Chapter 13
Who Is the Worst Migrant? Migrant Hierarchies in Populist Radical-Right Rhetoric in Estonia

Katrina Koppel and Mari-Liis Jakobson

13.1 Introduction

Migrants are often an antagonised group in populist radical-right rhetoric and are even perceived quite negatively by mainstream publics. Immigrants' contributions (societal, economic, cultural etc.) are, on the whole, undervalued even by those who consider their own position to be neutral or positive toward migrants, while the negative effects (e.g. criminality or lowering property values) are overestimated (Marchlewska et al., 2019). Often, immigrants are associated with or blamed for the turbulent times that the host society is experiencing and are depicted using anxiety-inducing rhetoric. While populism tends towards simplifying and homogenising the good and morally virtuous people as well as the unworthy and/or morally corrupt antagonist groups (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013; Müller, 2016; Taggart, 2004), there is often more nuance to this. In fact, migrants are not always perceived as a completely homogeneous group even by the populist radical right, especially when contemplating migration policy. Such an approach becomes inevitable as soon as the populists begin to make policy proposals. Yet, these internal hierarchies that exist within primarily negative perceptions have thus far merited little attention.

This chapter aims to deconstruct the phenomenon of migrant hierarchies in populist radical-right rhetoric by looking at value statements of how the value and deservingness of different groups is denoted in political discourse. Understanding the logic of hierarchisation is important because it adds another layer to understanding how and around what such migration-related anxieties are constructed in host societies. The hierarchies also nuance the picture and help us to understand the nexus between anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy-making: why and how can radical anti-immigrant rhetoric still translate into quite measured (though restrictive)

K. Koppel (✉) · M.-L. Jakobson
Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia
e-mail: katrina.koppel@tlu.ee

immigration-control proposals and why these do not cause opposition or cognitive dissonance among the supporters of the populist radical-right parties.

Methodologically, the paper draws on and also expands from the Essex School of Discourse Theory and their approach to populism (see, e.g., Laclau, 2005), the Critical Discourse Analysis School and their approach to the populist radical right (Wodak, 2017) and positioning theory (Van Langenhove, 2017). The discourse-theoretical approach claims that populist discourse relies primarily on creating chains of equivalence in order to articulate the antagonism between 'the people' and their antagonist(s) – the political elites or the establishment. The logic of equivalence is opposed to the logic of difference which we come across in more-measured debates, where issues are treated with more nuance and recognition of particularity. In this chapter, however, we look at how immigrants are differentiated in populist radical-right rhetoric and how the logic of difference occasionally coexists with the logic of equivalence in populist discourse in order to construct immigrant hierarchies. Critical-discourse analysis complements this by focusing on the nomination and attribution strategies used to construct the people and the antagonists and points out that, in the case of right-wing populism, various minority groups, including migrants, are also antagonised (Wodak, 2017). Positioning theory lends us the concept of moral concerns used for positioning various groups in the social hierarchy.

Empirically, we examine how migrants are constructed by the Estonian populist radical-right party *Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond* (Estonian Conservative People's Party – EKRE) in their counterpublic, the webzine *Uued Uudised.* EKRE is a relatively typical European populist radical-right party riding the wave of neo-populism. It largely achieved its electoral success in the aftermath of the European migration crisis and the anti-immigrant stance is the defining rhetorical position of the party (Kasekamp et al., 2019), whether in opposition or in a coalition party. A counterpublic is chosen as the context for analysis, as these produce a fragmentary public where only speakers sharing the same subject position air their views; hence, it is expected to provide the purest context for analysing the populist radical-right's immigration discourse.

Estonia is one of the smallest EU member states (population 1.3 million) with one of the largest shares of foreign-origin residents, the vast majority of whom are (descendants of) Russian-speaking immigrants from the period when Estonia was annexed by the Soviet Union. Like most Central and Eastern European countries, Estonia has primarily been a net emigration country since it regained independence. Almost half of Estonians abroad reside in neighbouring Finland, which is mainly a destination for (lower-skilled) labour migration. In recent years, however, immigration rates have sped up notably and the foreign-born population has become much more diverse. While Ukraine, Russia and Belarus are still the main countries of immigration, communities of migrants from Nigeria, India and the MENA region have also begun to form in recent years. Immigration has stimulated a series of liberalising reforms, which exempted student migration and highly skilled specialists from the immigration quota, allowed short-term labour migration based on visas (which has in particular increased the number of Ukrainian labour migrants), and lowered the salary requirement for immigrant labour force to the average salary.

13.2   Immigrant Hierarchies

Social stratification and hierarchies are an organic and unavoidable phenomenon in social groups (Bunderson et al., 2016; Tilly, 2001). Hierarchies can perhaps be witnessed more frequently in the field of migration than in other walks of life, as the division into 'us' and 'them' is common, placing the in-group ahead of the outgroups. Hierarchies are manufactured on many different levels, from objective economic inequalities to individual perceptions and government policy. Hierarchies are a product not just of economic inequality but also of power inequalities.

For instance, Charles Tilly (2001) has observed that durable inequalities in societies are created and maintained as a result of two structural gate-keeping processes: exploitation (where the powerful in-group uses their resources to undercut others from the full rewards for their added value) and opportunity hoarding (where the same in-group does not allow others to gain access to value-producing resources). As a result, people from better socio-economic backgrounds have economic, educational, cultural and other advantages which help them to reproduce such an advantageous position in the higher strata of the social hierarchy.

However, hierarchies are also socially constructed and reproduced through cultural practices as well as the institutional order. Martin Reisigl (2008) has noted that hierarchies are a primarily discursive construction, as some groups are projected as superior to others mainly through the use of language. This can include both everyday exchanges as well as more elaborate cultural practices and, as such, can also affect the institutional order. Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram (1993) show how the social constructions of different societal groups affect both the choice of policy tools and the ways in which policies are legitimated in society. According to Ingram et al. (2019), policy target groups are constantly (though subconsciously) evaluated in society on two scales: (1) how powerful (or powerless) a group is and (2) how positively (or negatively) the group is perceived by society. As a result, groups positively regarded by society and with more power tend to be rewarded via public policies, while others with little power and a negative public perception tend to bear the burden. Groups with a negative public image but with access to power tend to be subject to 'firing blanks' with their policies, which appear as burdens but, in practice, do not put the group at a disadvantage. Powerless groups with a positive public image occasionally do receive rewards but are typically the first to lose them when cutbacks are necessary. In the field of welfare policy, the concept of 'deservingness' has become a central conditionality for support (Van Oorschot, 2000), which is practised both in policy design and in the phase of policy implementation. As a result, deservingness is decided not just by new laws that are written but also when the so-called street-level bureaucrats begin implementing these policies and making decisions on whether and to what kind of support a concrete person is entitled.

All these practices are also at play in the field of migration. Immigrants are often (though not always) at a relative disadvantage, both economically and symbolically, compared to the host population; various social policies, which regulate access for example to healthcare, housing or the labour market, can even worsen the situation

(Ratzmann & Sahraoui, 2021). Furthermore, public attitudes tend to regard migrants as less valuable than their actual societal contribution (Marchlewska et al., 2019) and, as a result, immigration and integration policies tend to be increasingly exclusive and to place additional demands and/or burdens on immigrants (Joppke, 2003; Moynihan et al., 2022). However, this does not apply equally to all immigrant groups: as a result of these above-mentioned processes, there are also notable hierarchies within the immigrant community. For instance, selective immigration policies are inherently an immigrant hierarchy-generating tool, defining select immigrant groups as deserving of the right to immigration and/or immigrant integration support, while non-prioritised would-be-immigrants are left to seek alternative entry opportunities – often including irregular ones. Immigration policies can also contribute towards constructivist as well as objective economic positions in the societal hierarchy, where some immigrant groups might even wield more power than some non-immigrant ones – for example, thanks to their good economic position (immigrant investors, so-called talent migrants), high level of perceived deservingness (such as those working in fields with significant labour shortages or having more 'desirable' ethnic backgrounds), high level of human capital (highly skilled specialists) or access to decision-makers (e.g. immigrant entrepreneurs), etc. Such hierarchies can be reproduced not just by the non-immigrant host population but also by immigrants themselves when trying to position themselves as relatively more deserving than some other immigrant groups. For instance, Jakobson et al. (2012) report how Estonians living in Finland depict themselves as more hardworking, better integrated and overall more deserving than some other immigrant groups such as the Somalis. Goerres et al. (2018) depict a similar narrative among the *Russlanddeutsch* (descendants of a historical minority of ethnic Germans in Russia who have 'repatriated' to Germany), while Nowicka (2018) outlines how Polish migrants position themselves ahead of other immigrant groups.

Yet, all the above-mentioned theories simply describe the *strategies* of hierarchy construction, not the *ontologies* of hierarchy. What, then, constitutes such hierarchies? Van Langenhove (2017, 4) has associated hierarchies with moral orders, defined as

> a set of habits and prescriptions, both temporary and permanent … these orders are indicative (and a central aspect) of a society's culture … what indicates 'good and bad' and thus indicates rights and responsibilities.

The moral orders defining immigrants' deservingness and, thus, their position in the social hierarchies can also vary notably, depending, *inter alia*, on their reason for immigration, labour-market position, gender, ethnicity or race. Policies privileging high-skilled or high-income migrants or immigrants from specific countries and/or regions create and institutionalise the hierarchisation of migration, hardening both categories directly related to skills and income (e.g. formal education and skills) as well as the categories influencing them such as race or social class (Chung, 2009). It could also be argued that immigration policies based on the migrants' economic status, skills, education etc. function discursively as a direct defining feature of the value of a migrant; the conditions given preference by migration policies (higher

education, high income, other qualifications) function as a political design of migration hierarchies. The time of immigration can also translate into hierarchies of immigrants' positionalities, where those who have immigrated in one period, for example, see themselves as better integrated or immigrating for nobler reasons than those who immigrated earlier or later and, thus, as belonging to a higher class (see e.g. Griffith, 2005).

'Whiteness' is also occasionally perceived as an indicator of an immigrant's position in the social hierarchy. It is constructed by the way it positions others as inferior. It thereby produces a system of racialised inequality wherein 'whiteness' is always seen as a universally positive category and, in representing the Western world, as a source of fantasy and repressed desires (Fanon, 1967; Saïd, 1978). For minority groups, however, it produces images of racialised otherness and lower positions in the social hierarchy which cannot be overcome. However, racism

> is not just directed at those with darker skins, from the former colonial countries, but at the newer categories of the displaced and dispossessed whites, who are beating at western Europe's doors [...] It is a racism that is meted out to impoverished strangers even if they are white (Rzepnikowska, 2019, 63).

Yet, on other occasions, the 'whiteness' of immigrants might even position them higher in the social hierarchy, as with French immigrants in Morocco for example (Virkama et al., 2012).

Often, 'whiteness' gets combined with other features. As put by Colic-Peisker (2005, 622), 'whiteness is not just about skin colour, but also about class, status, language and other features of the individual that can be discerned in social interaction' (cf. McDowell, 2009, 29). To give a more historic example, the WW II female refugees from the Baltic States (the so-called Baltic Swans) were perceived by the UK authorities as desirable immigrants not just because of their skin colour but also their gender, physical characteristics and habits. In a memorandum from the Foreign Labour Committee after a visit to the camps in Germany, the advantages of Baltic women were spelt out in unambiguous terms:

> The women are of good appearance; are scrupulously clean in their persons and habits.... There is little doubt that the specially selected women who come to this country will be an exceptionally healthy and fit body ... and would constitute a good and desirable element in our population (Kay & Miles, 1992, 50; cf. McDowell, 2009).

13.3 *Uued Uudised* as an Estonian Counterpublic

In this chapter, we focus on the construction of immigrant hierarchies within a newszine called *Uued Uudised* (UU). Operating since 2015, UU is the official news outlet of the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE), a populist radical-right party with a staunch anti-immigrant disposition (Jakobson et al., 2020; Kasekamp et al., 2019; Petsinis, 2019). Notably, UU states on their homepage, as well as some channel descriptions on other media, that positions represented in their

content may not be in line with those of EKRE. UU can be defined as a counterpublic, a space distinct from that of public opinion, where those in society – who do not feel that their opinions are (fairly) represented in the general public sphere – congregate (Warner, 2002). The purpose of counterpublics is not only to create a separate space with more favourable conditions for expressing certain opinions. The role is not only the production of separated enclaves but also communicating with the wider public with the purpose of breaking the consensus within that public (Asen, 2000; Warner, 2002). The space within a counterpublic becomes an environment for the legitimation of arguments for those existing within it (Toepfl & Piwoni, 2015). The categories of this legitimation can range from moral evaluation to authorisation (Van Leeuwen, 2007, 92).

Even though counterpublics overall are ideologically tilted towards one political opinion, the conversations within it can remain quite pluralistic, because disagreements exist even among like-minded individuals. Thus, a counterpublic functions as any other public sphere does, where positions are deliberated and thus also a certain level of opinion pluralism exists; however, this plurality is still articulated from a specific subject position. For instance, we can expect some debate in UU over what exactly the effects of immigration are; however, this difference of opinion still stems from the shared view that immigration in general is a negative, harmful tendency.

This tilted legitimacy becomes an issue when those within the counterpublic attempt to reuse the same arguments in the public sphere but encounter resistance to their base logics, which are seen as indisputable within counterpublics. The resulting cognitive dissonance can increase the perceived divide between those *within* the counterpublic and those outside. This can result in an increased distance between the constructed 'people' and 'others' in the political field, as well as an increased antagonism between those in disagreement. It can also result in conspiracy theorism (see e.g. Marchlewska et al., 2019) as a way of reasoning the division in opinions stemming from people from two clashing value systems.

As such, counterpublics are expected to be a good source of material for determining themed discourses of this specific societal sub-group. We can expect that the immigration-related rhetoric in UU is more orthodox (Bourdieu, 1984) and radical than in the mainstream public arena, where it might get toned down for political-correctness purposes.

The research sample ranges from 2015 to 2021 and includes 50 articles, including both news articles as well as opinion pieces and editorials. For most articles included in the sample, a single author cannot be determined; however the articles can be seen as reflecting the opinions of the editors. The sample encompasses a period during which EKRE had seats in parliament as an opposition party, was in a governing coalition and then returned to the status of an opposition party.

UU was chosen as the singular populist radical-right counterpublic as it is the largest of its kind in Estonia. The criteria for inclusion of an article within the sample are as follows:

- Relevance – all articles in the sample must be focused on migration and articles with only brief mentions were rejected.

- Presence of discourse – all articles reporting migration data without discourse were rejected.
- Balance in authorship – the sample includes articles from both identifiable authors as well as those published by the editor(s) with no identifiable single author, thus representing the view of the publication.

13.4   Discourse of Immigrant Hierarchies

In order to identify the immigrant hierarchies in the discourse utilised in UU, we employ the discursive approach of the Essex School, as developed originally by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001 [1985]) and since developed by many scholars. We also blend it with features of critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2017) and positioning theory (Van Langenhove, 2017).

According to the discourse-theoretical approach, discursive articulations are an instrument of power, used in order to construct hegemony and build antagonisms. There are two foundational logics employed in the political process – namely, the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence. The logic of difference is an agonistic logic that articulates the societal realm as a diverse and complex context and acknowledges the resultant need for particular treatment. The logic of equivalence, on the other hand, is a tool for constructing antagonisms, where seemingly very different demands are listed in a chain of equivalence with the sole purpose of articulating an antagonism (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). We might come across the logic of difference in debates where the particular needs of different policy target groups are acknowledged and discussed: for instance, that migrants with different demographic, socio-economic or cultural backgrounds might require different types of integration support. The logic of equivalence, on the other hand, can be witnessed in, for example, political speeches which list seemingly unconnected claims to make the same point – for instance, that immigration ought to be restricted because immigrants are taking away locals' jobs, practice a foreign religion and might lie to immigration officials. There is nothing to suggest that there is a logical linkage between employment, religion and deception but all three claims articulate an antagonism between immigrants and the nation.

The Essex School has become notably influential in populism studies, where the articulation of chains of equivalence is seen as the central strategy in populist discourse. Chains of equivalence are used to build an antagonism between the 'people as underdog' and the elite/establishment (Laclau, 2005).

Of course, populism is not essentially anti-immigrant *per se*. Some forms of inclusionary populism might actually build their antagonism against the power elites onto the demands to relax immigration control (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). It is the populist radical right that builds on a nativist, nationalist conceptualisation of 'the people' and constructs various minority groups, including migrants as the proxies or protégés of the establishment. This is defined as the mechanism of 'scapegoating' in critical discourse analysis

(Wodak, 2017). Scapegoats are constructed in order to obscure the differences in the in-group of 'the people' and make them seem more unified. In order to deconstruct scapegoats, critical discourse analysis looks at the nomination and attribution strategies – in this case, what are immigrants called and which attributes are used to characterise them.

However, these attributions also have a deeper goal and meaning. According to Wodak (2015), these are used to generate a politics of fear: normalising racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic rhetoric and policy stances. In this chapter, however, we want to introduce more nuance to this division and, hence, bring in positioning theory and its core concept of moral concerns, as discussed in the previous section.

Drawing on these approaches, we might expect that, in the immigration discourse articulated on *Uued Uudised*, immigrants would frequently be constructed as scapegoats and that the logic of equivalence would frequently be used in order to raise moral concerns. Yet, we also want to demonstrate that occasionally, even in populist rhetoric, the logic of difference is used to some extent – at least on the level of acknowledging the diversity and complexity of immigration processes and distinguishing the positions of different groups in the extent to which these can be blamed for moral deviance.

We employ these approaches through three discursive analytical operations: first, we identify the nomination of immigrants – i.e. which concepts are used for immigrants in the articles on *Uued Uudised* and which immigrant categories these imply. As a result, we demonstrate the types of immigration process that are covered in this counterpublic. Secondly, we identify the attributes associated with these immigrant categories and analyse which moral concerns are raised regarding them. As the third step, we look at how the claims about the identified immigrant categories are related to one another – through chains either of equivalence or of difference. This allows us to pinpoint which immigrant groups are identified as scapegoats of specific moral concerns and which groups are placed higher in the social hierarchy regarding this specific concern.

13.5   Immigration-Related Moral Concerns and Chains of Equivalence

Throughout the UU coverage, immigrants are predominantly depicted as antagonistic to the 'indigenous population' or the 'Estonian people' – the group called 'the people' in populist parlance. Immigrants are often depicted as protégés of the elites, who are also part of the chains of equivalence constructed and who are the real culprits behind immigration. At times, the elites are named neutrally (e.g. 'the government'); however, more-loaded euphemisms are often used – e.g. the 'powermongers' (*võimurid*), 'liberals', 'multiculti-ites' (*multikultilased*) or 'experts' (in quotation marks) – to articulate the ideological leanings and conspiratorial motives behind immigration.

The chains of equivalence articulated in UU are constructed in order to spark anxieties in the perceived in-group by articulating different moral concerns associated with certain attributes of these immigrant categories. The chains of equivalence depict immigrants as grotesquely different from 'the people' and, often, even malignant. In the nomination strategies, references are made to different sub-groups of migrants based on their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, family status, labour-market position and immigration status. Different categorisations are used to articulate the various moral concerns which legitimise the undesirability and lower position of migrants in the social hierarchy.

The above-mentioned categorisations can overlap – i.e. the same group of migrants is depicted through their religious and racial belonging as well as their labour-market and immigration status. Often, however, references are made to clearly different groups of immigrants, who are linked to one another through chains of equivalence to indicate their antagonistic relationship with 'the people' by using the concept of refugee and linking different moral concerns – e.g. about taking the jobs of Estonians who have had to leave for work in Finland (in popular parlance, called *Kalevipoeg*) – savaging academia and burdening the welfare system:

> Our people have left for Finland to earn butter for their bread as *Kalevipoegs*. We would want those people to come and alleviate our labour shortages, not those highly educated IT specialists from some African jungle. We don't need those people en masse here. […] Tens of thousands of Ukrainians who have come to Estonia are also refugees. Those thousands of students, of whom a large proportion does not qualify to be a student – I can speak from experience, one of them physically assaulted their professor last week – these are refugees too, these are immigrants too, these too are the people we really don't need here, who burden our social welfare system and cause problems (UU, 27.11.2018).

The categorisations by race, religion and ethnicity are used to raise moral concerns about crime, cultural conflicts and population replacement. The main target group depicted through these categorisations are immigrants from Africa or the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, who are referred to by their region of origin ('Africans'), race ('negroes'), complexion ('tanned') or religion ('Muslim') and only rarely by nationality ('Syrian', 'Afghan', 'Nigerian').

Cultural conflict is articulated as a moral concern, since cultural differences are depicted as fundamental. For instance, when talking about international students, the perils of cultural conflict in academia are primarily articulated via the 'foreignness' of Islam:

> Cultures are different and misunderstandings come quickly. Who wouldn't know that Muslims don't care for our food, they find visiting a doctor of the opposite sex unacceptable and they don't like our women's broad freedoms (UU, 11.08.2020).

Here, religion is used as an epitome of otherness and yet to condone all kinds of student immigration. Similar articulations of moral concern about cultural conflict were also articulated – e.g. with reference to race and ethnicity.

The possibility of integration is ruled out on the grounds of immigrants not wanting to integrate. The trope about impossible integration is often also used to link the moral concern about cultural conflict with that about population replacement. In a

reaction article titled '"Refugee experts" Käsper and Žibas call for national suicide', the UU contributor(s) link several moral concerns:

> Actually Afghans and Syrians are the source of huge problems in Europe, and not because they are not being integrated [into societies], but because they do not want to [integrate]. These people come from another culture, from other customs, traditions, mentality and convictions and they want to live their former life in Europe, especially as gigantic migrant communities in Western Europe support it. They do not come to integrate or take over Western values, but to bring their own, with their problems. [...] their goal is to replace a nation state with a mixed population, give citizenship to strangers and make Estonia resemble Western Europe, where tensions are growing because of migrant communities. Finland started collecting Somali refugees in the 1990s and where have they ended up? The employment rate of strangers is low, they are sustained by government assistance and go on holiday to their 'dangerous' homeland (UU, 16.08.2020).

In this article, the concern about cultural conflict ('they want to live their former life in Europe') is linked via a chain of equivalence with concerns about population replacement ('to replace a nation state with a mixed population') and about misusing the welfare state ('they are sustained by government assistance'). The foundation of these claims is that this is already happening in Western European countries – a very common trope used to depict the consequences of immigration. The concern about population replacement is aired both with reference to immigrants from the Global South as well as those originating from the former Eastern bloc: Ukraine, Russia, Belarus.

Another major moral concern links immigration to criminality. Immigrants are suspected of all kinds of criminal acts from deceiving the immigration authorities (e.g. smuggling in undeserving migrants as alleged family migrants) to rape and murder. While immigrants from the MENA region and Africa are associated with grave crimes like terrorism, murder or rape, those from Eastern Europe are associated with less-grave violations of the law, such as speeding:

> In 1997–2013, immigrants raped at least 1,400 minors according to local authorities and, according to the BBC, group rape had become 'a common phenomenon when growing up in Rotherham'. The city council avoided the subject all these years, because bringing criminals of primarily Pakistani origin to justice promised a lot of painful accusations of racism. Similar incidents of rape are common all over Europe, where the mass of immigrants has passed the critical limit (UU, 08.05.2015).

> ...a Ukraininan businessman who has settled in Estonia, who thought that Estonians are too law-abiding and admitted that he already has several penalties for speeding (UU, 23.07.2021).

Muslim immigrants are more often than others associated with the threat of terrorism. This trope emerges more frequently when a terrorist attack has occurred somewhere in Europe. Below is an example after the 2016 terrorist attack in Nice, France, where two Estonian citizens also died. Through a chain of equivalence, the threat of Islamic terrorism is associated with immigration and important national symbols like the Estonian song festival:

> Estonians currently have reason to be concerned about their security. A prime minister who does not see a link between terrorism and Islam is incapable of defending his nation. As long as the government continues monthly imports of immigrants to Estonia and does not condemn the immigration policy of Western Europe, it is just a question of time before Islamic terrorism will demand new victims from Estonia. […] We do not want Islamic soldiers armed with knives and machetes to begin to run around on our streets. We do not want to go to the song festival in fear of becoming a victim of a Muslim suicide terrorist (UU, 27.07.2016).

The labour-market position of immigrants is typically depicted as low. It is associated with three distinct moral concerns. Firstly, refugees and immigrants from the MENA region, in particular, are seen as a hazard to the Estonian welfare system, as they are depicted as unqualified and with poor work morals. In the following quote, a chain of equivalence is articulated between the cultural conflict and the labour-market crisis:

> Most immigrants do not integrate into the European culture or lifestyle. The reason is lack of language skills, different perceptions, cultural background and low level of education. Today there are not that many jobs they could be offered. Times when Estonian refugees were lumberjacks with an axe and saw in Sweden, are over. Now even in Estonia, forestry work is done with expensive and complicated machinery [not by unqualified immigrants] (UU, 04.06.2015).

Ukrainian immigrants, on the other hand, are accused of being too eager on the labour market, thus endangering labour standards. In the following article, Ukrainian labour migrants are termed 'neoslaves' – who are exploited by the private sector in Estonia:

> Europe is still suffering from the epidemic induced by the coronavirus. Estonia has narrowly overcome the virus and, in Ukraine, the virus is only starting to gain momentum. This is the situation when businessmen mad with greed want to bring Ukrainians to clear their strawberry fields! People's lives don't count for those greedy entrepreneurs; they only have profit numbers in front of their eyes. In Estonia, unemployment is growing, people are desperate, willing to do any job for a salary that would allow them to pay taxes and put food on their kids' table despite Estonia's growing retail prices. But a business, which has had the strawberries planted, shouts: 'I want to use slave labour, I don't want to pay taxes!' Openly. It is a poorly disguised secret that Ukrainians who are imported as slaves are often kept in non-residential buildings by the herd, no taxes are paid on them or are taxes optimised to the minimum and they are forced to work seven days a week, 10–12 hours per day. […] We have to think about Estonian people having jobs with decent pay in their homeland. Mass usage of cheap labour has not brought happiness to the citizenry in any country, only a small clique of entrepreneurs have profited – at the expense of the society's cohesiveness (UU, 27.05.2020).

13.6   Chains of Difference

Yet, in some cases, different valences are ascribed to different migrant categories. While it is clear that there is virtually no immigrant group in EKRE's rhetoric that would be viewed positively (Estonians as immigrants in other countries is perhaps

the only exception here), some immigrant groups are occasionally treated more value-neutrally. For instance, migrants 'from the West' or from EU member states are depicted as less undesirable than immigrants from non-EU countries such as Ukraine:

> Also, Ukraine is not part of the European Union, so the neoslaves are brought to the union through gray schemes […] European Union's free movement of labour is intended for European citizens' dignified labour migration over internal borders, to integrate the European citizenry. The free-movement principle is not for bringing slave labour from third countries outside the union – be they from 'similar/close' Ukraine or 'distant' Tanzania. Hence, businessmen importing slaves to Estonian strawberry fields or construction sites are paradoxically harming the European Union, connived by the Reform Party, while EKRE is, alongside our nation state, either intentionally or unintentionally, also protecting the cohesiveness of the European Union! (UU, 27.05.2020).

A clear chain of difference is constructed in a news piece summarising a study about Estonians in Finland, whom the researchers describe as hard-working but also racist. The author of the news piece challenges this impression by articulating a chain of difference which, instead, emphasises the double standards and varied work ethics demanded from other (and racially distinct) immigrant groups:

> Finland has transitioned to the coddling of Third-World immigrants that is so common in the West, [Third-World immigrants] who are forgiven mistakes that Estonians [resident in Finland] are not forgiven; that these kinds of migrants are super-demanding on society without contributing themselves; that they are not comparably hardworking because in their homeland a work style with clear-cut working hours and short breaks is unknown (UU, 28.09.2018).

In another article, a chain of difference is constructed between desirable, highly skilled migrants and undesirable law offenders:

> In Estonia it has always been thought that, if you declare the country open, only IT specialists, successful entrepreneurs, Africans who are keen to learn, refugees who deeply love Estonia and so forth will come; in practice, 'openness' attracts primarily con artists and criminals of greater calibre. The police just expelled a woman with Colombian citizenship who was working in Estonia as a prostitute. […] A Ukraininan businessman who has settled in Estonia, who thought that Estonians are too law-abiding and admitted that he already has several penalties for speeding. […] We also have a Brazilian coach-child molester and a Bangladeshi physiotherapist-rapist (UU, 23.07.2021).

This is actually a repeatedly used rhetorical strategy: a chain of difference is articulated between 'theoretical migrants' – i.e. groups which are prioritised in national immigration policy and also its political legitimation – and 'actual migrants', i.e. people who might be beneficiaries of these rewarding policies but are still a reason for moral concern and thus undesirable. The reason for calling the latter group 'theoretical migrants' is that it is often claimed in UU that the desired migrants actually do not come to Estonia:

> We are told about specialists but, for example in 2015, only a third of foreign workers had obtained a higher education. Mainly people who work in construction, industry and services for low wages come to Estonia, thus replacing our own people, who have gone abroad because of low wages (UU, 12.07.2018).

Furthermore, a hierarchy is constructed between immigrants of different cultural backgrounds and levels of integration. In the following quote, a chain of difference is constructed between Russians (who immigrated to Estonia primarily in Soviet times) and immigrants of a different religion or race. While the articulation of the Russian minority is obviously nothing positive and both are articulated as antagonists to 'the people' ('crime against Estonian people'), the depiction of African and Muslim immigrants is clearly even more negative:

> While the integrating of Russians was unsuccessful, Kopli and Lasnamäe [districts in Tallinn] are no-go zones for Estonians; the indigenous population does not really like to go to the s*tromka* [beach] and the [Russian] old hags in Lasnamäe complain that the Estonian sales reps can't speak Russian, then claim that people of colour and Muslims who are ten times more foreign in their way of thinking and customs – this is either utter naïvety or an obvious crime against the Estonian people (UU, 27.05.2018).

In the following quote, new immigrants with no desire to integrate are juxtaposed with previous arrivals who are placed above them in the hierarchy for not dressing in a visibly distinct way:

> Many Tallinners noticed people in oriental clothing in the centre of town on Saturday, and were prompted to ask – from where did they come to Estonia during the corona crisis? Actually there should be no exotic tourists in Tallinn during pandemic times and, even among the 'local' migrants (who have already been let in), people dressing in such a foreign manner have not been seen – so it must be some kind of an opening of the migration door (UU, 19.07.2020).

Also gender tends to factor into the desirability. Frequently, male immigrants – especially refugees – are depicted as particularly undeserving, the more so when compared to women and children:

> Why don't they show us REFUGEES in the news, who need our help? Why do they only show those, richer than us, well dressed young men, with smartphones and internet connections, who are storming the European welfare assistance? […] When there was war in Europe, women and children were EVACUATED from the war zone to neighbouring countries; it would be natural that men go to war for their country, and don't flee to the other end of the world (UU, 15.12.2015).

Refugees tend to be the group with which the chain of difference is used the most often, distinguishing between those who deserve international protection and those who are trying to claim it fraudulently. In addition to gender, which is used as an indicator of vulnerability, the country of origin is also used as a differentiator, thus suggesting that some refugees might indeed be legitimate, while there are also illegitimate claimants:

> Immigration supporters […] mainly talk about war refugees, victims of persecution, civilians whose homes have been destroyed. But most immigrants who cross the Mediterranean from Tunisia and Algeria can in no way be termed refugees. In those countries the situation has stabilised and death does not threaten those moving to Europe from there (UU, 08.05.2015).

13.7   Conclusion

As this chapter attests, the portrayal of immigration in the populist radical-right counterpublic *Uued Uudised* uses the strategies both of creating chains of equivalence and chains of difference to articulate societal hierarchies. Through the use of populist discourse, immigration is associated with multiple moral concerns which distinguish the morally virtuous 'people' from the morally deviant immigrants, who are advocated for by the elites with equally flawed considerations. We can argue that antagonising immigrants is a method of maintaining the durable inequalities and the advantageous position of the in-group, denying benefits to the 'undeserving' and also keeping the malign elites in check. While this cannot be achieved through policy measures, it clearly can be done discursively, by constructing anxieties about immigration in the host society.

However, the chapter has also demonstrated that, while constructing chains of equivalence is broadly used in the populist radical-right counterpublics, occasionally chains of difference are also constructed to articulate a hierarchy between various groups. While no group of immigrants is depicted as good or 'deserving' in the UU discourse, occasionally distinctions between the 'bad' and 'worse' groups of immigrants emerge. This kind of differentiation is also a way, for example, that EKRE was able to mitigate immigration policy when in office (in 2019–2021). Already in their electoral manifesto for the 2019 general elections, EKRE proposed not just measures for forbidding immigration but also a kind of a positive programme which allowed labour migrants who are paid at least three times the average wage to enter the country outside of the immigration quota. The intentionally high salary requirement follows the same pattern as discovered in the analysis of UU discourses: hierarchies are constructed between categories of immigrants who are envisioned as merely theoretical (highly skilled specialists or eager-to-learn international students) and the 'actual immigrants' who are claimed to be arriving in Estonia. The chains of difference are also similar to the way in which EKRE mitigated proposing immigration legislation in office: through disadvantaging particular groups of migrants who were in parallel scapegoated by the UU public (see e.g. Jakobson & Kalev, 2020; Kalev, Chap. 6 in this volume).

While this analysis has focused on the discursive strategies used in the Estonian populist radical-right context, these strategies are also used in other empirical contexts. Remember Donald Trump's much-cited speech on 17 June 2017:

> When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

Here, there is also a distinction made between 'the best' and 'good' Mexicans or people present at his campaign launch ('They're not sending you') and the 'people that have lots of problems' and 'rapists'. This rhetorical move also leaves a door open for permissive policies and exceptions to the rule of immigrants causing various moral concerns. Of course, the consequentiality between discourse and policy needs further exploration, as this was not the focus of this chapter.

Admittedly, immigrant hierarchies are nothing uniquely characteristic to populists – nor are the logic of equivalence nor the populist discourse more generally. According to the discursive approach, we should not treat particular movements or politicians as populist but as a type of discourse that can be utilised by political actors of various positionings (Stavrakakis, 2017). The fact that immigrant hierarchies are nothing particular to exclusively populist positionings is also underscored by an earlier chapter (Chap. 11 by Umpierrez et al., in this volume) which provides a brief overview of where and how immigrant hierarchies exist. Yet, the case of populist radical-right rhetoric provides us with a so-called extreme case (Seawright & Gerring, 2008) which demonstrates that, even in contexts where the logic of difference is least expected, immigrant hierarchies exist and are one reason why people who claim to have a positive attitude towards immigrants still ascribe to (some) immigrants' more negative traits than immigrants *in corpore* deserve by objective merit.

Thus, immigrant hierarchies constructed through the chains of equivalence and difference also merit analysis in mainstream society. This can be instructive in terms of understanding the causes of anxieties about migration and the resultant so-called migration crises in host societies more broadly.

References

Asen, R. (2000). Seeking the 'counter' in counterpublics. *Communication Theory, 10*(4), 424–446.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press.

Bunderson, J. S., Van Der Vegt, G. S., Cantimur, Y., & Rink, F. (2016). Different views of hierarchy and why they matter: Hierarchy as inequality or as cascading influence. *Academy of Management Journal, 59*(4), 1265–1289.

Chung, D. S. (2009). How readers perceive journalists' functions at online community newspapers. *Newspaper Research Journal, 30*(1), 72–80.

Colic-Peisker, V. (2005). 'At least you're the right colour': Identity and social inclusion of Bosnian refugees in Australia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 31*(4), 615–638.

De Cleen, B., & Stavrakakis, Y. (2017). Distinctions and articulations: A discourse theoretical framework for the study of populism and nationalism. *Javnost-The Public, 24*(4), 301–319.

Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, white masks*. Grove Press.

Goerres, A., Spies, D. C., & Kumlin, S. (2018). The electoral supporter base of the Alternative for Germany. *Swiss Political Science Review, 24*(3), 246–269.

Griffith, D. (2005). Class relations among old and new immigrants. *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies, 1*(4), 89–107.

Ingram, H., Schneider, A. L., & DeLeon, P. (2019). Social construction and policy design. In P. A. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp. 93–126). Routledge.

Jakobson, M. L., & Kalev, L. (2020). Covid-19 crisis and labor migration policy: A perspective from Estonia. *Frontiers in Political Science, 2*, Article 595407.

Jakobson, M. L., Järvinen-Alenius, P., Pitkänen, P., Ruutsoo, R., Keski-Hirvelä, E., & Kalev, L. (2012). The emergence of Estonian–Finnish transnational space. In P. Pitkänen, A. Içduygu, & D. Sert (Eds.), *Migration and transformation: International perspectives on migration* (pp. 159–205). Springer.

Jakobson, M. L., Saarts, T., & Kalev, L. (2020). Radical right across borders? The case of EKRE's Finnish branch. In T. Kernalegenn & E. van Haute (Eds.), *Political parties abroad* (pp. 21–38). Routledge.

Joppke, C. (2003). Citizenship between de- and re-ethnicization. *European Journal of Sociology/ Archives Européennes de Sociologie, 44*(3), 429–458.

Kasekamp, A., Madisson, M. L., & Wierenga, L. (2019). Discursive opportunities for the Estonian populist radical right in a digital society. *Problems of Post-Communism, 66*(1), 47–58.

Kay, D., & Miles, R. (1992). *Refugees or migrant workers? European volunteer workers in Britain, 1946–1951*. Routledge.

Laclau, E. (2005). *On populist reason*. Verso.

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. Verso.

Marchlewska, M., Cichocka, A., Łozowski, F., Górska, P., & Winiewski, M. (2019). In search of an imaginary enemy: Catholic collective narcissism and the endorsement of gender conspiracy beliefs. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 159*(6), 766–779.

McDowell, L. (2009). Old and new European economic migrants: Whiteness and managed migration policies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 35*(1), 19–36.

Moynihan, D., Gerzina, J., & Herd, P. (2022). Kafka's bureaucracy: Immigration administrative burdens in the Trump era. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance, 5*(1), 22–35.

Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2013). Exclusionary vs inclusionary populism: Comparing contemporary Europe and Latin America. *Government and Opposition, 48*(2), 147–174.

Müller, J. W. (2016). *What is populism?* University of Pennsylvania Press.

Nowicka, M. (2018). Cultural precarity: Migrants' positionalities in the light of current anti-immigrant populism in Europe. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 39*(5), 527–542.

Petsinis, V. (2019). Identity politics and right-wing populism in Estonia: The case of EKRE. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, 25*(2), 211–230.

Ratzmann, N., & Sahraoui, N. (2021). Conceptualising the role of deservingness in migrants' access to social services. *Social Policy and Society, 20*(3), 440–451.

Reisigl, M. (2008). Analyzing political rhetoric. In R. Wodak & M. Krzyzanowski (Eds.), *Qualitative discourse analysis in the social sciences* (pp. 96–120). Palgrave Macmillan.

Rzepnikowska, A. (2019). Racism and xenophobia experienced by Polish migrants in the UK before and after Brexit vote. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45*(1), 61–77.

Saïd, E. (1978). Orientalism. In P. Williams & L. Chrisman (Eds.), *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: A reader* (pp. 132–149). Routledge.

Schneider, A., & Ingram, H. (1993). Social construction of target populations: Implications for politics and policy. *American Political Science Review, 87*(2), 334–347.

Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case selection techniques in case study research: A menu of qualitative and quantitative options. *Political Research Quarterly, 61*(2), 294–308.

Stavrakakis, Y. (2017). Discourse theory in populism research: Three challenges and a dilemma. *Journal of Language and Politics, 16*(4), 523–534.

Taggart, P. (2004). Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe. *Journal of Political Ideologies, 9*(3), 269–288.

Tilly, C. (2001). *Durable inequality*. University of California Press.

Toepfl, F., & Piwoni, E. (2015). Public spheres in interaction: Comment sections of news websites as counterpublic spaces. *Journal of Communication, 65*(3), 465–488.

Van Langenhove, L. (2017). Varieties of moral orders and the dual structure of society: A perspective from positioning theory. *Frontiers in Sociology, 2*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2017.00009

Van Leeuwen, T. (2007). Legitimation in discourse and communication. *Discourse & Communication, 1*(1), 91–112.

Van Oorschot, W. (2000). Who should get what, and why? On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public. *Policy and Politics, 28*(1), 33–48.

Virkama, A., Therrien, C., Harrami, N., & Kadri, A. (2012). Franco–Moroccan transnational space: Continuity and transformations. In P. Pitkänen, A. Içduygu, & D. Sert (Eds.), *Migration and transformation: International perspectives on migration* (pp. 63–101). Springer.

Warner, M. (2002). Publics and counterpublics (abbreviated version). *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 88*(4), 413–425.

Wodak, R. (2015). *The politics of fear: What right-wing populist discourses mean*. Sage.

Wodak, R. (2017). The 'establishment', the 'elites', and the 'people': Who's who? *Journal of Language and Politics, 16*(4), 551–565.