POSITION PAPER

Discourses and practices of the 'New Normal'

Towards an interdisciplinary research agenda on crisis and the normalization of anti- and post-democratic action

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This position paper argues for an interdisciplinary agenda relating crises to on-going processes of normalization of anti- and post-democratic action. We call for exploring theoretically and empirically the 'new normal' logic introduced into public imagination on the back of various crises, including the recent 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe, COVID-19 pandemic, or the still ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. Gathering researchers of populism, extremism, discrimination, and other formats of anti- and post-democratic action, we propose investigating how, why, and under which conditions, discourses and practices underlying normalization processes re-emerge to challenge the liberal democratic order. We argue exploring the multiple variants of 'the new normal' related to crises, historically and more recently. We are interested in how and why these open pathways for politics of exclusion, inequality, xenophobia and other patterns of anti- and post-democratic action while deepening polarization and radicalization of society as well as propelling far-right politics and ideologies.

Keywords: crisis, the New Normal, normalization, mainstreaming, discourse, practice, far right, nativism, anti- & post-democratic action

1.   Introduction

The notion of the 'new normal' has been used repeatedly in recent years. In this way, the 'new normal' has operated under the assumption that politicians, the media and those in power possess knowledge of how a 'return to normality', as well as how the post-crisis reality, should, and would, eventually look like. Calls for re-establishment of normality – or acceptance of (prolonged) crisis situations as apparently normal – have equally been attached to recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemics accompanied by widespread public debates about its social, political and economic as well as other repercussions as 'the new normal'. In a similar way, after several weeks of the Russian 2022 invasion of Ukraine, questions emerged whether the state of war and insecurity should not be accepted as the 'new normal' for the European as well as global society.

Indeed, throughout most of the crisis-ridden and disruptive 'brief 20th century' (Judt 2005), we saw various 'normalizing' discourses and practices being closely associated with a range of crises (Kallis 2013; Triandafyllidou et al. 2009; Stråth & Wodak 2009). Such was the case with, for example, the economic crises of the 1920s and 1930s in Europe. These not only led to the enforcement of national socialism and fascism but also, once these ideologies became the 'new normal' (Vuillard 2018), they ultimately led to, at first, a rise in policies and practices of discrimination and exclusion (see e.g. various instances of active anti-semitism in the mid/late 1930s) before resulting in the atrocities of the Second World War. Indeed, historically, in that and other cases of wars, revolutions, juntas, martial law introductions and many other deeply disruptive occurrences, the 'new normal' has often been used as a powerful frame permitting authoritarian politics of violence, exclusion and even genocide to be normalized in a post-crisis manner as, not only necessary, but also acceptable (Krzyżanowski 2020a). This was evident in practically every decade of the 20th century persistently characterized by crises of various types.

Connections between crises, and discourses and practices of 'manufacturing' normality – often defined as 'normalization' – have become even more frequent and intense since the turn of the new millennium. Once introduced, they frequently allow powerful social, political, media and economic actors to stress the urgency of – and gain legitimacy for – some immediate actions and measures to be implemented (see e.g. the recent COVID-19 pandemic). However, these processes also have a salient 'by-product': a hasty identification of those who, apparently, are to 'blame' for the various crises as 'scapegoats' (Reisigl & Wodak 2001; Hansson 2015). This, in turn, eventually leads to sustained 'moral panics' (Cohen 1972; Krzyżanowski 2020b), resulting in the exclusion of various members of society from both social imaginaries and specific practices. In fact, practi-

cally every crisis since 2000 has resulted in a similar, albeit hardly new, process: building specific forms of 'stigma' (Goffman 1990; Tyler 2020) around social groups who allegedly were to blame for social problems, while simultaneously calling for the introduction of a normality that both symbolically and structurally excludes those 'others' identified 'within' as well as 'outside' an imagined community (Anderson 1991; Bauman 2016; Druxes 2020; Kovács 2010).
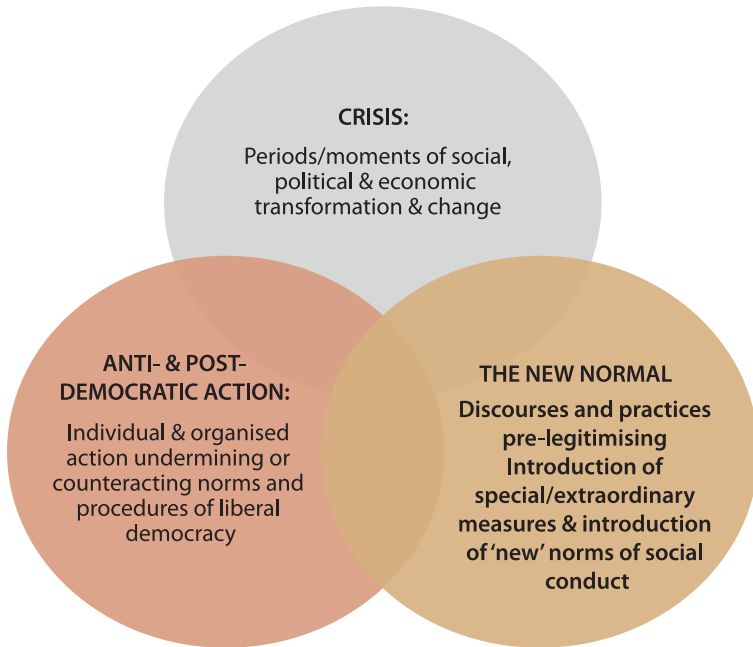
CRISIS:
Periods/moments of social, political & economic transformation & change

ANTI- & POST-DEMOCRATIC ACTION:
Individual & organised action undermining or counteracting norms and procedures of liberal democracy

THE NEW NORMAL
Discourses and practices pre-legitimising Introduction of special/extraordinary measures & introduction of 'new' norms of social conduct

Figure 1. Intersections between Crisis, the 'New Normal' and Anti- & Post-Democratic Action

What, hence, seems to be largely overlooked in the current general drive to embrace the 'new normal' logic is its in-depth as well as far-reaching propensity to forge inequality and exclusion, and to thus redefine democracy in both conceptual and practical terms. *The 'new normal', namely, is not only a recurrent post-crisis 'slogan' but, more often than not, a persistent, active hegemonic frame symptomatic of the initiation – and eventual normalization – of either dismantling or at least profound undermining of the core ideas of democratically-funded, inclusive community and liberal democracy.* Specifically, it is through this 'new normal' that various formats of anti- and post-democratic action – i.e. discourses and practices which either openly challenge democratic values and norms, or in a typically illiberal manner undermine them from 'within' – gradually and 'invisibly', yet certainly

very effectively, come to the fore prior to being distributed and accepted as part and parcel of the construction of the new 'normality' (Fournier 2019; Krzyżanowski 2020b; Laruelle 2022; Wodak 2019). As a result, crises become a vital – if not the sole or at least the major – trigger point for normalization processes which eventually undermine democracy's central values, such as the of rule of law, equality and various freedoms of speech, media and movement, to mention but a few (Cooper 2021).

Taking the above perspective and proposing our framework, we suggest looking closely at the interplay between crisis, the 'new normal' and ensuing recourse to anti- and/or post-democratic action. Therein, we are primarily interested in studying the intersections between crisis and normalization processes initiated under the 'new normal' headline while specifically looking into when, how and why crises, the 'new normal' and anti- & post-democratic action connect. We are also eager to highlight when and how the above linkage clears the way for processes of challenging or undermining the values of liberal democracy, whether in public discourse or in the closely related forms of social and political practice.

While we see crises and the 'new normal' as potentially opening ways to normalized, radical political action (e.g. in extremist and other sense), we are particularly eager to look closely at what we define as post-democratic action, i.e. political activity which is formally located within the realm of democratic procedures yet effectively – and often progressively – undermines liberal democracy's key values by normalizing uncivil, illiberal thinking and action in the wider sociopolitical domain (see Krzyżanowski & Ledin 2017; Laruelle 2022; Scheppele 2020; Sauer, Krasteva & Saarinen 2018). Indeed, given the growing entanglement of the above currents of anti- and post-democratic action – and the difficulty in separating them – we see a need for such types of analyses that embrace many hybrid and outright contradictory ideological combinations in relation to many positions on society, politics and the economy (see Figure 2 and further definitions below).

2. Scope/Focus of the suggested research agenda

We argue for a research agenda that looks at traditional realms of political action (i.e., party-politics and the media, or regulatory processes of policymaking) in close connection with such areas as, inter alia, cultural and memory politics, gender politics and wider evolving popular culture as related sites. Taking such a broad perspective would be fundamental to identifying a clear linkage between politics/media and other key social fields in which hegemonic and widely communicated visions of society and polity are produced and disseminated, especially in a crisis-related manner. As we recognize the centrality of trigger-response logic

between crises and ensuing normalization processes recurrently signalled by the 'new normal' framing, our central concern is the logic and nature of normalization processes initiated in relation to crises both historically and more recently. We hence suggest:

– looking theoretically and empirically at the differentiated pace and intensity of post 'new normal' pathways of normalization in various national and transnational contexts

– exploring why, in some cases, crisis-related normalization processes are easier to initiate and detect as well as more time/space 'compressed', and why, in case of other crises, the change is much more subtle, gradual and stretched out over time and possibly less visible (whilst not necessarily being e.g. less pervasive)

– analysing when, why and how normalization trajectories ensuing from the post-crisis 'new normal' logic are contested and why that contestation takes on ever more complex and hybrid forms.
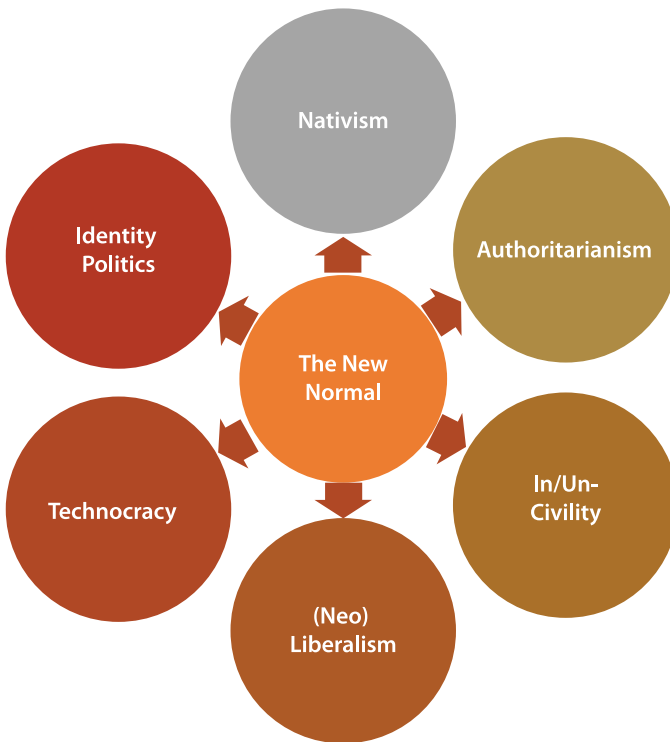

Figure 2. The 'New Normal' and its Ideological, Discursive-Practical Connections with Various Dimensions of Anti- & Post-Democratic Action

We argue that, especially in recent years, a notable acceleration in normalization processes in relation to crises has been afforded by processes of 'mediatization' and 'digitization' connecting traditionally separate fields of politics, society, and the media with wider popular culture, in addition to creating a more decentralized public (incl. semi-public) sphere/s (Alvares & Dahlgren 2016). In combination, and fuelled by various facets of 'politicization' (Ellul 1967/1977; Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou & Wodak 2018; Zürn 2019), these processes have created opportunities for the mediation and self-mediation of many anti-democratic extreme ideas and ideologies and their subsequent spread across wider, traditional and alternative, national and transnational, public spheres (Krzyżanowski & Ledin 2017; Pajnik & Meret 2018). They have also, eventually, constituted the fuel for a post-democratic logic whereby the new exclusionary discourse about society, politics and the economy – once reserved for extreme and radical parts of the spectrum – piggybacked the 'new normal' logic to become mainstreamed or normalized, indeed paradoxically within – and not outside – democratic processes, rules and procedures (Laruelle 2022; Mondon & Winter 2020).

In our proposed framework, we suggest a broad, integrated discursive-practical approach to the analysis of the processes and connections above, i.e., one that sees discourse and practice as dialectically connected ways of acting in symbolic as well as practical terms (Fairclough & Wodak 1997). We hence view that discourse is an integral part of social (and political) action and the integral part of articulation of social and political practices. Therefore, it is necessary to explore various discursive articulations and re-packagings of anti- and post-democratic action – often prior to these becoming practice – and to do so especially in connection with crises. As we argue, the key traces of those processes can be found in, e.g., scrutinising the recently prevalent dynamics of 'conceptual flipsiding' (Krzyżanowski & Krzyżanowska 2022) which sees liberal-democratic notions being purposefully misused by illiberals while thus effectively hijacking the democratic language. This results in the wider 'libertarian' re-packaging of anti-liberal-democratic views – as evidenced, e.g., in far-right political and intellectual strategies and discourse during COVID-19 (Wodak 2022; Wondreys & Mudde 2020). Therein, frequent self-rebranding of anti- and post-democratic ideologies (incl. as 'neo-conservative', 'national-conservative', 'freedom of speech', 'patriotic' or the like; see also Gardell 2021; Miller-Idriss 2020; Titley 2019; Sengul 2021) comes to the fore along with ever more vocal attempts to deride the far-right's political and ideological opponents and critics as 'leftist', 'woke', or as or members of a 'political correctness offensive'.

To be sure, the above re/definitions – and their eventual legitimating enactments in both public discourse and the eventual social and regulatory practice –

were just isolated displays of a wider process wherein key values of 20th century liberal democracy have encountered a salient 'cultural backlash' (Norris & Inglehart 2019), and have been seen as leading to the 'authoritarian contagion' (Cooper 2021; Frankenberg & Heitmayer 2022) and the institutionalization of 'new despotism' (Keane 2020) – the latter so acutely evidenced in the 2022 Ukraine invasion by Russia – or the wider solidification of 'illiberalism' (Laruelle 2022; Mudde 2022). Especially the COVID-19 pandemic must be viewed as one of the key tipping points, when the yet strongest revival of re-nationalising tendencies – including the closure of national borders and the re/building of walls in both a physical and an abstract sense in addition to further radicalization of regimes of exclusion and the deepening of intra-societal inequalities has occurred. In a similar vein, the still ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine which commenced in February 2022, must be seen as a pronounced expression of renewed radical nationalism which now moved to open politics of conflict, aggression and discrimination, and even war crimes and genocide.

In sum, we are proposing a research framework and agenda that are broad, abductive and empirically-based, and one that seeks to provide and design patterns of improvement in and counteraction of anti- and post-democracy. We do so in the hope of reversing the on-going institutionalization of the populist mirage of defending the 'people' to show that, unless counteracted, it will lead to renewed global and local inequalities and further socio-political and politico-economic crises, as well as significantly diminishing society's capacity to address mounting challenges of a global and transnational nature.

3.   On the conceptual connection between crisis, normalization and anti- & post-democratic action

The ideological core of most European states is that of liberal democracy, a combination of two different, if at times overlapping, traditions, of the democratic and the liberal. Simply stated, the democratic tradition emphasizes popular sovereignty and liberal individual rights (Mouffe 2000), while, in its most essential form, liberal democracy tries to respect both the will of the majority and the rights of (individual and collective) minorities. In terms of key values, it is based on accountability, individualism, popular sovereignty, the rule of law and tolerance, while in terms of institutions, it entails free and fair elections, an independent judiciary and media, and the separation of powers. As Robert Dahl (1971) famously argued, liberal democracy is, however, an ideal, and no system lives up to the ideal in practice, but at least in recent decades most European countries

have aspired to be liberal democracies and created a liberal democratic institutional infrastructure.

Most European populations continue to support the essence of democracy (e.g., Kriesi 2020). However, as democracy (still) remains prevalent, the real political struggle is now about what kind of democracy we should have and if, within democracy, there are discourses and types of action that threaten or undermine democracy. There are, hence, various challenges to the dominant model of liberal democracy, coming from across the political spectrum, which, inter alia, include:

– Nativism, which comes mainly from the radical right, and claims supreme power for the nation – or "our" people – which they define in exclusionary terms of blood and essence, thereby attacking fundamental liberal democratic values such as minority rights (e.g. Mudde 2007; Newth 2023; Rydgren 2017; Wodak 2021).
– Populism, which challenges not only minority rights, but also other key foundations of liberal democracy such as the rule of law and the separation of powers, and traditionally comes from both the radical right and left (e.g. Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Mueller 2016; Salo & Rydgren 2021).
– Technocracy, which comes mainly from the (neoliberal) mainstream and seeks to limit the scope of democracy (Bersou & Caramani 2020; Bickerton & Accretti 2021) by decreasing state and public control and increasing 'postdemocratic' (Crouch 2004) power of the markets.
– Finally, authoritarianism comes from both the mainstream and the fringes – although these terms have largely lost their meaning, given the normalization of former "fringes" (e.g. Wilkinson 2019; Wodak 2019, 2021).

Across Europe, various combinations of the above currents – in and of themselves complex and described here in some very terms – allow nativism, populism and authoritarianism to pave the way for an "illiberal turn" that gradually undermines a liberal interpretation of the democratic order (Amlinger & Nachtwey 2022) while the success of all those anti liberal-democratic (or anti-democratic) challenges, facilitated by different crises, has transformed the status quo, in terms of both values and institutions. Already two decades ago, Colin Crouch (2004) referred to this new situation, what we perhaps call the "new normal", as neither democratic nor anti-democratic, but rather post-democratic, arguing that postdemocracy combines significant aspects of democracy and non-democracy. While it has become popular to claim that liberal democracy used to be strong and has been incrementally weakened in the 21st century, we believe that this (a) overstates the state of liberal democracy in the late-20th century, and (b) ignores some of the liberal democratic advantages that have been achieved in recent decades, such as in terms of LGBTQI+ rights in various countries (e.g. Ayoub &

Paternotte 2019). Nevertheless, we still argue that the concept of post-democracy carries a significant analytical charisma and allows grasping many of complexities and dualities inscribed into contemporary re/definitions of liberal democracy. We therefore call for post-democracy's empirical rather than just theoretical or conceptual elaboration and for connecting it with crises as periods/times when acceleration of post-democratic thinking – and acting – occurs. We do so while arguing that, due to its hegemonic and hence pervasive character, post-democratic action remains the key, sustainable danger to contemporary liberal democracy and not only a tolerable, temporary 'anomaly' nested within liberal democracy.

Crisis – and its prevalence to modernity – has certainly been crucial, if not outright central and nodal, in ongoing redefinitions of liberal democracy and its potential slide into anti- and post-democracy. Theorized and conceptualized very extensively in recent years (see, inter alia, Hay 1999, 2013; Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou and Wodak 2018; Krzyżanowski 2019; Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski 2018; Krzyżanowski & Krzyżanowska 2022; Nabers 2017; Triandafyllidou, Krzyżanowski & Wodak 2009 for overviews), crisis has changed its meaning very significantly. Once related to key moments of social and political transformation and "epochal change" (Koselleck, 1979, 2002), it signalled "a critical transition period after which – if not everything, then much – will be different" (Koselleck, 2006: 358). In late modernity, however, crisis has become a connotation of a prolonged condition, i.e. "a state of greater or lesser permanence, as in a longer or shorter transition towards something better or worse or towards something altogether different" (ibid.; see Agamben 2005) or has even come to be seen as a 'polycrisis' (Tooze 2022) i.e. combination of many, more or less simultaneous and overlapping, crises whose repercussions unfold in a cumulative manner. In addition, crisis has also emerged as a profoundly discursive and narrative construct that legitimises re-definitions of social reality. Crisis has hence evolved into a peculiar form of an imaginary (see, inter alia, Taylor, 2004) that draws on past/ present-related descriptions to provide a powerful ideological future projection (Wolin 1989, 2004). Within such an imaginary, the combination of the 'known' (or the experienced, perhaps a 'real' crisis) and the 'unknown' (the expected, the imagined and discursively constructed representation of crisis) is apparent. Accordingly, discourses on crisis draw on the 'real' and the 'projected' to form a peculiar form of social – and especially political – utopia (Levitas, 2011; see Graham, 2019). This leaves crisis open to strongly ideological use, whereby to a large extent it becomes an idea invented for strategically defined 'political' motives (Sum and Jessop 2013) driving various forms of 'public pedagogies' (Graham & Dugmore 2022).

Perceived as an imaginary, crisis should hence also be viewed as a challenge to democracy. The recent global rise of populism has not only been triggered

by crises; in fact, crises themselves have often been created and/or eagerly sustained by populist political actors. Moffitt (2016: 114) calls this the populist performance of crisis, wherein populists pit 'the people' against 'the elite' or associated dangerous 'others', and radically simplify the terms and terrain of the political debate; they advocate strong leadership and quick political action to stave off or solve the impending crisis". Within such a process, crisis may be either augmented or misrepresented on the one hand, or, downplayed and disclaimed on the other (Krzyżanowski 2019; Krzyżanowski & Krzyżanowska 2022). Either way, it is applied as a flexible, discursive and politicized construct that is only sporadically tested by a reality check. It can be used to 'pre-legitimise' and initiate strategic-political actions (Krzyżanowski 2014), using and 'making real' the imaginary – and very often utopian and/or nostalgic (Elgenius and Rydgren 2022) visions – of both the present and the future.

Such a definition of crisis is central to our understanding of the wider democratic salience of processes of normalization. Our take here is one that closely links discourse and action/ practice and views normalization as

> a set of simultaneous or subsequent discursive strategies which gradually introduce and/or perpetuate in public discourse some new – and in most cases often uncivil or untrue – patterns of representing social actors, processes and issues. Importantly, these discursive strategies are initiated as part and parcel of wider – and in most cases pre-determined – forms of social, political and economic action designed to not only change the norms of social conduct but also to gain legitimacy from such a change and from the related 'new' normative order.
>
> (Krzyżanowski 2020a: 432)

The above necessitates analysis across various social fields that can highlight normalization's and mainstreaming's historically contingent character (Finchelstein 2017; Kallis 2021) as well as its propensity for ideological and practice-based appropriation, as made evident in the cases of, inter alia, fascism, radicalism, racism etc. (see especially Kallis 2013). Mondon and Winter (2020) claimed that the 2010s have heralded a new stage in mainstreaming processes, whereby ideas of the far right have become normalized as common. This has, however, happened not only through the actions of mainstream politicians, but also with active support from media, in addition to academics, intellectuals, uncivil society and other actors (Krzyżanowski 2018a, 2020b). Hence, a broad take on normalization/mainstreaming is vital to look beyond "a one-way process in which the far right moves closer to mainstream, whether ideologically, institutionally or discursively" (Mondon & Winter 2020: 112) as that would risk missing the complexity and nuance of 'mainstreaming' as a relational and bi-directional process (see Hainsworth 2000; Kallis 2013; Mudde 2019; Wodak 2015, 2019, 2021).

4.   Theoretical and conceptual contribution

The research agenda outlined here contributes to a number of vibrant and indeed growing fields of research. Of these, our main contribution is within the work devoted to the wider, socio-political processes defined as 'normalization' (Kallis 2021; Krzyżanowski 2018a, 2020a, 2020b; Krzyżanowski & Ekström 2022; Mudde 2019; Wodak 2018a, 2018b, 2021) or the more strictly political 'mainstreaming' (Brown & Mondon 2021; Hainsworth 2000; Lacey 2019; Minkenberg 2017; Mondon & Winter 2020; Odmalm 2017; Odmalm & Hepburn 2017; Rydgren & van der Meiden 2019) with both notions referring to how radical ideas, ideologies and actions recently part of the accepted social and political status quo.

The scholarship on 'mainstreaming' has had a rather persistent focus on complementary processes of, on the one hand, mainstreaming of the radical right, and, on the other – though to a lesser degree – radicalization of the political mainstream. One common reason identified for mainstream parties to legitimize the radical right was the coalition-building necessity (Moffitt, 2021). Hence, mainstreaming has often been regarded as "the incorporation of populist notions into the political mainstream" (Curran, 2004:38), yet scholars have also argued that this might be considered a case of radicalization of the mainstream moving ideologically or discursively closer to the radical (Akkerman et al. 2016).

The above duality has also been reflected within 'mainstream' parties which, in the context of the global rise of the far right (Moffitt 2016; Mudde 2019), see themselves as striking a balance between attracting educated, middle-class voters on the one hand, and their traditional supporters from working class and blue collar strata on the other (Bale & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021a, 2021b; Mondon & Winter 2020; Strobl 2021; Amlinger & Nachtwey 2022). For this reason, mainstream, and especially mainstream-right or conservative, parties have overwhelmingly been analysed from a perspective of adopting elements of the radical right's political agenda, such as anti- immigrant positions (Krzyżanowski 2018b; Krzyżanowski & Wodak 2009). At the same time, scholars have also pointed to the diversity of strategies undertaken by mainstream parties vis-à-vis radical movements (Herman & Muldoon 2019), several of which transcended the *cordon sanitaire* against radical right ideologies (Ekström, Krzyżanowski & Johnson 2023). However, these tendencies have also posed challenges to the radical right itself, which thus started responding to both political opportunities of mainstreaming and their further radicalization (Pauwels & van Haute 2017).

Key work on normalization, on the other hand, has argued that the latter is path-dependent and cyclical, i.e. that, historically speaking, we recurrently witness the arrival of 'normalizing transgressions' (Kallis, 2021) enacted around different ideological projects such as, e.g., fascism or national populism. The

recurring nature of normalizing tendencies has also been highlighted by those who argue that normalization relies very strongly on the 'recontextualization' (Bernstein 1990; Krzyżanowski 2016) of similar types of ideologically laden arguments (e.g. related to various forms of racism, xenophobia etc., see Krzyżanowski 2018a), as well as showing that normalization persistently draws on such core themes and arguments as, inter alia, religion, nativism, (white) supremacy or conspiracy theories (Cammaerts 2018, 2020).

But other work has also illustrated that normalization occurs within multi-stage processes of changing public discourse and therein introducing more profound and long-lasting 'discursive shifts' (Krzyżanowski 2018a, 2020b). It has been shown therein that normalization is not unidirectional – from the introduction of a certain discourse to its widespread acceptance (Wodak 2021) – but rather draws on recurrence, or on back-and-forth, or continuum logic. It hence operates in various inter-spaces wherein specific 'borderline discourse' (Krzyżanowski & Ledin 2017) or intentional 'coarse civility' (Heitmeyer 2018) come to the fore in the process of repackaging uncivil norms into politically correct and quasi-civil argumentation (Krzyżanowski et al 2021; Wodak 2022). Elsewhere, scholars have also shown how other discursive shifts have been used with, e.g., the radical right increasingly claiming victimhood and anti-white 'racism' (Gardell 2021) as a new subtle way to discuss anti-white sentiments and promote the belief that political elites have allegedly given unfair advantages to migrants and asylum-seekers. These inverted – and thereby normalized – historical processes of racism and inequality have often been combined with white supremacist culture as a legitimate and acceptable ideological viewpoint (Sengul 2021; Titley 2019). They also gave rise to claims that nearly all salient social problems – such as e.g. criminality – can and should be ascribed to various 'others' who thuse come to stand in an even starker opposition to the 'natives' (Ekström, Krzyżanowski & Johnson 2023).

Building on these studies which explore and trace the ever-more complex, hybrid and outright contradictory logic of mainstreaming and/or normalization, we wish to point to the centrality of the discourse which emphasises, pre-legitimises and legitimises normalization (Krzyżanowski 2014; van Leeuwen 2007; Reyes 2011; Rheindorf & Wodak 2020) as well as to key discursive shifts in public language that introduces new norms before making them elements of specific exclusionary practice. By the same token, we also want to point to wider and more macro-level or transnational patterns of social, political and economic 'discursive change' (Fairclough 1992) to highlight how such change has continued to frame as well as drive different context-specific shifts, their narrative and rhetorical appeal, and their relevance for regulatory social practices.

However, we also see our proposed research agenda as contributing to wider interdisciplinary debates showing that the spatio-temporal nexus of mediatiza-

tion, digitization and politicization underpins the fact that many normalization processes now stretch beyond the social fields to which they were once confined, in line with their ever-evolving 'heteronomy' (Bourdieu 1993). As the latter facilitates a much wider set of normalization tendencies (Fielitz & Thurston 2018), our aim is to examine discourses and practices, which are often much less questioned or scrutinized (as is the case with, e.g., the widespread growth of un-/in-civility offline and online; see Farkas, Schou & Neumayer 2018; Krzyżanowski et al 2021; Rossini 2020).

Finally, in a similar vein, our suggested agenda contributes to critical research on crisis. We hence suggest connecting work on the crisis' deep and recurrent impact on the changing fabric of, and inequalities in, society with the more politically-centred analyses of crisis as an ambivalent and hybrid element of the populist imagination (Moffitt 2016; Mudde 2019). The so-called 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe is a prominent example of a crisis being 'colonized' by populist politics and ideologies (see Chouliaraki et al 2019; Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017; Chouliaraki & Zaborowski 2017; Ekman & Krzyżanowski 2021; Krzyżanowski 2018a, 2018b; Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou & Wodak 2018). In many countries, the support for anti-immigration alarm and associated 'moral panic' driven by populist politics and its affiliates, such as online and offline uncivil society, has been blown out of all proportion (Krastev 2017, 2020; Rheindorf & Wodak 2020; Krzyżanowski et al. 2021). This has often led directly to a range of political- practical strategies of exclusion which could be mapped, such as so-called welfarism (Bradby et al 2020; see also Rankin 2021; Barradale 2022).

5.   (Final) methodological considerations – connecting discourse to practice

Summing up, we suggest a research agenda that, in essence, combines two, wider areas of analysis focussed on, on the one hand, connecting crisis, the 'new normal' and the dynamics of anti- and post-democratic action diachronically, i.e. from the past to the present, and in the second area, looking more closely at the multilevel character of post-crisis and 'new normal' driven facets of normalization in a contemporary or synchronic sense.

While our framework above can be operationalized by way of various methodological currents the relate discourse and/to practice as well as relates their synchronic and diachronic currents, our general suggestion is in following the line of Critical Discourse Studies – or CDS. The latter focuses explicitly on a critical understanding of text and discourse – as a set of perspectives and articulation/ enunciation strategies – as well as highlighting the importance of

anchoring discourse in its socio-political context of production and reception (van Dijk 1991; Wodak 2001; Reisigl & Wodak 2001). We also foreground CDS due to its recognition of the close interconnection between discourse and practice – and specifically the role of discourse in influencing and engineering social dynamics and its central impact on changing social norms and the 'naturalization' (Fairclough 1992) of various forms of ideologies. In the course of the above, we rely on notions such as wider, macro-level, transnational 'discursive change' (Fairclough 1992), but also meso/ micro level 'discursive shifts' (Krzyżanowski 2018a, 2020b).

We refer in particular to the Discourse-historical Approach (or DHA; Krzyżanowski 2010; Wodak 1996, 2021; Reisigl 2017) which allows investigating specific forms of discursive articulations of social processes within particular contexts, and tracing the spatio-temporal diffusion of discourse across various time and space boundaries and social practices. DHA allows conducting analyses with a view to tracing discourse dynamics both diachronically/ historically and synchronically (Wodak 1996), and across multiple social fields, spaces and genres (Reisigl & Wodak 2001). As such, it is driven by one of CDS's central notions of 'recontextualization' (Bernstein 1990; Krzyżanowski 2016), which encompasses both the movement of various discursive elements (themes, arguments/topoi etc.) across time and space, and recognising how, in the process of being re-used and combined, they produce a hegemonic and hierarchical order of discourse as well as subordinating local discourses to wider ideological paradigms and frames.

Given DHA's devotion to systematic and categorical, entry- and in-depth level, analysis, its application allows scrutinising context-specific discourses and practices across by way of a stable range of well-defined and well-tested analytical categories (see Krzyżanowski 2010) whose deployment permits inter-contextual – and cross-national – comparison and combination of findings. However, the DHA also remains open to multiple inter- methodological combinations. Such is the case within the so-called Discourse-Ethnographic Analysis, or DEA, which connects the DHA with ethnography of practice (Krzyżanowski 2010, 2017; see also Muntigl, Weiss & Wodak 2000; Wodak 1996), or within Discourse-Conceptual Analysis, or DCA, tracing a connection between discourses and concepts including in, e.g., policy or media analysis (Krzyżanowski 2016, 2019). In a similar vein, the DHA also combines qualitative approaches to analysis with quantitatively-oriented methods such as, corpus linguistics (Baker et al 2008), or various types of social media analytics (e.g. Ekström et al 2023; Jacobi et al. 2016; Jost et al. 2018; Theocharis et al. 2016). Deployng the former and the latter facilitates e.g. dealing with large amount of comparative empirical material and allow longitudinal analyses prior to 'downscaling data' (Baker et al 2008) in view of qualitative (critical) discourse analysis.

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