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Bridging language barriers, bonding against immigrants: A visual case study of transnational network publics created by far-right activists in Europe

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Abstract

With the growing importance of digital and social media, visual images represent an increasingly attractive medium for far-right political entrepreneurs to mobilize supporters and mainstream voters in the context of increasing polarization and widespread fears of immigrants and refugees. This article investigates how far-right activists use cartoon images poking fun at immigrants to construct a shared ethno-nationalist bond of solidarity across multilingual and transnational networks and publics. Focusing on right-wing activists as political entrepreneurs, I will explore the visual and discursive translation of nationalist symbols and cartoons within different national political contexts and across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Combining the discourse historical approach (DHA) with multimodal analysis, I will trace the cross-cultural translation and sharing of an anti-immigrant poster created by the Swiss People's Party (SVP), a right-wing political party in Switzerland, in its controversial 'black sheep' campaign. Second, I will show how far-right sympathizers in Italy and Germany, inspired by the SVP, created their own 'black sheep' cartoons in which they imagine a racist bond of transnational solidarity through the use of images depicting immigrants as Europe's *other*. This article contributes to the study of transnational network publics by showing the relevance of non-verbal and visual translation strategies used by radical right-wing political entrepreneurs to forge stronger alliances cross-nationally and cross-linguistically.

Keywords

Anti-immigrant images, far-right political activists, linguistic boundaries, translation

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Introduction

Current scholarly and political debates on the rise of the far-right in Europe have shown the broadening impact of populist and anti-immigrant parties in European countries (Berezin, 2009; Caiani et al., 2012; Langenohl, 2013; Wodak and Richardson, 2013). Within a context of increasing economic and political instability linked largely to the Eurozone crisis and the arrival of refugees from the Middle East, the far right has gained leverage across the European Union (EU) (Wodak, 2015). Studies of the slow yet constant rise of the right across several decades show that extreme-right political parties such as Front National in France or Lega Nord in Italy have modernized their political discourse, mainstreamed their programs and, playing upon fear and resentment of immigrants, aroused the sympathy of middle-class voters (Ruzza and Fella, 2009). Throughout Europe, radical right-wing political parties have adopted increasingly subtle rhetoric, including 'coded' forms of racism (Wodak, 2013: 25). This transformation has led to electoral success and mainstream appeal. This 'new racism' employs sophisticated rhetorical strategies, including metaphors, metonymies and visual devices (Richardson and Colombo, 2014: 489). Although populist anti-immigration parties routinely deny connections to the extreme right, the analysis of their visual communication strategies provides a more nuanced perspective.

Research on far-right political discourse has revealed sophisticated use and transnational diffusion of visual communication strategies. Populist right-wing political parties disseminate controversial posters or stigmatizing symbols of immigrants within their national or local campaigns, which are then shared widely and adapted by far-right and extremist parties and activists across Europe (Betz, 2013; Kallis, 2013; Richardson and Colombo, 2014; Richardson and Wodak, 2009a, 2009b; Van Leeuwen and Jaworski, 2002). For example, using gendered figures stigmatizing male immigrants as perpetrators of crime, the election posters of far-right political parties construct a narrative of threat with anti-intellectual appeals to 'common sense' (Richardson and Wodak, 2009b: 58). They employ polarizing images to construct national identity through a 'discourse of fear' (Wodak, 2013: 27).

Although each of these parties appeals to a specific national context, they all share the systematic strategy of visual or symbolic media provocation that speaks to multiple audiences. The use of visual images to reinforce anti-immigrant discourse serves as a means for right-wing groups to bond with their constituents, while eliding actual social and cultural differences within differentiated national audiences (Machin and Richardson, 2012). Consequently, they secure media attention that ultimately shapes mainstream political discourse (Richardson and Wodak, 2009a). Media provocation starts with a party official or publisher sending a scandalous double message that includes more or less subtle racist connotations to their national media audiences, then, in a second step, adds a 'quasi apology', while also dramatizing their own role as a 'victim' of the establishment (Wodak, 2013: 32).

My aim in this article is to trace how far-right political entrepreneurs forge alliances against immigration cross-nationally and cross-linguistically by creating posters and visual media able to reach new audiences in different countries. A good example of the electoral success and transnational appeal of this 'new racism' and its provocative use of visual media is the Swiss People's Party (SVP). Richardson and Colombo (2014) characterize the SVP as one of the most powerful far-right political parties in Western Europe, arguing that its political success stems from a 'new racism' that is 'more and more subtle' in both its expression

and support (p. 488). What makes the SVP an interesting case for analysis is that its regular national poster campaigns, designed for a multilingual Swiss audience, were highly attractive to a broader, multilingual *European* audience of sympathizers. For example, contributing to an ongoing polemic regarding the arrival of refugees in Germany and Western Europe, the SVP in February 2016 stirred a provocative international media campaign to further push the criminalization and deportation of immigrants and refugees accused of acts of sexual violence, repeating the party's previous claims (Ritter 2016). Previous work on transnational political communication in the context of the EU shows that language barriers create cultural challenges for citizens communicating online across different countries (Doerr, 2010; Doerr and Mattoni, 2014). However, the visual side of political mobilization – which potentially allows activists to overcome language barriers through visual communication strategies and social media – has been neglected (Flam and Doerr, 2015). The SVP's professional visual media strategy makes them a model admired and celebrated by far-right and right-populist political parties across Europe (Kallis, 2013: 55).

The SVP sparked an international controversy over its racist 'black sheep' poster, a cartoon campaign originally created for the 2007 Swiss parliamentary elections. This poster was initially disseminated online via blogs and social networks in Switzerland, where the SVP campaigned for 'criminal' immigrants and foreigners living in Switzerland to be deported after serving their sentences.[1] Following a successful national referendum campaign, the SVP's initiative also advocated discussion of a further step to deport entire families of minors who committed crimes.[2] The original poster for the SVP's national election campaign shows three white sheep standing on the Swiss flag as one of them kicks a single black sheep away (see figure 1).

Because of its cartoon style and use of stereotypical images of black and white sheep, the 'black sheep' poster triggered an international media controversy over racism, something that the SVP and its visual designers likely expected to happen (Langenohl, 2013).[3] Figure 1 shows the SVP poster, with the moderate title of 'in favor of more security' (*German*: 'Für mehr Sicherheit'). More radical, the bold slogan in the upper part of the poster explicitly credits the authorship of the poster as the 'People's Initiative for the Deportation of Criminal Foreigners' (*German*: 'Volksinitiative für die Ausweisung krimineller Ausländer').

Although the SVP has constructed several campaign images denigrating immigrants, its 2007 black sheep poster is of particular importance because of its success in infiltrating the mainstream and thus becoming a model for efficient propaganda. It has been widely imitated by far-right and populist-right political parties and activists across Western Europe (Betz, 2013; Kallis, 2013; Langenohl, 2013; Richardson and Colombo, 2014). Following its initial black sheep campaign, the SVP used another poster campaign promoting a ban of minarets in Switzerland in 2009. Again, they presented similarly racist images, this time of Muslims, and received widespread international acclaim among far-right political parties (Kallis, 2013). For each of these campaigns, Betz (2013) shows, SVP party officials denied any connection to racism.

In their most recent campaign, during the widespread public debates and right-wing mobilizations of the European refugee crisis, the SVP in February 2016 published a novel version of the original black sheep poster. The 2016 version uses the same graphic content as figure 1 with a new, radicalized title: 'Finally more security' (*German*: 'Endlich Sicherheit schaffen'). By adding the notion 'finally' to the title, the text suggests the

Figure 1. SVP 'Black Sheep' poster motive. A 2007 campaign poster.
Source: http://www.ithaca.edu/depts/i/Swiss_Peoples_Party,_Creating_Security,_2007/14381_photo.jpg (accessed 1 November 2016).

'urgency' of imposing restrictive legal measures to expel 'criminal foreigners'. Like the original poster, the most recent black sheep campaign helped the SVP mobilize widespread popular support for legal measures to expel immigrants convicted of minor offenses and to restrict their access to legal aid.[4]

Following on from the initial black sheep poster campaign, the 2010 SVP referendum to automatically deport 'foreign criminals' was approved by over 50% of Swiss voters (Richardson and Colombo, 2014). The electoral success of the SVP stems from 'a popular, generally understood visual language which works perfectly in political communication, due to its visual simplification' (Richardson and Colombo, 2014: 489). Because they contain very few words, the SVP posters communicate their basic messages visually and instantly, creating a strong resonance and connection to collective visual memory (Richardson and Colombo, 2014). Through its media strategy and entailed political success in reaching out to the mainstream, the SVP plays a dominant role in mobilization, networking and collaboration within the radical right in Switzerland, although party officials deny this (Helbling, 2010; Skenderovic, 2009). SVP members also mobilize transnational alliances against immigrants using social media and participate in international summits against Muslims, broadening and deepening their transnational audience and connections (Betz, 2013; Kallis, 2013).

Given the reluctance of mainstream media to report on radical political activist groups, it is in *transnational social networks* where political mobilization on the right may increasingly take place (Caiani, 2009; Caiani et al., 2012). As Caiani (2014) shows, the Internet allows political parties and their extremist supporters to build an increasingly deep and connected right-wing political space. Following Caiani (2014), I conceive of

political entrepreneurs on the far-right in Europe as a broad spectrum of groups, including members of populist-right political parties and anti-immigrant activist groups, from neo-Nazi groups, cultural associations, revisionists, publishers, to subcultural youth organizations. Visual and digital media facilitate communication through *transnational network publics* (Ikegami, 2005) and connect a multiplicity of political actors interacting in various, partly overlapping and partly multilingual, communication channels. Beyond a discursive theory of the public space that addresses verbal or text-based cognitive linguistic deliberation (Habermas, 2001), my goal is to explore how far-right political groups use the aesthetic and visual dimension of transnational network publics for their political activism (Ikegami, 2005; Olesen, 2005, 2015).

The black sheep poster campaign is a good case to illustrate the outstanding transnational and national impact of the SVP as a political entrepreneur, using subtle forms of racism to provoke the media through a sophisticated visual set of images. Scholars have discussed the SVP as a model case for the transnational diffusion and adoption of radical right-wing ideas across Europe (Kallis, 2013: 55). Kallis (2013) discusses how the Swiss SVP and the Italian Lega Nord emerged as 'power brokers' in their respective national political contexts, influencing the 'gradual mainstream' of other far-right political parties in other national contexts (p. 55). Official far-right political parties such as the Italian regional party Lega Nord and the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD) in Germany publicized the SVP poster in their blogs and in local solidarity campaigns, thereby creating their own black sheep posters and translations celebrating ethno-nationalist solidarity among anti-immigrant parties in different European countries. In Italy, well-known extreme right-wing politicians made controversial TV appearances, in which they framed themselves and the SVP as the 'true' victims of immigration in Europe (cf. Ruzza and Fella, 2009). Printing and promoting their own 'black sheep' t-shirts and items, party members and activists used the black sheep campaign in the name of their own regionalist separatist party ideology (cf. Bar On, 2013). German neo-Nazi activists did more than their Italian counterparts. Going beyond solidarity expression, regional NPD party activists in the federal state of Hessen created their own local black sheep cartoon posters, radicalizing the original text of the SVP's poster.

The following figures show posters by regionalist nationalist parties in Italy (Lega Nord) and Germany (NPD Hessen), constructing their own local black sheep posters inspired by the SVP's poster (see following figures).

In my empirical analysis I will combine several steps of multimodal analysis and cross-national comparison to explore the posters in figures 2 and 3 as well as other visuals and text slogans created by Italian and German far-right activists that imagine a bond of solidarity among right-wing activists in different European countries. I focus on the Italian Lega Nord as a regionalist party in Northern Italy mobilizing against immigrants and European integration (Bar On, 2013; Berezin, 2009; Ruzza and Fella, 2009). In comparison to the fairly established Swiss SVP and the Italian Lega Nord, my third case, the German-based NPD, is at the political fringes. The NPD is Germany's best-known extremist neo-Nazi party, and it has been permanently watched by German authorities for its anti-constitutional activities (Posch et al., 2013).[5]

Addressing the role of images versus texts, I combine multimodal approaches of qualitative research to study how far-right activists use and *translate* visual cartoons to

Figure 2. Left: Lega Nord, Italy.
See also the comment of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ)*, December 6, 2007.
Figure 3. Right: NPD, Germany.
Source: http://www.20min.ch/schweiz/news/story/12687753, accessed last indirectly as displayed via Google, January 1, 2015.

construct a bond of solidarity among ethno-nationalist groups. By *translation*, I mean the role of non-verbal and visual translation processes within transnational, multilingual public spaces created by political activists to mobilize protest against immigration. I will compare the visual images and discursive translation strategies used by right-wing party activists, bloggers and sympathizers in Germany and Italy who enthusiastically translated and recontextualized the SVP's black sheep posters in their different national and local political contexts. I will exclusively focus on practices of cross-cultural and intersemiotic translations of the black sheep poster symbol from one national context to another and from image into text. I follow Jakobson (2000 [1950]), who defines intersemiotic translation as 'an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems' (p. 115).

The combined analysis of visual images together with verbal and written discourse is of theoretical interest for understanding the construction and bridging of boundaries within Europe's multilingual public sphere (Flam and Doerr, 2015). Cartoons in particular are used as a medium to enact a 'border politics' in which immigrants become *othered* as 'third nationals' (Wodak and Boukala, 2015: 258). I conceive of cartoons or comics as a particularly interesting research subject for the study of intersemiotic translation. As a *genre*, comics combine visual *and* written discursive elements that are open for multiple interpretations, misunderstandings and cultural translation problems (Forchtner et al., 2013). In that perspective, the case of the SVP poster invites us to study the conditions and (discursive) practices by which far-right activists construct 'boundary ideologies', to distinguish between 'us' and 'them' (Lamont and Mólnar, 2002: 188) and rely on visual images shared with transnational network publics.

Contributing to studies on ethnic boundary work, my case study will empirically explore how right-wing activists shared and visually translated images in their transnational network publics by crossing linguistic boundaries, while simultaneously upholding ethnonationalist political boundaries toward immigrants and non-right-wing groups. Sociologists studying boundary work show how people construct solidarity by crossing linguistic boundaries, while maintaining nationalistic ones (Lamont and Mólnar, 2002). While work on ethnic and national boundaries has challenged the idea that national public spheres provide natural (linguistic) homogeneous discourse arenas (Gal, 2006), little is known about the remaking of ethnic boundaries in transnational networks (Bauböck, 2007; Lamont and Mólnar, 2002). I will analyze how extremist posters construct borders between immigrants and their target groups, while at the same time mobilizing audiences transnationally.

In discussing three different black sheep poster campaigns by the SVP, the NPD and the Lega Nord, I will make several arguments. First, a critical visual analysis of online media contributes to a better understanding of the political impact that nationalist domestic political actors can have within transnational and even multilingual publics. Second, one must conceive of visual images as an increasingly relevant media of cross-cultural communication used by extremist political actors and anti-immigrant groups to create political alliances in multilingual transnational publics. In my analysis, I will show that the actual textual content of the SVP poster campaign produced new and varying place-specific political posters in Italy and Germany. In contrast, the visual translation process was rapid and did not require much editing of existing posters. The case of the SVP poster campaign shows how political entrepreneurs use visual communication to overcome the known restrictions of multilingual verbal political communication, spreading their contentious messages across countries and international audiences.

Multimodal analysis and the discourse historical approach

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, political discourse is a *multimodal* form of communication, including visual and verbal, text-based and multiple other modes of communication (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Based on the visual turn in the fields of rhetoric, literary criticism, persuasion and linguistics, several scholars have used multimodal discourse analyses to study visuals as *texts*. Richardson and Wodak (2009a) propose a multimodal methodology that combines the discourse historical approach (DHA) with argumentation theory and visual grammar. They study racist visual meanings in political leaflets of Austrian and British far-right parties. The analysis of 'visual rhetoric', as Richardson and Wodak (2009b) demonstrate, includes deconstructing the multiple layers of meaning and the distinct ambiguity that characterize combined visual and discursive visual communication processes (pp. 50–51). For instance, textual elements of posters may support an image, or they might use 'vague and ambiguous' notions that avoid explicit racist claims (Richardson and Wodak, 2009b: 69). This makes it possible for poster producers to claim that their message is not racist.

In the perspective of DHA, I propose to analyze how radical right-wing parties in different countries use posters to construct 'political imaginaries', representing different imaginary historical pasts and identity narratives (Wodak, 2013: 26). Political activists and poster designers employ specific visual elements and colors to create and maintain

aesthetic contrast between different groups, imagining visual boundaries or other similarities that may be recognized and interpreted contentiously by audiences in specific political contexts (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). Drawing on multimodal analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006), I will critically analyze the visual composition of black sheep cartoons, focusing on 'pictorial framing devices' and studying 'continuities and similarities of color and visual shape' as well as 'empty space between elements' (p. 78ff). At the in-depth level, my discursive analysis will focus on cross-cultural translation as a set of visual and/or discursive practices in transnational network public spaces created by social or political activists, whose aim is the mobilization of sympathizers in other countries (Doerr, 2010).

Combining multimodal analysis with a DHA approach, I restrict my *in-depth analysis* on deconstructing multiple levels of political and historical *context*, including the *genre* of the posters, their content, the broader *socio-historical political context* and a specific text (*text-internal co-text*), as well as discourses and texts that have influenced the posters (*intertextual and interdiscursive* relations) (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: 40ff). What makes cartoons a *genre* traditionally used for propaganda purposes is their particular culturally-coded humoristic capacity that appeals to a particular place-specific audience. The coding includes dichotomizing 'enemy images' that make fun of other cultures or groups (Forchtner et al., 2013). At the visual level, these *border politics* (Wodak, 2015) play out in colors and establish a contrast between white and black as salient features in marking 'good' and 'bad' (p. 74). Given my interest in boundary making strategies, I will also explore the construction of borders in the context visual design of the posters, including, for example, nationalistic and chauvinistic symbolism in the display of flags (Billig 1995). This interdisciplinary research perspective allows an analysis of how right-wing populist political parties combine visual images and text-based arguments to reference and allude in more or less subtle ways to Nazi iconography and the discourse of ethnic cleansing and genocide (Richardson and Wodak, 2009b: 55).

In my data analysis, I considered the limitations of a study that explores radical right-wing political activism through the Internet-based data (Caiani and della Porta, 2011, 2014). Far-right activists use the Internet as a highly important, anonymous public space for transnational or even global communication (Caiani, 2014; Caiani et al., 2012). Moreover, one particular challenge of sampling on the web was that the far-right activist bloggers and groups I study created, modified and further diffused visual images displayed online using changing webpages. Considering the particular characteristics and volatility of right-wing activist groups, I assume that my analysis of images shared by far-right-wing activists cannot reveal the true identity and relationships between these groups, nor can I specify the fluid boundaries of a right-wing movement (Caiani, 2014). My sample includes only images found through Google searches using the words 'black sheep poster' and 'SVP', 'Lega Nord' and 'NPD', considering English, German and Italian entries. These searches yielded 98 relevant images. The images were found on webpages and blogs by the groups associated with the cases studied. From this broader sample I constructed a theoretical sample that included only images with a clear 'black sheep' theme, since I was interested in tracing the sharing and translation of the black sheep poster. In terms of coding the sample of visuals, I do not assume that the same image used by different activist groups in different countries would necessarily represent

the same political meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006; Müller et al., 2009). Given the contextual concerns that impact visual analysis, it is thus necessary to complement visual methods and data with text-based methods and analysis of news media discourses related to the case.

Situating transnational network publics within specific national contexts

My selection of three Western European countries allows me to trace how right-wing activists translate cartoons about immigration in Europe in both multilingual and monolingual national contexts (Switzerland is multilingual, Germany and Italy are monolingual). First, the target of the original SVP black sheep campaign was part of a national, multilingual political context with several sub-publics, including the French- and German-speaking parts of Switzerland. For the Swiss national political context, I take into consideration the distinct direct democratic political context of Switzerland, which, in comparison to other European countries, encourages close informal networks of cooperation between extreme-right activist groups and established populist right-wing parties such as the SVP. Skenderovic shows the fluid overlap between SVP and extreme-right activist groups within Switzerland through socialization, joint political events and concrete endorsement within elections and extreme right-wing publications since the 1980s and 1990s (Skenderovic, 2009). SVP officials ambiguously relate to grassroots far-right activists, developing a joint transnational populist rhetoric through common networks (Betz, 2013).

At the core of the transnational community of sympathizers connected to spreading the poster were neo-Nazis in Switzerland and internationally. As my theoretical interest is to understand cross-national translation of visual images in transnational network publics, I focus on Italy and Germany. Both are direct neighboring countries to Switzerland, yet both are also situated within the transnational political context, that is, the EU. Connected to the SVP, far-right grassroots activists and party officials in Italy use efficient channels of communication and networking, including local and transnational meetings, online communication and mutual quotation (Ruzza and Fella, 2009). While linguistically distinct, the groups in Italy and Germany are both associated with right-wing political parties embedded within longstanding histories of fascism, anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant mobilization (Bar On, 2013; Caiani et al., 2012). I will consider these differences in order to understand how and through which images and linguistic practices far-right activists contest official boundaries of citizenship or concepts of immigration through the use of contentious visual performances (Tilly, 2004).

In the following section I proceed in three steps. First, I analyze the SVP poster and its cross-cultural and linguistic translation into the French- and German-speaking parts of Switzerland. Second, I analyze the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural translation of the original SVP poster by the Lega Nord. Third is the creation of a Euro-nationalist poster, combining posters by the NPD, the SVP and the Lega Nord. For each case, I explore first how the anti-immigration discourse by far-right groups figures within the color semiotics, visual aesthetic representations and texts (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). Second, I look at the symbolic and iconographic meaning of ‘black sheep’ images in my data

sample to consider their national historical context of creation, as well as patterns of translation and recontextualization within different national and local contexts (Richardson and Colombo, 2014). Third, I compare and contrast diverse sets of meanings found in different visual and/or discursive media and in the different national contexts in which my cases are embedded.

Findings: The 'black sheep' and ethno-nationalist bonding against immigrants

On 8 October 2007, a *New York Times* reporter visited a local rally in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The reporter commented on the SVP's controversial poster as follows:

> The poster is not the creation of a fringe movement, but of the most powerful party in Switzerland's federal Parliament and a member of the coalition government […]. As voters prepare to go to the polls in a general election on Oct. 21, the poster – and the party's underlying message – have polarized a country that prides itself on peaceful consensus in politics, neutrality in foreign policy and tolerance in human relations.[6]

Interviewed by the *New York Times*, an SVP candidate explained that the 'black sheep' was not a racist symbol but instead 'just gives a simple message', illustrating the SVP's policy toward immigrants: 'The black sheep is not any black sheep that doesn't fit into the family. It's the foreign criminal who doesn't belong here, the one that doesn't obey Swiss law. We don't want him.'[7]

While SVP politicians themselves officially denied their intention to offend immigrants in general with their propaganda poster, a cursory visual content analysis shows that the poster uses flashy black and white colors, a cartoon performative-style and strong visual action at its center. A group of white sheep 'kicks out' a 'black sheep', which symbolizes, in the words of an SVP candidate for parliament, a 'criminal foreigner'.[8] Importantly, the central poster motive sheep is embedded in the immediate visual context of the red Swiss national flag, a nationalist symbol.

The figures (see later) show the SVP posters as displayed in public spaces within Switzerland (on the left in German, and on the right in French). The visual dimension of the poster constructs a strong dichotomy, a graphic boundary between White and Black, Swiss citizens and 'criminal' foreigners. At the level of visual composition, this dichotomous bonding-and-boundary-making strategy is further emphasized through the use of intense colors. The red flag emphasizes the White group of 'Swiss' citizens, while 'criminal foreigners' are associated with the symbolically loaded 'black sheep' stereotype.

The impact of this poster is created through the use of colors that are simplistic and vivid, thus evoking a sensory truth criterion (Van Leeuwen, 2011). In other words, the color use and display of sheep figures goes beyond the criterion of natural expression, and through this constructs meaning based on the 'effect of pleasure or displeasure created by visual representation' (Van Leeuwen, 2011: 22). In the perspective of color semiotics, color may simultaneously 'convey ideational, interpersonal or textual meanings', while at the same time a color can communicate one meaning dominantly over other

meanings which complement each other (Van Leeuwen, 2011: 96). On one level, this vivid color composition uses the opposition of black and white to market the cartoon. However, additional political meanings are implied through the political iconography of radical right-wing political parties, wherein black and white stand for different groups. White thus stands for a homogeneous imagined homeland (*Heimat*) (Wodak, 2013: 25). In this myth of the nation, racist argumentation is not spelled out explicitly at the linguistic level, but the ambiguous visual representation symbolizes the construction of borders through explicit color codes (Richardson and Wodak, 2009a: 73).

In analyzing the immediate visual context of the SVP poster and the *interdiscursive and intertextual* relationships between the cartoon and the other visual devices, it is interesting to note that the cartoon connects the Christian cross of the Swiss flag with the historical and archetypical religious black sheep metaphor. Both the cross and the black sheep can be associated with traditional Christian myths, and with an essentialist and supremacist narrative of Europe's Christian identity and fight against non-Christian, non-White and non-European *others* such as those who practice Islam and Judaism. The image stereotypes and criminalizes immigrants as Europe's 'black sheep', a characteristic *other* to an imaginary 'white' citizenship (Wodak, 2013). The portrayal of immigrants as animals is supposedly 'just making fun', yet the use of an offensive cartoon style and dehumanization is a well-known discursive strategy used by racist and anti-Semitic groups (Wodak, 2013).

The cartoon poster *genre* that the SVP party strategists chose uses a simultaneously racist and humoristic mocking style. At the *interdiscursive* level, the cartoon seems to recall and evoke the broader historical context of Swiss radical democratic tradition. Moreover, the discourse of Swiss democracy is embodied by the group of 'white sheep' who take 'direct action' against a 'black sheep' in the 'absence' of a 'shepherd'. Through the dichotomous representation of black and white sheep, the poster design draws an emotional 'us and them' cultural boundary between those who are being made fun of and those who can enjoy racist humor as 'fun' (Wettergren, 2009). In this perspective, we can interpret the SVP poster as a comic narrative in which a herd of white sheep takes an active and heroic nationalist role in having the 'courage' to push out the black sheep (Forchtner et al., 2013: 218). By combining multiple symbolic dimensions in one poster, professional SVP campaign designers produced an image that strongly resonated with collective memory and connected several racist, ethno-nationalist and religious discourses. While the 2007 'black sheep' poster passes as a somewhat ambiguous image, the SVP issued a second series of explicitly racist posters for a referendum campaign against mosques in 2009 (Langenohl, 2013).

While the cartoon content of the two SVP posters (Figures 4 and 5) created by SVP party professionals and professional designers is similar, the analysis of written discourse shows a theoretically interesting process of cultural translation within the two different linguistic parts of Switzerland. Because the public space of Switzerland is multilingual, the SVP campaign designers had to translate the meaning of the poster into different linguistic and cultural contexts – a translation process which slightly changed the poster's meaning.

The French translation of the German poster text 'For more security' (*French: Pour plus de sécurité*) translates the party name of the German-speaking 'SVP' into the SVP's

Figure 4. The Black Sheep campaign: SVP posters displayed in Switzerland.
Source: poster on the left, in German: http://newsdesk.org/2010/08/03/swiss-party-seeks-to-expel-foreign-criminals/ (accessed 1 January 2015).
Figure 5. The Black Sheep campaign: SVP posters displayed in Switzerland.
Source: poster on the right, in French: tafel.levillage.org (accessed 1 January 2015).

French party name 'UDC' (*French: Union démocratique du centre*) while, however, omitting the radical message in the German poster. The translation of the SVP's German language poster (Figure 1) into the French-speaking parts of Switzerland deradicalizes the tone and also lacks the authorship of the poster as a 'people's initiative', or a grass-roots referendum campaign to 'deport criminal foreigners'. In speculating on the differences of this cross-cultural and cross-linguistic translation process, it is possible that the absence of the word 'deportation' in the French translation is no accident. *Deportation* continues to be associated with the Holocaust, which involved German-authored national socialism and the collaboration by the Vichy regime in France (Berezin, 2009). In Austria, Hungary and Greece, right-wing political parties have used similar cartoon and/or visual images to construct stereotypes and metaphors criminalizing immigrants as enemies of the nation (Wodak, 2013).

The second case study, that of the black sheep cartoons created by the Italian Lega Nord, shows a more expansive process of cross-cultural translation. The Lega Nord was key in promoting and popularizing the SVP poster through national television programs and local party rallies. However, Lega Nord campaign designers changed both the visual color and symbolic content of the original poster. The separatist party journal 'la Padania' printed the following poster on page two (see Figure 6).

In analyzing the visual content of the poster in figure 6, I focus on the elements of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic translation compared to the original SVP poster in figures 4 and 5. A change of meaning in the Lega Nord's visual translation occurs through the recontextualization in color and visual devices that appear in the immediate context of the 'black sheep'. The Lega Nord poster replaces the Swiss flag and its red cross with the symbolism of the wheel, and with the green color regionalist separatist party identity of the northern Italian Lega Nord. Lega Nord activists thus combine their parochial and specific symbols with universalist 'black sheep' stereotyping of immigrants, a strategy

Figure 6. Black Sheep poster designed by the Italian Lega Nord.[9]

used to modernize and connect transnationally to the fascist and local roots of Lega Nord (Caiani et al., 2012; Ruzza and Fella, 2009). Note, importantly, that besides these small aesthetic adaptations, the violent eviction of the black sheep remains the same.

Regarding the broader context, it is also important to consider the particular national audience addressed and, in comparison to the SVP, the varying degrees of professionalism by which the Lega Nord communicated its message to a specific sub-national audience. Including neo-Nazi groups that also form part of the Lega Nord party clientele, the poster subtitle of 'We only give residence to honest foreigners who work' resonates with historical fascist discourses about work and homeland in Italy (Berezin, 2009).[10] The term 'honest foreigner' is important as it constructs a homogeneous and unified symbolic bond between all Italian citizens, eliding internal economic and cultural divisions (cf. Machin and Richardson, 2012), and historical boundaries between Southern Italian migrants and Northern Italians (Ruzza and Fella, 2009). However, this slogan stands in contrast to the immediate *co-text* of the other visual devices used to construct a visual boundary between different audiences; for instance, the Lega Nord uses its particular regional flag, distinguishing a boundary and its affirmed superiority in regards to the rest of Italy (Bar On, 2013). This specific flag reduces the political symbolism of the poster to a specific local political context. While reflecting the Lega's separatist and place-specific political discourse, the separatist flag also limits the potential appeal of the poster to broader transnational audiences who may not be able to recognize the flag. This regionalist separatist discourse is in contrast to the more subtle visual racism and professionalized rhetoric that helped the SVP to reach out to broader multilingual (transnational) audiences, including both extreme rightist and mainstream supporters in the different linguistic sub-publics of Switzerland (cf. Skenderovic, 2009).

Addressing the current political context of anti-immigration discourse (Richardson and Wodak, 2009a), the Lega Nord translation links the Swiss discourse about security to its own separatist party identity and its different groups of regional sympathizers and national audiences in Italy. Using a subtly racist message, the symbolic action on the Lega Nord poster is framed as 'Security Lessons from the North', which leaves somewhat ambiguous who exactly is the author of these security lessons, and what is meant by the black sheep. 'Lessons from the North' may stand for both the SVP in the geographic North of Switzerland and the northern regional separatist party identity of the Lega Nord. Indeed, the above visual appears as a figure supporting an article by party president Umberto Bossi, written in the party journal and formulated in order to toughen policies toward foreigners in Italy. Image and *co-text* mutually support each other. The humorous notion of 'security lessons' from the North constructs an imaginary boundary between those who can laugh about harsh 'Security Lessons from the North' directed against 'foreigners' and those who may be affected by them. Moreover, the poster text also appeals to the discourse of the homeland, entitled 'Security at home' (*Italian: Sicuri a casa nostra*). While veiling the history of Italian immigration to other countries (Choate, 2008), the discourse of 'home' here relates to a law and order discourse that may be directed against migrants from both Southern Italy and abroad. This comparatively vague and ambiguous discursive translation of the 'black sheep' poster allowed Lega Nord to address a broad spectrum of socially and geographically diverse supporters and mobilize the general fear against non-European immigrants and criminals (Caiani et al., 2012).

With my third case, the German neo-Nazi party NPD, I focus on an additional cross-cultural translation process carried out by extreme right-wing NPD bloggers. Their work constructs a transnational visual bond connecting the SVP, Lega Nord and their own political party, the NPD. The following figure is a screenshot of an NPD party campaign poster put online by a blogger in support of the SVP.[11] Different regional NPD parties in eastern and western Germany reproduced the SVP poster in their own local electoral campaigns. In blogs and webpages such as the Swiss German 'RainbowNetBlog Schweiz', party supporters combined each other's posters in a collage and constructed a genuinely right-wing notion of solidarity beyond the nation state. The NPD poster repeats and combines the messages of all previous right-wing posters inspired by the SVP (see figure 7).

The image is authored by NPD and SVP grassroots sympathizers. What is first striking, as seen in the case of the Lega Nord, is how the black sheep motif changes its meaning through processes of copyediting and recontextualization in different online and offline contexts. While keeping the Swiss flag as a nationalist background motif, this poster design radicalizes the underlying racist message and content of the SVP's political message in appropriating it for the NPD's own extreme far-right idea of solidarity. In multiplying the symbolic danger as well as the potential number of enemies, the single black sheep is replaced by multiple sheep. The figure keeps most visual elements of the original SVP poster, while transposing its meaning from a national to a transnational right-wing public. The symbolic 'white sheep' in this simplistic poster are given names such as 'SVP', 'Lega Nord' and 'NPD', thus losing all ambiguity. In the process of multiple rounds of translation in online publics that created radical sympathizers, the professionalized rhetoric of new racism is thus being replaced by an extreme racist visual rhetoric that also visually accentuates and increases the binary narrative of threat by

Figure 7. Radical far-right blogs reinterpret the SVP sheep using Nazi terminology.
Source: http://blog.rainbownet.ch/category/politik-schweiz/svp/page/3

multiplying the number of 'black sheep'. The poster symbolizes an aspiration for unity between these groups that SVP right-populist party officials always denied in public by constructing the enemies of these groups as a homogenized and large group of *others*.

A converging visual aspect in all three cases is that of the black sheep are being kicked into a white space. The NPD poster case in figure 3 in particular assembles its ethno-nationalist vision of the nation state ambiguously in red, which is the color of both the Swiss flag and German historic fascism and the neo-Nazi party NPD. In contrast, the whiteness of the empty space to which political enemies are relegated can be seen to symbolize liminality, the absence of a return destination and a lack of concern for it, and/or statelessness. The exile is not to a *place*, but rather to oblivion – the ultimate, nationalistic, xenophobic dehumanization. In this dichotomous image of Europe, there is only the nation and the abyss on the outside. The simplicity of this divide seems to be an effective vehicle for cross-national 'translation'.[12]

The analysis of *interdiscursive and intertextual* elements confirms the blatantly racist linguistic translation carried out by the NPD. While the NPD poster ambiguously represents political enemies as a group of 'black sheep', the text-based translation process makes clear that the notion of black sheep also includes any political group that thinks differently from the NPD. The 'black sheep' visual appears in the immediate, text-internal *co-text* of the term 'Sippenhaft'. This term invokes a recontextualization and

radicalization of the SVP poster reaching out to place-specific extremist audiences in Germany. The German poster title 'Sippenhaft Dank SVP' and the font of the title (*English*: 'kin liability due to SVP') allude to the NPD's historic connection with national-socialist ideology. The German notion 'Sippenhaft' was a practice of criminal arrest used by Hitler's terror regime against the entire family and 'kin' of political enemies.

We can only understand the full meaning of the Nazi term 'kin liability' – and its potential to invoke a racist joke appealing to extremist audiences – if we analyze the specific socio-political and historical contexts in which the term is used (Richardson and Colombo, 2014). While the Lega Nord humorously titled the poster with 'Security Lessons from the North' addressing its regionalist sympathizers, the NPD uses the term 'Sippenhaft' to appeal to a German-speaking extremist audience (beyond Germany or Switzerland) that is able to decipher it as a code word connecting Nazi past and present SVP policy. Indeed, this poster refers to one of the most radical political claims of the SVP, that is, the expelling not only of 'criminal foreigners', but also, in the case of criminal minors, of the offender's entire family. This was a highly controversial right-wing political claim that supported replication of historic national-socialist practices of family punishment ('Sippenhaft') used toward political opponents and Jews, in defiance of human rights and EU law as adopted by Switzerland.[13] Claiming that the SVP's present anti-immigrant policy proposals are equivalent with historical nationalist-socialist ideology and practice constructs an explicit interdiscursive connection and invokes a potential future of fascist cooperation beyond national borders.

However, the unclear authorship of the poster presents a problem with the analysis. As described in the methods section, this reflects a common problem in working with visual analysis through the use of online data. Although the blog itself is situated in a Swiss German network public ('RainbowNet Schweiz'), the authorship of this third poster seems to be German, using the German phrase 'Sippenhaft dank SVP'. This use of a historical German Nazi term acts as an expression of gratitude by NPD supporters toward the SVP. The new title ('Sippenhaft'), in fact, makes a national-socialist practice the shared core of solidarity among anti-immigrant parties in different European countries.

By analyzing both written and visual translation practices, we can see that the case of the SVP poster translation illustrates how far-right political parties bridge linguistic boundaries in order to transpose the bond of ethno-nationalist solidarity to a multilingual transnational public space. Where written poster titles and slogans use specific linguistic and historic references for different, specific national or sub-national publics, the visuals analyzed construct a homogeneous bond among a group of white sheep representing racist SVP supporters, such as the NPD. As an example of boundary-making as bonding, the denigrated figure of the immigrant thus becomes the negative core, cementing an imagined ethno-nationalist bond of solidarity that connects far-right activists and populist-right political audiences across languages and national contexts.

Conclusion

This case study has traced the relevance of visual translation and of contentious cartoons created by anti-immigrant bloggers and activists in different European countries, who imagine themselves as part of an ethno-nationalist political community, including

different linguistic sub-publics of German, Italian and French-speaking right-wing groups and political parties. Due to their professionalized, simple visual design, SVP 'black sheep' posters traveled quickly through transnational network publics, reaching out to broad multilingual audiences including both mainstream voters in Switzerland as well as radical extremists in Switzerland and abroad.

I have explored the intentional political construction of anti-immigrant cartoons as an instrument of transnational solidarity translatable across different linguistic sub-publics and place-specific national or sub-national election campaigns. It is important to notice the different modes in which the discursive alliance between extremist and populist right wing parties succeeded. By creating denigrating images of immigrants as non-White, non-European and threatening 'black sheep', right-wing extremist political activists draw on a stock of historically familiar racist symbols, while officially denying any racist intention. Anti-immigration cartoons express at the visual level what cannot be said within politically correct language, and by mobilizing widespread fears, far-right parties succeed in shifting mainstream immigration discourse further to the right (Wodak, 2015). By scapegoating immigrants as societies' shared internal foe, right-wing political parties succeed in mobilizing sympathetic audiences across Europe precisely by eliding the broader context of social and economic inequality dividing these societies.

My case study shows how transnational network publics made possible a radicalization of the racist content of the original 'black sheep' poster through multiple steps of visual, cultural and linguistic translation by sympathizers and bloggers, addressing audiences beyond the Swiss context. In contrast to the comparatively more 'moderate', yet subtly racist discourse of the initial SVP poster, some right-wing sympathizers and online bloggers used explicit fascist terminology to imagine a Euro-fascist alliance between the German neo-Nazi party, the NPD, the Swiss SVP and the Italian regionalist Lega Nord. Rather than the original wording of the SVP poster, SVP visuals and symbols of foreigners as animalistic and criminalized 'black sheep' served far-right and anti-immigrant parties in different countries as a quick and spontaneous bridge-media to verbalize ethno-nationalist solidarity.

In methodological terms, my combination of multimodal analysis and DHA has confirmed the efficiency of visual images as a media to translate racist discourse across different linguistic sub-publics. Three different posters, drawing on the same visual motive, promoted a discourse of national unity and homogeneity against 'criminal foreigners'. Considering cultural and political boundaries, far-right political groups invested more work into recontextualizing and translating text slogans and linguistic terms from one national or cultural context to another, especially where some of their historically charged associations connected directly with divided national histories and memories of fascism. However, the informality and anonymity of online sites and activist blogs also allowed right-wing bloggers to further radicalize the racist subtext of the original official campaign text created by SVP politicians through the explicit use of well-known historical fascist terminology.

The question remains as to why images of the denigrated *other* can be so easily translated across linguistic boundaries and national political contexts. My analysis has shown that in at least one case, it was the most controversial parts of the campaign that were picked up and radicalized. One possible explanation for this is that offensive images travel through the emotional reaction they create (Flam and Doerr, 2015). In this respect, this case study highlights the relevance of political activists as extremist translators

behind the instrumentalization and calculated contentious translation of images within multilingual and multicultural transnational publics and social networks. In other words, the text of the SVP posters did not translate automatically. It was instead encrypted and recontextualized in particular regional and sub-national parochial codes reflecting the ideology of place-specific audiences. The Lega Nord integrated the SVP's perceived success as a transnational experience in *learning* a 'security lesson from the North' – reflecting the Lega's local discourse on policy-learning in the context of the development of restrictive (European) anti-immigrant policies. The translation by the NPD, to the contrary, included only the most radical policy proposal of the SVP connecting it to historical Nazi terminology and the NPD's future ambitions. Lega Nord used their regional separatist flag; the NPD used their Nazi terminology. While place-specific slogans did not translate across borders, images did become the carrier media for a cross-national extreme right-wing bond connecting activists in different countries.

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Notes

1. *Times*, September 21, 2007.
2. Helena Bachmann, *Times*, September 21, 2007.
3. See, for example, Sciolino, 2007; *Times*, September 21, 2007.
4. *FAZ*, February 28, 2016.
5. The NPD was established in 1964, well before the right-populist and Eurosceptic party AfD (Alternative for Germany), created in 2013.
6. *New York Times*, August 7, 2007.
7. See Note 6.
8. *New York Times*, October 8, 2007.
9. See also the comment of the *NZZ*, December 6, 2007. Visual downloaded from the far-right Swiss online journal *Der Blick* commenting on *La Padania*, January 3, 2008. http://www.blick.ch/news/ausland/lega-nord-kommt-aufs-schaf-id148447.html
10. *Italian*: 'Diamo residenza solo agli stranieri honesti che lavorano'.
11. http://blog.rainbownet.ch/category/politik-schweiz/svp/page/3
12. I am grateful to Marc Steinberg for his comment on this question.
13. See *New York Times* article, October 8, 2010.

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