex, both epistemologically and theoretically: these are questions concerning the relationship between discourse and subjectivity, and hence the highly debatable (in)stability of political 'convictions' and ideological *interpellations*; these are questions, then, that can only here be anticipated as the object of important future research.

Postscript

Since completion of this article the FPÖ has – under Heinz-Christian Strache – experienced renewed electoral success, both in local and the general elections on 1 October 2006. The latter resulted in a victory for the SPÖ, which at the time of writing this postscript (October 2006) is striving to form a new coalition government widely predicted to involve the ÖVP. It remains to be seen if and how the presently reconfiguring power relation will impact on the (counter-)hegemonic discourses examined above.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Leverhulme Trust for a Special Research Fellowship, which made the research underlying, and the writing of, this article possible. I would also like to thank my colleagues David Parker and Nick Stevenson, as well as the anonymous referees for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

Notes

1 Discourse analysis (e.g. Marshall, 1994) posits that the 'connection' between ideologies and subjectivities is under-determined and situation specific, as reflected in social actors' not infrequent switching of 'interpretative paradigms' (Wetherell and Potter, 1992) according to context. In light of this, it should be noted that the notion of counter-hegemony is not here taken to reflect the relative quantitative 'spread' of a discourse across a population, but its relationship to existing configurations of power and its enunciating subjects' self-definition in opposition to structurally reproductive, hegemonic discourses.

2 In what follows, I adopt a working definition of civil society as comprising 'networks and associations that are formed between the home and the state that allow for public forms of discussion and argument' (Stevenson, 2004: 1).

3 As a system of extraparliamentary negotiations, social partnership 'extended the concept of stability into the economic and social spheres [. . .] [through] the institutionalized cooperation between economic interest groups, which came to be known as the "social partners". Employers and employees were organized in mandatory associations termed chambers [. . .] entrusted with negotiating fundamental economic issues' (Thaler, 2001: 31). The Chamber of Agriculture, the

Federal Chamber of Commerce, the Austrian Chamber of Labour and the ÖGB (Austrian Trade Union Association) make up the country's four chambers.

4 These debates centre on the issue of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the much-used German term for ways of acknowledging, confronting, discussing, and – if possible – 'coming to terms with' the past: in this particular case, it is aimed at collectively remembering World War II and the Holocaust and mourning its victims. As indicated earlier, the 'Waldheim controversy' of 1986 is often identified as a crucial watershed in this regard, which triggered an overdue process of 'national soul-searching' reflected in important policy changes and symbolic actions indicative of a now decidedly more self-critical (public) historical consciousness (e.g. Sully, 1990; Pick, 2000).

5 Affiliated to the 'international network of streetpapers' (INSP) (to which the British *Big Issue* also belongs), the *Megaphon* received international praise in July 2003 for organizing the first Homeless Football World Cup in Graz, then Cultural Capital of Europe.

6 While this article analyses their discursive logic and content, significant questions concerning readers' decoding of such counter-hegemonic messages remain to be addressed. Future research might therefore draw on the methods pioneered in audience ethnographies and other reception studies to shed light on people's readings/decodings/ negotiations of the critical discourses articulated by *Falter* and *Megaphon*.

7 For a recent and relevant discussion of regional differences (and their histories) in Austria, see, for example, Dachs (2003). Whilst regional differences and local contexts must of course be acknowledged as the backdrop to the discourses examined here, the present analysis suggests that there are counter-hegemonic concerns, themes, frameworks of meaning and discursive/political strategies that recur on a wider, national level. Moreover, contributions to a recent conference entitled Fortress Europe and its 'Others': Cultural Representations in Film, Media and the Arts (University of London, 4–6 April 2005) inadvertently revealed that some of these themes and strategies are indeed of transnational, pan-European relevance and presence.

8 My translation of the original: 'Österreich war immer unser zweites Land – ein kleines Land mit einem grossen Herzen. Die direkten Kontakte zur Bevölkerung waren gerade zu Kriegszeiten für viele Menschen von existentieller Wichtigkeit.'

9 Such composite terminology arguably conflates different models of the nation (e.g. McCrone, 1998) frequently contrasted as the 'French model' of civic or territorial nationalism on one hand, and the romanticist 'German' model of ethnic nationalism on the other. Both ideal types, however, construct identities, delineate and maintain boundaries, assign membership (albeit by the radically different criteria of assimilation/residence and descent/birth respectively) and can hence be subsumed under the single designation of 'discourses of national identity' in the context of the present discussion.

10 For a relevant discussion of different 'grammars of identity', see Baumann and Gingrich (2004).

11 I here draw on Richard Jenkins's analytical distinction (1997) between 'social classification' (i.e. the external imposition of a group label and definition by powerful social actors and institutions) on one hand, and 'group identification'

(i.e. the internal experience of shared meaning, solidarity and 'identity') on the other.

12 As such, *Megaphon* differs radically from Church-focused publications such as *Caritas Aktuell*, a recent issue of which was dedicated to the topic of 'Caritas and Liturgy' (2004).

13 More widely documented instances of such boundary contestation have included recent calls for new legislation concerning Austrian citizenship, which would replace the current *ius sanguinis* (blood) model with *ius soli* (earth). This has been advocated by the SPÖ and Austria's Green Party (http://derStandard, 21 November 2003), as well as by the president of Caritas Austria (Schwentner, 2004b). If implemented, this would parallel Germany's recent revision of her citizenship laws previously based on the descent principle to an assimilationist/'territorial' model (see, for example, Brubaker, 2001).

14 See Michel Foucault (1990[1976]: 92ff.) for a relevant theory (or *analytics*) of the 'multiplicity of force relations', of the omnipresence of power being 'exercised from innumerable points' whilst also giving rise to a 'multiplicity of points of resistance'.

15 Incidents of racist violence must be added to this list of hardships endured by Roma communities.

16 Conceptualizing the difference between 'culture' and 'ethnicity' as a difference in degree of consciousness, this (emerging) theoretical tradition (e.g. Vertovec, 2000; Karner, 2005) draws on Pierre Bourdieu's analysis (1977) of the transformational power of crises, which turn *doxa* (or 'the universe of the undiscussed') into *discourse* (or 'politicized opinion').

17 My translation of the original: 'Es ist stockdunkel. Im Laufschritt stolpert die Gruppe durch die Nacht. Hinter ihr bellen die Hunde der tschechischen Polizei. Doch plötzlich kommt der Tross zum Stillstand. Ein Fluss versperrt den Fluchtweg. Hastig nehmen die Männer die Kinder auf ihre Schultern. Die Frauen tragen das dürftige Gepäck. Dann waten sie durch das Wasser. Drüben die Überraschung: Die österreichischen Beamten stehen schon bereit. Es ist der 31. Oktober, Mitternacht.'

18 Jordan and Düvell have qualified this observation somewhat: they point out that, first, the number of officially recognized refugees peaked in 1993 and has declined since (an observation recently corroborated by the UNHCR, http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home, 2 March 2005); second, that measured as a percentage of the world's population, contemporary numbers of migrants are 'modest' when compared to previous periods of mass migration; and consequently that 'the so-called world migration crisis is [. . .] not about unprecedented movement of populations across borders, but about the principles and rules under which they should move, and how these are agreed and enforced' (Jordan and Düvell, 2003: 67).

19 I am here merely using the popular designation of many such conflicts but certainly not corroborating the assumption that ethnicity single-handedly causes antagonism between groups widely (mis)constructed as constituting primordial entities. The many flaws of such primordial accounts include their inability to explain the historical and social specificity of conflicts, the socio-economic and political contexts in which violence erupts. For a further relevant criticism of primordial 'explanations' of ethnic violence see Brass (1997):

drawing on Foucault, Brass demonstrates that while the precipitating triggers of violence can be extremely difficult to ascertain, the media, (local/national) politicians and other self-interested social actors can be very efficient at offering ethnic interpretations of violence, thus imposing a pre-existing discourse from which they seek to benefit (i.e. offering stories of considerable 'newsworthiness'; polarizing the populace into ethnic camps, one of which can thus be spoken to and mobilized for electoral purposes).

20 As governor of Carinthia, Haider contradicted the FPÖ's agreement with the new legislation and criticized the 'concentration of asylum seekers and associated problems' in the provinces (http://www.orf.at, 16 June 2004).

21 The perhaps best-known organizational activism against everyday racism is provided by Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus Arbeit (ZARA) (http://www.zara.or.at, 31 March 2005). Founded in 1999, ZARA organizes consciousness-raising workshops, provides support and legal advice for victims and witnesses of racism, and publishes an annual report documenting instances of everyday racism (http://www.zara.or.at/materialien/rassismus-report/rassismus-report-2004.pdf, 31 March 2005).

22 A comparable incident occurred in July 2001, when Mike Chukwuma, a Nigerian-born Austrian citizen and delegate of the Green Party, was refused admission to a bar in Linz. The local authorities subsequently ordered the bouncer and the bar concerned to pay a fine of 750 euros each, against which they successfully appealed. Chukwuma has recently taken his case to the European Court of Human Rights (http://www.ooe.orf.at, 10 May 2004).

23 My translation of the original: 'Die neoliberale Ideologie hat unübersehbare Risse bekommen. Die Mythen vom sozialen Paradies im globalen Markt glauben vermutlich nicht einmal mehr die, die von ihnen am meisten profitieren. Es hat sich als falsch erwiesen, dass durch den globalen Markt ein ebenes Feld für alle geschaffen werde könne. [. . .] Es ist ein Trugschluss, dass der Reichtum von oben nach unten durchsickere.'

24 There are, of course, significant differences between Beck's, Castells's and Bauman's respective theories. In what follows, I merely extrapolate and condense some of their key observations, which resonate with the critical discourses analysed in this article.

25 See http://www.markenfirmen.com.

26 While the European elections resulted in a further shift to the right on a pan-European level, Austria's Green Party received a respectable 12.8 percent of the country's popular vote; at the same time, a dismal 6.3 percent pushed the FPÖ deeper into crisis. The surprise result, however, were the 14 percent cast for (former) journalist, author and Greenpeace activist Hans-Peter Martin, who had previously been expelled by the European Social Democrats and had vowed to reveal and combat alleged corruption in the European Parliament (http://www.orf.at, 14 June 2004). In the context of the present article, we may argue that this also inadvertently poses questions concerning the relationship between the critical discourse examined here and EU politics. While this is a subject worthy of a separate analysis, a preliminary reading suggests a degree of ideological ambivalence paralleled in the political and interpretative patterns analysed above. For example, an inclusive and welcoming attitude towards EU enlargement and further cultural diversification encountered in both *Megaphon*

(*Megaphon*, 2004) and *Falter* (e.g. Prlic and Wurmdobler, 2004) has thus been juxtaposed to criticisms of EU-wide reductions in welfare spending (e.g. Binder and Plank, 2004; Schwentner, 2004c).

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CHRISTIAN KARNER is a lecturer in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Nottingham. *Address*: School of Sociology & Social Policy, Law & Social Sciences Building, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham. [email: christian.karner@nottingham.ac.uk]