

## **“Wir sind das Volk” - narrative identity and the other in the discourse of the PEGIDA movement**

**Adrian Paukstat, Cedric Ellwanger**

### **Angaben zur Veröffentlichung / Publication details:**

Paukstat, Adrian, and Cedric Ellwanger. 2016. “Wir sind das Volk’ - narrative identity and the other in the discourse of the PEGIDA movement.” *Contention: The Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Protest* 4 (1-2): 93–108. <https://doi.org/10.3167/cont.2016.040108>.

### **Nutzungsbedingungen / Terms of use:**

**CC BY-NC-ND 3.0**

Dieses Dokument wird unter folgenden Bedingungen zur Verfügung gestellt: / This document is made available under these conditions:  
**CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0: Creative Commons - Namensnennung - Nicht kommerziell - Keine Bearbeitung**  
Weitere Informationen finden Sie unter: / For more information see:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/de/deed.de>





---

## “WIR SIND DAS VOLK” – NARRATIVE IDENTITY AND THE OTHER IN THE DISCOURSE OF THE PEGIDA MOVEMENT

ADRIAN PAUKSTAT

*FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF AUGSBURG*

CEDRIC ELLWANGER

*FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF AUGSBURG*

---

### Abstract

PEGIDA, the self-proclaimed ‘Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident’ movement is a highly debated topic in Germany. Over the course of the refugee crisis it has become clear that this movement would not perish as quickly as many analysts thought. The authors investigated PEGIDA's narrative identity (Ricoeur 2005) in relation to their conceptions of Self and Other, using Keller's (2008) Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD). In this, the authors utilize discourse-related paradigms to reconstruct subject positions and narrative identities, as articulated in public speeches and commentary of PEGIDA supporters in 2014-5. Beyond the issue of PEGIDA itself, this study aims to introduce new paradigms on collective political identity, which can also shed new light on the issue of populist movements in a time of a legitimacy crisis of the European Union and the growing numbers seeking refuge in Europe.

### Keywords

discourse; SKAD; alterity; PEGIDA; narrative identity; Germany; right-wing; social movements

### Corresponding author:

Cedric Ellwanger, Email: [cedric.ellwanger@hotmail.de](mailto:cedric.ellwanger@hotmail.de)

"Wir sind das Volk!" – "We are the people" is an often-repeated phrase in Germany lately. For non-Germans that utterance may sound like a standard rhetoric device for mobilizing a nationally-defined group, but in the German context it serves as a central symbol for the probably most celebrated event in recent German history: The fall of the Berlin Wall and the re-unification of what, from the perspective of the German population, always belonged together. In 1989 something happened, which nobody foresaw but everyone had hoped for: A peaceful revolution of the citizens of communist East Germany for freedom and democracy. In Autumn of that year thousands of people took to the streets in the *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (DDR). As they chanted "We are the people" they challenged the state and its technocratic institutions, implicitly demanding to be the *demos*, from which "democracy", as the rule of the people draws its name. Since October 2014, every Monday, there has been a sense of *déjà vu* in Dresden, one of the central birthplaces of that democratic movement at the end of the Eighties. Each week people congregate in public squares where speeches are made and the participants once again chant in opposition to the State and its institutions - "We are the people". Only on second sight do we see a difference. The people chant not only "Wir sind das Volk" but also "Lügenpresse", roughly translated as "liar press". This slogan also sounds eerily familiar to German speakers, but from a different era altogether; Lügenpresse was a central ideological trope of Nazi propaganda before and after they came to power<sup>1</sup>, one which expressed the fascists' disdain for any kind of free and independent media. Add to this the content of these speeches in Dresden and elsewhere, which refer to 'criminal foreigners' and the danger of Islamization and one's awareness of the nature of this movement is refined. PEGIDA is the kind of right-wing populist movement one thought Germany would forever be protected from. Had we not learned from our hellish past?

Obviously we had not and after early marginalization, PEGIDA grew stronger and stronger with the European refugee crisis and now seems to be a central facet of German politics and debate. For German politicians, political scientists and sociologists the success and persistence of this movement seemed to come out of nowhere. Clearly this worrying phenomenon calls for considered analysis of its causes, functions and possible consequences. Given the movement's lack of codified structure, our goal here is to analyze the construction of PEGIDA identities through an interpretive sociology of knowledge approach, using a symbolic discursive breakdown of the elements of its narrative which reveals the singular importance of Self/Other experiences. Therefore we shall elaborate on a sociological approach to the movement's discourse, one which emphasizes the relations between actors and the discourse itself. We define this concept of narrative identity construction through conflict between Self and Other, based on the ideas of Paul Ricoeur (2005) and Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau (2001). Following this, we marry these sensitizing theoretical concepts (Blumer, 1954) with the methodological approach of Grounded Theory (Corbin/ Strauss 2008, Glaser/ Strauss 1967). This phenomenon-oriented perspective re-conceptualizes the relationship between theory, methodology and empirical analysis and defines the empirical sources for our analysis, by interrelating data and theory in an abductive manner (Peirce 1976). The empirical investigation is not simply deduced from a theoretical perspective but rather informs the theoretical positioning itself. The data set of our study consists of speeches held in Dresden by PEGIDA leaders in fall and winter of 2014/15, interviews with rank-and-file supporters of PEGIDA and a collection of PEGIDA's semi-official position-papers. On the basis of this data we inquired into the process of subject constitution between the poles of Self and Other and the wider narrative configuration of the movement's concept of Self and the differentiated Other. Through this analysis we identify 'ambivalence'

1 The earliest documented use of term was in an article by Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg in 1921 (Albrecht, 2002, p. 271). Use of the term in German language publications peaked during world war 2 (Haller, 2015).

and ‘abstractness’ as key productive and integrative characteristics of the PEGIDA movement. In concluding, we will account for future theoretical and empirical implications of this analysis and consider how these findings might help to critically illuminate what we see as the dangerous potentiality of PEGIDA’s activities and similar movements across Europe.

### Discourse, Social Actors and Social Identity

Our basic point of departure is a relational conception of social identity. In this we want to avoid preconceptions of collective identity of social movement actors, as some form of readily-accessible entity to be scrutinized. We regard neither the political ideology of a movement, nor the personal identity of its actors as separable factors. Following on from the work of Keller (2008, 2011, 2012, 2013), we consider the movement and its actors as interdependently constituting one another through a discourse in which both the subject appears as always-already socialized, as well as the movement as always-already constituted by the subjects that make up its structure. The ‘Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse’ (SKAD) elaborated by Keller (2011), provides us with the methodological conceptions by which we approach the analysis of the self-constituting processes of both the members and the PEGIDA movement.

Contrary to many interpretations of Foucauldian discourse, which often rely on the formula of man vanishing ‘like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea’ (Foucault, 1974, p. 422), SKAD represents a highly differentiated and genuinely sociological concept of *social actors* in its hermeneutic sociology of knowledge (Hitzler & Reichertz & Schröder, 1999). This can be understood as individual ‘or collective producers of utterances; those which under recourse to specific sets of rules and resources produce and transform discourse through their practices and transformations’ (Keller, 2008, p. 234).

At the basis of these conceptions lies a certain dialectic, which structures the relationship between actor and discourse as a structured reservoir of knowledge. On one hand, actors produce meaningful enunciations, therefore contributing to and shaping discourse. On the other, they can only do so through recourse to the reservoir of knowledge materialized in discourse. In this recourse to more or less institutionalized discourses as mechanisms of socialization, its subjects reproduce as well as transcend the ‘communicative patterns of utterance production’ (*ibid.*, p. 234).

Discursive structures therefore, are constitutively dependent on their actualization by the discursive praxis of the actors, just as much as the actors’ enunciations are dependent on the pre-existing structures of meaning and knowledge represented in discourse. In other words, subjects can only be conceived of as actors which are socio-historically embedded in certain structures of knowledge which provide them with the means of enunciation, be it typifications, role models or other categories of this kind. In Keller’s words: ‘Social actors actualize discourses, fill them with life, challenge them, transcend them – but they don’t control them’ (Keller, 2012, p. 74).

Regarding our analysis of PEGIDA, this means that we conceptually depart from the idea of a ‘unity of discourse’. Single utterances and texts are not, therefore, conceived of as single, isolated units of meaning, but as ‘fragments of discourse’ (Keller, 2013, p. 63). We regard every enunciation of any actor as always-already discursively mediated, with any unit of meaning gaining that meaning from reference to the totality of the discourse, from which single enunciations are always to be regarded as a part.

### Narrative, Ideology and the role of Self and Other

Narrative structures constitute a specific mode of the configuration of discursive elements.

The narrative is what integrates the disintegrated aspects of a discourse into a unified and cohesive plot. A narration of this kind provides the elements of enunciation with a certain, more or less actualized, inner coherence and closure. It provides a historical perspective in which continuities, dynamic changes and developments are interpreted as part of a whole. Abstract meta-narrative structures combine with concrete illustrative cases and ‘constitute (contradictable) states of the world as narratives, in which there are actors and actants, occurrences, challenges, successes and defeats, “Good” and “Evil”’ (Keller, 2013, p. 49). Paradigmatic narratives common to social groups enable the discursive production of causal relations, the enunciation of calls to action, instructions of how to follow such calls and position actors in the relational structure of that discourse. It appears therefore as a basic medium of both identity and ideology. What we are, what we believe and why we believe it, is always mediated through narrative.

In the narrative of the PEGIDA movement causal relations are established by logically connecting the current influx of asylum seekers into Germany with the policies of German political elites. These two bracketed events are logically connected and a story is told, which says: Germany is being overwhelmed with migration because of the conscious inaction of political elites. The ‘call to action’ that both logically and narratologically follows from this declares: We demand that the elites do something about this and stop this influx. If we go one step further and look at the actants of this narrative, it becomes clear by what is meant by this declaration when we define narratives as the basic medium of both identity and ideology. What is inherent and required by such a logical order of narrative events is the definition of concrete ‘actants’. Events of any kind involve concrete personnel that implement them. Actions need actors. The actants of PEGIDA’s narrative are the refugees that constitute the influx, the political elites that fail to prevent it and, most importantly, PEGIDA itself as the ‘hero’ of the story.

The function of narrative in this context of identity is, according to French narratologist Paul Ricœur (2005), to bridge the contradictions inherent in the conception of identity itself. The classic Cartesian conception of identity as the “I = I” in *cogito ergo sum* ignores the temporal dimension, for if the subject appears as identical with herself how can change be integrated into this conception of identity? How am I still me, if I have changed? Have I not in a sense become someone else?

Ricœur’s answer to this ontological dilemma focuses on the narratives that subjects tell one another about themselves. They do so in order to sublimate the antinomies of identity into a logical whole. A narrative resolves discontinuity and change into continuity and logical consistency (*ibid*, p. 141-153). Ricœur’s conception of narratological identity allows us to conceive the issue of personal identity in a way that relieves us of the compulsion to assume a self-identical substance ‘behind’ the enunciations that integrate the temporal discontinuity of identity into a logical plot (Mattern, 1996, p. 204).

For this study, we therefore propose a theoretical paradigm that insists on the identity-establishing aspects of discourse as narrative and enables the subjects to identify with the PEGIDA discourse in the sense of recognizing themselves in the story that PEGIDA tells about itself and also enabling PEGIDA to approach the not yet mobilized subjects with an offer of collective identity. Following from Althusser’s (2014) notion of ‘interpellation’, PEGIDA as a social movement and the subjects of which it consists, produce and reproduce the narrative of a particular subject which functions both to *establish* a collective identity and to *mobilize* the subject of that collective. The moment the PEGIDA narrative assigns or aims to assign subject positions, this discursive narrative offers the subjects a way to make sense of their life-world experiences and gain identity from said construction. But at the same time it is the subjects themselves that actively construct said identity. We thus approach the narrative of PEGIDA as an ever changing,

ever adapting social organism.

The identity positions that the PEGIDA narrative constructs necessarily mirror the relational qualities of the narrative as a whole. According to Viehöver (2001) the key aspects of a narrative are its 'episodes' and 'actants'. An episode refers to the function of any narrative to causally link formerly unconnected events. The narrative therefore appears as the mode of discourse in which events a), b) and c) are constructed as logically following from one another: c) happened because of b) and b) happened because of a). Actants, Viehöver describes, as a certain set of abstract, prototypical subject positions used in variation in all narratives, such as 'hero' and 'anti-hero' (cf Greimas 1983). The key issue in this context is that actants and episodes are conceived as dialectically interrelated categories: episodes only exist insofar as they are implemented by the personnel of actants and actants only exist insofar as they implement the episodes of the narrative. One cannot be conceived of without the other.

The subject positions themselves thus follow the same relational logic: Positionings of Self, as German, 'das Volk' and so on, appear interrelated with categories of the Other, refugees or political opponents. The subject position of the Self depends on the construction of the Other. To elaborate further on this, one may refer to the concept of 'articulation', from Mouffe and Laclau's (2001) theory of hegemony as, 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice' (*ibid*, p. 105). Articulations are 'acts of identification' (Nonhoff & Gronau, 2012, p. 126) in which subjects construct their identity by establishing relations to other subjects. The constitutive elements of subject and identity thus appear in the dialectical interplay between Positioning of Self and of Other. Our analysis here therefore, aims to understand the various subject positions within the PEGIDA narratives in question, which as interdependent categories must be analytically approached as such.

## Corpus and Methodology

Based on the understanding that interpretative analysis is an inherently reflexive process of knowledge production, we neither claim nor attempt the objectivity often employed (or claimed or attempted) in quantitative analyses. The triad of objectivity, reliability and validity do not marry well with what is essentially a hermeneutic undertaking (Häder, 2015, p. 103-111). Nevertheless we must configure the interpretative process of our work in a way that is transparent, comprehensible and accountable. We do not therefore deny the subjective character of this analysis but do engage with our own social standpoint-dependency in a conscious and reflective manner (Strübing, 2014, p. 79-95).

In order to implement this approach we rely on the methodologies of Grounded Theory, as elaborated by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (see Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The basic aspect of Grounded Theory is a dialectical realization of the hermeneutic process which seeks to avoid the pitfalls of a simple deductive logic in interpretation that risk reading ones preconceived notions of the research object into the source materials. When one is looking for X in a certain text, one is very likely to eventually find it, thus reducing the research process to a self-referential circle.

For us this means, that though we approach the corpus with a certain set of pre-established categories, we continually modify our research categories within the hermeneutic process. These modifications were realized by cyclical rounds of coding of the corpus, each time adjusting the encoding tree, in order to establish an ever more refined set of categories of analysis. Thus, during the first round of coding, the categories being used in the research process emerged from the data, as rough ideas of what it was that we had to look out for. During subsequent rounds of

coding, the same material was used to either refine existing categories, or drop them altogether in cases where the patterns they represented didn't reappear in the material. (Corbin & Strauss 2008).

To establish the research corpus we employed 'theoretical sampling', a key pillar of grounded theory methodology and one which defines the compilation of data set as an intertwined, iterative process of compilation and analysis. The analysis does not as such begin with a finalized corpus, rather it is compiled in parallel to the process of refining the categories of research. The aim is thus to achieve 'theoretical saturation' of the corpus through the course of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 53). Since we aimed to analyze PEGIDA's discourse as a logically coherent whole, our guiding questions in sample selection were: Which fragments of discourse can reasonably be conceived of as representing the narrative and ideology of the movement? Which speakers can be conceived of as representing the movement in their articulations of discourse?

In this we had to account for the facts that PEGIDA is a highly social phenomenon, which aims to publicize its own perspectives and attempts to steer public discourse in the direction of its own political aspirations. Also, like in any social movement, hierarchical structures emerge, which come to define more or less powerful speaker positions (Keller 2008, p. 235), which in turn represent a certain dichotomy between more and less codified political positions, an issue that appears interrelated with the more or less powerful speaker positions.

We therefore compiled a corpus that contained both the articulation of relatively 'official' and codified political standpoints, from relatively powerful speaker positions, complimented with relatively unofficial, uncoded enunciations from relatively powerless standpoints. In a nutshell, the corpus contains both 'leaders' comments and those of the 'rank-and-file'. This lead us to three different kinds of documents: speeches held at PEGIDA rallies between Fall and Winter 2014/2015; a collection of 'semi-official' documents published by the PEGIDA leadership, publicizing their political positions; and interviews of participants at PEGIDA demonstrations in Cologne conducted by the German TV-Program *Panorama*<sup>2</sup>. All quotations from the corpus were translated into English by the authors.

### **Subject positions within the PEGIDA Discourse: The Ordinary German citizens and their enemies**

The subject of PEGIDA, as articulated within its discourse appears through several paradigmatic interpretative patterns that define their relationships *vis-a-vis* their political opponents. One of the most basic features appears to be a twofold process of defining one's own identity against the backdrop of the other. Firstly, the PEGIDA-subject as an 'alienated citizen' vs. the 'political system' of the Federal Republic of Germany and those deemed its representatives. This latter culminates in a diffuse but monolithic conception of 'The System'. Secondly the PEGIDA-subject as a white, European, enlightened, law abiding subject vs. (mostly Islamic) immigrants that threaten its cultural hegemony and the values that supposedly go along with it.

The particular conception of democracy that emerges from this discourse appears as a strict

2 After the TV-program 'Panorama' was publicly accused by PEGIDA supporters of misrepresenting their views in its show. The program then published inedited versions of the interviews with PEGIDA supporters.

„PEGIDA – Die Interviews in voller Länge, Teil 1“ (18.12.2014) <http://www.ardmediathek.de/tv/Panorama/PEGIDA-Die-Interviews-in-voller-L%C3%A4nge-/Das-Erste/Video?documentId=25442126> Accessed: 23.02.2016.

„PEGIDA – Die Interviews in voller Länge, Teil 2“ (18.12.2014) <http://www.ardmediathek.de/tv/Panorama/PEGIDA-Die-Interviews-in-voller-L%C3%A4nge-/Das-Erste/Video?documentId=25442102&bcastId=310918> Accessed: 23.02.2016.



identitarian notion of democracy, in which democracy as a political system is identified with the existence of a positively definable *demos*, which PEGIDA supporters define as being they themselves. This becomes clear with regard the their (in)famous slogan, Wir sind das Volk! (We are the people!). This notion is intricately linked to a feeling of estrangement and alienation regarding the political system. This *system* is not ours, they seem to be saying. We should be the *demos* and yet we are not, as the following statement highlights.

‘Those guys in Berlin just do what they like and not what the people want! Whose interests do they serve? Not those of the people!’ (Dresden 25.01.2015)

‘It is our right not to feel represented anymore, by people, who have done nothing else all their lives, but the dirty business of party politics! [clapping] Paltering over positions of power, defamation of political opponents, legislative periods as the only relevant frame of thought’. (Dresden 09.02.2015)

The political opponents against which PEGIDA situates itself, form a diffuse conglomerate of diverse actors that range from the German government, to media institutions and radical left-wing activists, all of whom are imagined to be parts of a coherent whole, united in their common opposition against PEGIDA. These notions become clear in the frequent use of generative terms for such political opponents, such as ‘Politics’, ‘the Media’, or more generally, the all-encompassing ‘System’. The relationships between these very heterogeneous parts of the System are frequently imagined as a kind of secretive collaboration, especially those between militant left-wing activists (*Antifa* – from anti-facist) and official representatives of German politics and political discourse.

‘Because they don't like what PEGIDA does, the Green Party supports the *Antifa*. They do everything they can in order to curtail our freedom of expression’ (Dresden 09.03.2015)

‘Those silent and less silent supporters of the radical leftists thugs congregate in churches and at vigils, they sit in editors offices and parliaments’ (Dresden 09.02.2015)

Structures of power and dominance in this discourse are usually conceived of as directly-personal, as opposed to socially mediated relations of power and dependency.

‘The green socialists use the asylum seekers, in order to create a red and green [referring to the Green Party and the Social Democratic Party] employment miracle for the bachelor graduates of gibberish studies. The pathological altruism and the feigned empathy of the do-gooders serve as a moral deflection from the lucrateness of the migrant-economy’<sup>3</sup>

All cultural or political aspects against which PEGIDA positions itself, appear in their own discourse as consciously precipitated from a center of power, based on clearly discernible partisan interests. A special position in this reserved for the media, which is mostly referred to as ‘Lügenpresse’ (liar press). According to this interpretive pattern, the media (yet again imagined as a coherent whole) serves as direct instrument of the system, consciously spreading lies in a situation where ‘the truth’ appears as essentially obvious and readily accessible by anyone. The political demands of the protesters mirror this simplistic dichotomous relationship: Instead of ‘lying’ the press should print ‘the truth’.

3 Festerling, T. (2015). 10 Forderungen an die deutsche Asylpolitik Retrieved May 20, 2016, from <http://pegidabayern.com/politik/loesungen/asylpolitik/>



‘When someone says something which is a different opinion, one is portrayed as bad or stupid and I won't take that anymore. [...] You should write the truth for once!’ (Panorama 1: 00:33:02)

‘They turn the facts on their head, they distort what anyone can see, who has been on a walk with LEGIDA or PEGIDA at least once. [People shouting: „Lügenpresse!“] I want to make this obvious issue unmistakably clear’ (Dresden 09.02.2015.)

‘They should simply report it like it is, without spreading bad and insidious lies about us’ (Dresden 15.12.2014.)

The protesters resentment towards the media is linked to what they regard as the essence of the media's incorrect depiction of themselves; their characterization as radical right-wingers, racists or Nazis. Resistance to this characterization provides one of the most basic elements of the identity of PEGIDA protesters. In nearly every single speech and nearly every other interview, this issue is brought up by leaders and rank and file members alike. Given how universally delegitimized openly racist, anti-Semitic and fascist political positions are within Germany's public discourse, one should not wonder that PEGIDA supporters and leaders attempt to distance themselves from such allegations. What appears as particularly interesting in this context, is how PEGIDA supporters differentiate themselves from ‘being a Nazi’. A highly recurrent pattern is the juxtaposition of the subject positions of ‘Nazi’ with ‘ordinary German citizens’.

Interviewer: All these people that demonstrate here are ‘patriotic Europeans’. What exactly does that mean?

Man 1: (pushing himself in front of the microphone) These are definitely no pinstripe-Nazis, like Mr. Jäger, interior minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, has said. Take a look around. Do you see any? One has to say that: These are perfectly ordinary people, who justifiably want to express their grievances’ (Panorama 1: 00:07:35)

‘I don't wanna sound right-wing, or something, because that's not who I am, I am a perfectly ordinary German citizen’ (Panorama 1: 00:21:14)

‘What is most important to me, is that I don't want to be insulted as a Nazi. I am a totally ordinary German citizen’ (Panorama 2: 00:11:16)

The protesters idea of ‘being a Nazi’ is thus constructed with emphasis on the anti-bourgeois aspects of that subject position. It appears to PEGIDA supporters as if a Nazi is not necessarily someone who embraces a racist, chauvinist or antisemitic worldview, but simply someone who differs from ones particular conception of conventional middle-class bourgeois identity. The Nazi, in this regard, occupies a similar subject-position to all other representatives of „the System“, as anyone who does not fit within their notions of being a ‘ordinary German citizen’.

In this regard PEGIDA appears as the opposite of a radical or revolutionary movement. PEGIDA supporters and leaders alike avoid referring to their demonstrations as ‘demonstrations’. PEGIDA never actually calls for protests or even vigils, referring to its public gatherings as

‘evening walks’. Their position *vis-a-vis* state and political system is that of the solicitant, not that of the revolutionary subject. Since this particular issue marks the most striking difference between PEGIDA and classically fascist movements, such as the German Neo-Nazi party NPD, there is truth in their distancing themselves from ‘being Nazi’. PEGIDA lacks the revolutionary impetus that characterizes the latter entirely<sup>4</sup>. The whole ideology of PEGIDA is affirmative of state power, albeit in the extreme. The PEGIDA subject appears as a petit-bourgeois solicitant *vis-a-vis* the state rather than as self-conscious revolutionary. PEGIDA does not demand, it pleads. This becomes most obvious in the recurrent pattern of positive references to state institutions, most notably, the police.

‘The police have to stand for our security with full force! The police officers turn their back on us, because they know that we won’t stab them in the back. [People shouting: ‘Jawohl!’ (Yes!) – clapping]. They turn their back on us and have to face those that hate us’ (Dresden 9.2.2015)

The codified political demands of PEGIDA mirror this notion. In their semi-official position papers PEGIDA seeks, among other things, ‘an amendment to the constitution that stipulates the right to integration and the duty to integrate’<sup>5</sup>; ‘increasing the funds for BAMF (Federal Bureau for Migration and Refugees)’<sup>6</sup>; and ‘increasing the funds for the police’<sup>7</sup>. Rather than being enemies, the political institutions of the Federal Republic of Germany appear as a frame of reference. The realization of one’s political ideals and goals within this discourse can thus be imagined, not as a weakening or even abolishment of the institutions from whom PEGIDA feels alienated, but by their reinforcement.

Another basic reference for the construction of PEGIDA subject identity is the notion of Islam, which permeates its discourse. The PEGIDA subject as the ‘ordinary German citizen’ that emerges from their articulations, appears as both ambiguously defined yet coherent and identical with itself. The speakers articulate their own identity constructions in a manner as if it was perfectly obvious exactly who such German subjects were. Based on essentialist notions of German culture, juxtaposed with equally essentialist ideas of an Islamic culture, PEGIDA constructs the idea of a subject whose definition is indistinct enough so that nearly anyone can identify with it, yet also postulating homogenous coherence and exclusivity. Members thus imagine themselves as part of a clear-cut collective which is in fact a completely arbitrary construct based on the elusive ‘ordinary German citizen’. What can be seen in these constructions is the Laclau-Mouffe concept of ‘articulation’, a vague and arbitrary notion of ‘being German’ is related to an equally vague and arbitrary notion of ‘being Muslim’. What emerges from this process is a concept of identity that, through its very fuzziness interpellates and therefore potentially mobilizes almost anyone - anyone who is not ‘Muslim’ that is. Characteristics of German identity are rarely expressed in any sort of concretely definable, canon of values. What is quite heavily stressed however is the menace that the values of the *other* constitute to ‘German values’, which

4 For a discussion of the social-revolutionary elements of fascist ideology see: Nolte (2008), Sternhell (1999); for a discussion of contemporary Neo-Nazism in Germany from the perspective of discourse analysis see: Botsch & Kopke (2009).

5 Positionspapier der PEGIDA. Retrieved May 20, 2016, from <http://www.i-finger.de/PEGIDA-positionspapier.pdf> Accessed: 29.02.2015

6 Ibid.

7 „Dresdener Thesen“. Retrieved May 20, 2016, from [https://legida.eu/images/legida/Dresdner\\_Thesen\\_15\\_02.pdf](https://legida.eu/images/legida/Dresdner_Thesen_15_02.pdf)

although also ill-defined, are constantly under threat.

‘I have to stress this once again: In our country the priority are German laws, German culture, German morals and German customs! [Crowd cheering, clapping]’ (Dresden 15.12.14)

‘Patriotism means for me to positively espouse ones country and like any other people on Earth we Germans should be allowed to be proud. Our people have made the most inventions in history. I come from southern Germany. My city has invented the bicycle and the car’ (Panorama 2: 00:03:40)

‘Now let’s get to the point, which we already talked about: Islamization. Politics and the Media ignore the worries of the population, our worries (*emphasis*) about abandoning our values, especially in the face of Islam. They deny all the Islamization’ (Panorama 1: 00:05:48)

‘Islam, and one should be allowed to say that, is a regress 300 years back into middle ages. There is genital mutilation. Women don't have anything to say. They are being married. And animals are being geschächtet<sup>8</sup>’ (Panorama 2: 00:06:45)

Refugees or migrants in general are identified as a disparate group consisting of different protagonists and here PEGIDA’s discourse appears rather fuzzy. At times, refugees and migrants are depicted as a homogenous mass, at others differentiations appear, depending on the social and ethnic background of the migrants and refugees. There is differentiation between foreigners willing and unwilling to integrate into German society, between ‘real’ refugees and ‘economic’ refugees, between those who are peaceful and those who are not. Such differentiations are often rhetorical fig-leaves, given that the refugees and migrants are overwhelmingly depicted as treacherous, dangerous and most importantly, potential terrorists. Thus while the PEGIDA discourse tries to preventively defend itself against allegations of racism, by hedging its characterizations of migrants and refugees with certain qualifications, it becomes patently clear that it embraces essentialist conceptions of the Other, which in most cases, revolve around an equally essentialist notion of Islam.

‘The second most frequent question: Are you against Islam? No, we are not against Islam! We are against Islamization and a radical Islamism. This is a decisive difference. Are you against foreigners? Also here we state clearly: No! PEGIDA is not against foreigners, which is clearly shown by the growing number of participants with foreign roots who attend our event’ (Dresden 01.12.2014)

‘I also have the opinion, like PEGIDA, that only those should receive asylum, who, er, come here by the means of political violence. Everyone else should maybe after all leave the country’ (Panorama 1: 00:19:34)

‘I demand the appointment of repatriation commissioners for asylum seekers whose

---

8 The German verb „schächten“ for which there exists no literal English translation, derives from the Hebrew „Shachar“ and describes the slaughter in a Jewish kosher or Muslim *halal* methods.

application has been denied [crowd cheering], especially when it comes to radical Muslims and those that have become criminals' (Dresden 05.01.2015)

Another important issue regarding the construction of the migrant other is the fact that migrants and refugees completely lack agency: Islam and Islamization, radical Muslims and asylum seekers materialize as objects rather than subjects. One is 'afraid of' them, one is (or isn't) 'against them', they should be 'repatriated' but they never emerge in the discourse as independent subjects or actors with agency. This is a striking difference between the refugees and migrants and the representatives of 'the System'. While both are constituted as the enemy other for PEGIDA subjects, refugees and migrants never appear as actual political opponents, but merely as the bone of contention. They are the object and not the subject of the political struggle, which according to PEGIDA is a struggle strictly confined within the ethnic and cultural borders of German society. A conflict between ordinary German citizens, *Das Volk* on one side and the System on the other. A conflict about refugees rather than involving refugees. This usually implicit notion in the discourse is at times made explicit when PEGIDA supporters articulate their aspirations to reinstate *Das Volk* (ethnically defined) as the *demos*:

'[Quoting from] the Green parties demands pertaining to refugees, asylum seekers, foreigners, people of color, Muslims [...]' "Within a discussion about asylum and integration all these people have to be able to voice their interests". No! Definitely not! First of all we, as citizens and Germans discuss this among ourselves, like it is stipulated in the constitution. Neither foreigners, nor asylum seekers, nor economic refugees have a special right to dialogue! We as citizens, tax payers and voters still decide about our social system on our own! [Crowd cheering, clapping, chanting: Wir sind das Volk!]' (Dresden 09.03.15)

### Narrative Configuration

Following Ricoeur, we understand the narrative as the central strategy for transgressing the antinomies and contradictions inherent in the constitution of identity by the establishment of a coherent plot. PEGIDA narrates itself both to itself and to others. All particular aspects of the PEGIDA discourse and the categories of analysis we established only exist within the context of a holistic narrative, as functional moments of the whole.

While the identity of the PEGIDA-subjects as Germans, as normal citizens, as alienated subjects of the national state, have to be synchronized through the demarcation from the negative Other and the establishment of positive equivalences between the life-world experiences of the concrete subjects, there must also be a time-space dynamic in the diachronic dimension. Specifically, in order to construct the subject of the 'German citizen', it is not enough simply to define which identities and experiences count as German and which do not. This German identity also needs a history, through which it can subsume the variance of its conditions into logical coherence. The German subjects of PEGIDA's discourse are exactly those protagonists who are narrated as cheated and deceived by politics and the media and threatened and endangered by non-Germans.

PEGIDA produces and reproduces the narrative of this German subject and transforms experiences of neglect and alienation into a positive identity, by linking them with a privileged position of knowledge and awareness. It's as if the concrete subjects feel alienated because they are the ones who do not fall for the 'liar press'. This narrative works as an 'interpellation' in the Althusserian sense of the term. The narrative assigns certain subject statuses by interpellating

the subjects as subjects, who are supposed to recognize themselves in the mirror of this ideology (Althusser, 2014). The desire that manifests itself in the political demands of PEGIDA works in a similar two-way fashion as the narrative ideology of identity: PEGIDA constructs its own identity and, at the same time, an offer of identity. It constructs its own desires as well as an offer of desire, for 'the subject cannot be forced to desire, rather it has to compel itself to accept this desire as its very own' (Arnold, 2012, p. 22). The identitarian ideology of the narrative appears as an offer of identity and the desire that goes along with it. Following our analysis we see how the PEGIDA discourse constructs, in and through all its moments, the identity and history of this German subject thusly:

This subject has worked hard his whole life but, nevertheless, real success and material safety constantly eludes him. What he earns is barely enough for subsistence. It feels alienated from the political system and it believes that its voice is not heard. It feels disadvantaged, culturally as well as materially, in the face of Islam, asylum seekers and foreigners, who constantly seem to do better than he does. Political institutions and the media are hostile and denigrating towards him. At the same time it believes in those institutions. It believes in the constitution, it believes in the courts and it believes in the police forces. It dislikes subversion, it doesn't even demonstrate. It speaks rather of 'evening walks'. But the more it raises its voice, the more aggressively it is attacked. It is surrounded by enemies. Crude alliances from left-wing movements to the governing Christian conservatives deny its legitimacy. And yet, it only expresses what the 'German people' think. And it does what it does for Germany, for Europe and the Occident. For them it desires security, peace and prosperity

The function of this narrative consists in the offer of this kind of identity and this kind of desire. PEGIDA tells itself: This is who we are and this is what we desire. At the same time it interpellates the not-yet mobilized, by implicitly saying: This is also who you are and what you desire. Join us.

### **Theoretical and Empirical Implications of the Analysis**

The analysis of the discursive processing of subject positions in a narrative context by PEGIDA has shown that it is all but certain what PEGIDA actually is and what the political, cultural and social essence of PEGIDA entails. PEGIDA stands on the side of the immediate but very unspecific and abstract truth and therefore knows best what the country needs and how to redirect it to a prosperous path. It opposes the System and is the only one willing to handle the potentially catastrophic event of refugees driving their way into Germany and Europe. The unspecific and abstract nature of this truth in our analysis does not arise, we argue, from some methodological oversight; rather the point of such a populist movement is exactly to remain in a state of constant ambivalence. Our narrative analysis of the central subject positions in relation to different antagonists and others, has disclosed the arbitrary identity construction of these defenders of the Occident. We attempted to show that although there is a common narrative, which constitutes PEGIDA and its followers as the perfect norm of German and European citizens, this norm is itself under-determined and therefore open for ambiguous and potentially conflicting subject positions. This opens up a seemingly endless social and political space for newcomers and potential allies. Articulations of the Self in relation to different Others, are also characterized by a remarkable ambivalence and arbitrariness. While the German state and its

institutions seem to be at once both the greatest enemy and the only hope, the migrants and refugees simultaneously lack any capacity to act whilst at the same time represent a potentially dangerous threat to "the people" and the German culture and nation.

From an explicitly normative standpoint there is an undeniable impulse to ask: What to do about this? Here, as social scientists and political activists we can only hope to find out how to stop the obviously appealing interpellations of the PEGIDA movement. We cannot definitively answer this question but our analysis opens up new possibilities to tackle such questions. How PEGIDA constitutes itself in relation to its Others offers a hint of what to look out in other movements and warns us not to take ambivalence and contradictions as either an analytical failure or as a weakness of movements. Ambiguity is a strategic discursive practice which enables the movement to expand and become stronger. Critical future research therefore has to further investigate such ambivalence in a thorough and comparative manner to understand what this appealing process consists of and how to illuminate and, if it needs to be, to confront it. Only then can we contribute to the fortification of civil society and its defense against uncivil significations of society.

## References

- Albrecht, N. (2002). Die Macht einer Verleumdungskampagne. Antidemokratische Agitationen der Presse und Justiz gegen die Weimarer Republik und ihren ersten Reichspräsidenten Friedrich Ebert vom „Badebild“ bis zum Magdeburger Prozeß. Retrieved May 20, 2016, from <http://d-nb.info/965571114/34>
- Althusser, L. (2014). *On The Reproduction Of Capitalism: Ideology And Ideological State Apparatuses*. London: Verso.
- Arnold, M. (2012). Erzählen. Die ethisch-politische Funktion narrativer Diskurse In: M. Arnold & G. Dressel & W. Viehöver (Eds.), *Erzählungen im Öffentlichen: Über die Wirkung narrativer Diskurse* (p. 17-64). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Blumer, H. (1954). What is wrong with social theory? *American Sociological Review*, 18, p. 3-10.
- Botsch, G. & Kopke, C. (2009): *Die NPD und ihr Milieu. Studien und Berichte*. Münster: Klemm & Oelschläger.
- Corbin, J. & Strauss, A.L. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. (3. Ed.). New York: Sage.
- Glaser, G.B. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Greimas, J.G. (1983). *Structural Semantics. An Attempt at a Method*. Nebraska: University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1989). *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Science*. London: Routledge.
- Haller, G. (2015). „Lügenpresse!“ – Ein neuer alter Kampftruf. Retrieved May 20, 2016, from <http://diepresse.com/home/zeitgeschichte/4628933/Lugenpresse-Ein-neuer-alter-Kampftruf>
- Häder, M. (2015). *Empirische Sozialforschung. Eine Einführung*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Hitzler, Ronald & Reichertz, J. & Schröer, N. (Eds.) (1999). *Hermeneutische Wissenssoziologie*. Konstanz: UVK-Verlag.
- Keller, R. (2008). *Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse. Grundlegung eines Forschungsprogramms*. (2. Ed.). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Keller, R. (2011). *The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse*. *Human Studies*, 34, p. 43-65.
- Keller, R. (2012). Der menschliche Faktor. Über Akteur(inn)en, Sprecher(inn)en, Subjektpositionen und Subjektivierungsweisen in der Wissenssoziologischen Diskursanalyse In: R. Keller & W. Schneider & W. Viehöver (Eds.), *Diskurs – Macht – Subjekt. Theorie und Empirie von Subjektivierung in der Diskursforschung* (p. 69-107). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Keller, R. (2013). Zur Praxis der Wissenssoziologischen Diskursanalyse In: R. Keller & I. Truschkat (Eds.), *Methodologie und Praxis der Wissenssoziologischen Diskursanalyse. Band 1: Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven* (p. 27-68). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.
- Mattern, J. (1996). Ricœur. Zur Einführung. Hamburg: Junius.
- Nolte, Ernst 2008: *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche: Action française · Italienischer Faschismus Nationalsozialismus*. München: Piper.
- Nonhoff, M. & Gronau, J. (2012). Die Freiheit des Subjekts im Diskurs. Anmerkungen zu einem Verhältnis der Gleichursprünglichkeit In: R. Keller & W. Schneider & W. Viehöver, (Eds.), *Diskurs – Macht – Subjekt. Theorie und Empirie von Subjektivierung in der Diskursforschung* (p. 109-130). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Ricœur, P. (2005). *Das Selbst als ein Anderer*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink.
- Sternhell, Z. (1999): *Die Entstehung der faschistischen Ideologie. Von Sorel zu Mussolini*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition.
- Strübing, J. (2014): *Grounded Theory. Zur sozialtheoretischen und epistemologischen Fundierung eines pragmatischen Forschungsstils*. (3. Ed.). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Ulrich, P. (2012). Kulturvergleich, diskursive Gelegenheitsstrukturen und linke Nahostdiskurse. Entwurf einer wissenssoziologischen und diskurstheoretischen Perspektive für die Protestforschung In: R. Keller & I. Truschkat (Eds.), *Methodologie und Praxis der Wissenssoziologischen Diskursanalyse. Band 1: Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven* (p. 315-338).



Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Viehöver, W. (2011). Diskurse als Narrationen  
 In: R. Keller & A. Hirsland & W. Schneider  
 & W. Viehöver (Hrsg.): Handbuch  
 Sozialwissenschaftliche Diskursanalyse: Band  
 1: Theorien und Methoden (p. 177-206).  
 Wiesbaden: Springer VS.