

ABSTRACT

Election posters - recent as well as historical ones - bluntly unveil the mentality of societal groups. More than 500 posters designed for the first five parliamentary elections in Austria between 1919 and 1930 illustrate how the democratic parties defined new aesthetical dimensions for the political language. All those posters referred to a simple concept of polarization and constituted the images of the political enemies. Every party – not a single one can be excluded – employed thinking in enemy terms and this fact was not even a main motivation for the two world wars but also determined the quality of the political culture in the years in between.

Methodologically, the media investigation merged two established research standards – Image Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis – in order to filter and interpret the significant public images of the parties. Those were evaluated using a quantitative/qualitative scheme and, by definition, comparing the *Selbstbild* (self representation) and the *Fremdbild* (other representation). While focusing on the use of symbols as agitation tools as well as the strategies of symbolization the major difference between the center/right-wing parties and the left-wing parties has been extracted. It was evident, that the right-wing parties acted similarly by having ordered anti-modern compositions, that operated with a conventional visual and verbal language. On contrary, the left wing parties – especially the Social-Democrats – arranged their election campaigns according to the rules of modern graphic design and consequently followed the mass communication standards. By elaborating new aesthetical codes they became a model for the National-Socialist's propaganda. From 1930 onwards, the National-Socialists concentrated on aesthetical improvements, adapted elements from both the right and the left ideological discourse and took over the successfully proven patterns of mass communication (that before were only practiced by the left-wing parties). The National-Socialists also made big efforts to benefit from the imperfectness of the election

campaigns, no matter of what political direction. Obviously, the Social-Democrats did a mistake in their communication policy when they magnified the image/symbol of the *red aggressor*. Although this symbol intentionally referred to the emerging self-esteem of the Social-Democrats, it was soon utilized by the National Socialists and helped them, in the end, to triumph in the *symbol war*.