

The Meaning of Anti-Americanism: A Performative Approach to Anti-American Prejudice

Felix Knappertsbusch, Department of Sociology, Justus Liebig University, Giessen, Germany

Vol. 7 (1) 2013

Focus Section 1: Transitions from Violence – The Impact of Transitional Justice

Editorial (p. 3)

Introduction: Transitions from Violence – Analyzing the Effects of Transitional Justice Thorsten Bonacker / Susanne Buckley-Zistel (pp. 4 – 9)

Bringing Justice and Enforcing Peace? An Ethnographic Perspective on the Impact of the Special Court for Sierra Leone Friederike Mieth (pp. 10 – 22)

Contesting International Norms of Transitional Justice: The Case of Timor Leste Eva Ottendörfer (pp. 23 – 35)

Transitional Justice: History-Telling, Collective Memory, and the Victim-Witness Chrisje Brants / Katrien Klep (pp. 36 – 49)

Focus Section 2: Qualitative Research on Prejudice

Guest Editorial: Qualitative Research on Prejudice Felix Knappertsbusch / Björn Milbradt / Udo Kelle (pp. 50 – 56)

Racism, Differentialism, and Antiracism in Everyday Ideology: A Mixed-Methods Study in Britain Peter Martin (pp. 57 – 73)

“It Depends How You’re Saying It”: The Complexities of Everyday Racism Jessica Walton / Naomi Priest / Yin Paradies (pp. 74 – 90)

► **The Meaning of Anti-Americanism: A Performative Approach to Anti-American Prejudice** Felix Knappertsbusch (pp. 91 – 107)

How Racist Violence Becomes a Virtue: An Application of Discourse Analysis E. Rosemary McKeever / Richard Reed / Samuel Pehrson / Lesley Storey / J. Christopher Cohrs (pp. 108 – 120)

Dealing with Discrimination and the Struggle for Social Advancement in Migrant Families: Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of a Study on Adolescent Generational Dynamics in Turkish Migrant Families Subjected to Marginalization Vera King / Hans-Christoph Koller / Janina Zölch (pp. 121 – 134)

Economic Prosperity as “Narcissistic Filling”: A Missing Link Between Political Attitudes and Right-wing Authoritarianism Oliver Decker / Katharina Rothe / Marliese Weißmann / Johannes Kiess / Elmar Brähler (pp. 135 – 149)

“I Am First and Foremost a Man of Logic” – Stereotyping, the Syndrome Character of Prejudice, and a Glance at Anders Breivik’s Manifesto Bjoern Milbradt (pp. 150 – 163)

Open Section

The Dynamics of the Creation, Evolution, and Disappearance of Terrorist Internet Forums Manuel Ricardo Torres-Soriano (pp. 164 – 178)

The Effect of Youth Demographics on Violence: The Importance of the Labor Market Noah Q. Bricker / Mark C. Foley (pp. 179 – 194)



The Meaning of Anti-Americanism: A Performative Approach to Anti-American Prejudice

Felix Knappertsbusch, Department of Sociology, Justus Liebig University, Giessen, Germany

A contribution to the ongoing debate on how anti-Americanism can be adequately conceptualized and how such prejudice can be distinguished from legitimate criticism, arguing that part of these conceptual problems arise from a too narrow focus on defining anti-Americanism and the use of standardized empirical operationalizations. Such approaches exhibit severe limitations in grasping the flexibility of the phenomenon in everyday discourse and often underestimate or ignore the interpretive aspect involved in identifying utterances as anti-American prejudice. Alternatively, a performative approach is proposed, understanding anti-Americanism as a network of speech acts bound by family resemblance rather than identical features. In combination with qualitative empirical research methods such a conceptualization is especially suited to account for the flexible, situated use of anti-American utterances. At the same time it grants reflexivity to the research concept, in the sense of a close description of the scientific application of the notion of anti-Americanism. Two empirical examples from an interview study on anti-American speech in Germany illustrate the potential of such an approach, providing an insight into how anti-Americanism is incorporated into the construction and expression of racist and revisionist national identifications in everyday discourse.

How should we explain to someone what a game is? I imagine that we should describe games to him, and we might add: "This and similar things are called 'games'". And do we know any more about it ourselves? Is it only other people who we cannot tell exactly what a game is? – But this is not ignorance. We do not know the boundaries because none have been drawn.

(Wittgenstein 1967, § 69)

In the field of research on prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination, anti-Americanism is one of the rather controversial and often neglected topics. The notion of anti-Americanism is often accompanied by debates about the extent and intent of its application, what counts as anti-American, and what should be regarded as legitimate criticism of the United States. The concept is frequently dismissed as mere political rhetoric, and critics deny it has any substance, much more than with many other forms of prejudice (Hahn 2003, 20–21; Markovits 2007, 13 ff.). Those claiming such a position often regard anti-Americanism as a legitimate and necessary form of political protest (Misik 2003; ProKla 1989). Some of the opponents of criticism of anti-Americanism even affirm-

actively label themselves anti-American, while claiming that there is nothing wrong with prejudice when it comes to the United States (O'Connor 2007, 13–14; Markovits 2007, 25). While I do not mean to ignore the specific characteristics of different forms of prejudice and discrimination, or equate them directly, the general rejection of criticism of anti-Americanism seems to be rather troubling. I agree with Brendon O'Connor's slightly hyperbolic claim: "to overcome anti-American prejudice, we first need to overcome the prejudice against seeing anti-Americanism as a form of prejudice" (O'Connor 2007, 19).

However, at the same time researchers in this field agree that there is good reason to criticize the current state of research on anti-Americanism:

Despite its currency in popular discourse, anti-Americanism is a topic that has received limited attention by academics. This lack of attention is probably due to two factors. First, anti-Americanism is a term that is difficult to conceptualize. Second, it easily lends itself to (mis)use as a pejorative.

(Johnston 2006, 2–3)

Brendon O'Connor claims that research on anti-Americanism seems to have somewhat prematurely rushed past more basic conceptual issues that still need to be dealt with:

The existing academic literature provides endless divisions between different so-called sources of anti-Americanism but there is too little scholarship on what anti-Americanism conceptually is and thus how anti-Americanism can effectively be differentiated from criticism.

(O'Connor 2007, 7)

Some of the most informative work on anti-Americanism seeks to resolve these conceptual problems by employing the notion of prejudice (ibid., 13–14). This approach has many virtues and constitutes one of the most promising developments in current anti-Americanism research. It provides useful distinctions and theoretical concepts, while connecting the study of anti-Americanism more closely to the large and well-established body of prejudice research. Secondly, as O'Connor rightfully indicates, this anti-Americanism-as-prejudice perspective places the notion of anti-Americanism in a strong normative context with “significant cultural and political resonance in the fight against racism and discrimination” (ibid.). However, at the same time, I argue that considerable shortcomings in the way prejudice is commonly conceptualized limit the concept's potential to resolve the problems that it is supposed to. What is interesting about both Johnston's and O'Connor's diagnoses is their mention of a close association between conceptual and practical or ethical aspects of the notion of anti-Americanism. The disagreement about how anti-Americanism should be defined seems to be strongly related to the question of how a *good use* of the concept might be construed (for example, how anti-Americanism can be differentiated from criticism of the United States). In fact, it seems to me that this controversy is at least as much about the *application* of the concept of anti-Americanism, as it is about its definition.¹ This question of a *good use* of definitions will thus occupy a central place in

my exploration. I will argue that conceptions of anti-Americanism as prejudice often focus too much on strict definitions of their subject matter, dismissing the importance of also accounting for the immense variability in their application to concrete empirical phenomena, i.e. reflecting on the empirical application of such concepts. I will go on to show how these conceptual foundations, which stand very much in the tradition of the “prejudice as attitude” approach (Nelson 2002, 8–9), limit the scope for addressing the problems outlined above. In my view, they are too focused on defining an essential core of anti-Americanism: “the ‘real thing’, the real anti-Americanism” (Markovits 2007, 12). Applying a distinction Andrei Markovits has fruitfully applied to the criticism of anti-Americanism (ibid.), one could say that research seems to concentrate too much on what anti-Americanism “is” and too little on what it actually “does.” The reciprocal relation of semantics and pragmatics in meaning-making (both lay and scientific) is reduced to a mere problem of definitional imprecision, to be resolved by the abstract listing of the right criteria. In contrast to this, I will stress the “priority of practice” both in lay discourse and scientific conceptualization (Bloor 2001).

A similar criticism has recently been put forward by Klaus Baethge and colleagues (2010), pointing out how notions of anti-Americanism are often too occupied with definitions of the content of anti-American stereotypes, while neglecting a thorough investigation of their flexible functionality in everyday discourse. Building on this line of argument, I propose a performative perspective on anti-Americanism, grasping it as an open network of speech acts. In this perspective the focus is shifted towards anti-Americanism as practical meaning-making, concerning not definable features of the prejudiced psyche or lexical-semantic core elements of anti-American speech, but anti-Americanism as embedded in the discursive practice of “everyday ideology” (Martin 2010, 62). Such highlighting of the performative aspect of anti-American speech

¹ Similarly, Konrad Jarausch has suggested including the meta-debate on the scientific and political use of the term itself in research on anti-Americanism (Jarausch 2005, 46–47).

simultaneously serves as a reflection on the empirical use of the scientific concept of anti-Americanism: reflecting on the everyday language use of *anti-American talk* reciprocally implies reflecting on the scientific language use of *talk about anti-Americanism*. The assumption that we cannot theoretically know or properly define what anti-Americanism *is* unless we empirically work through various instances of what it *does* is essential to this approach. In fact, what anti-Americanism *is*, as determined by definitions, is only a reflection on the practice of what anti-American speech *does*. This emphasis on practical meaning in context necessitates the use of methods of empirically grounded theory construction,² which have as yet received very limited attention in the study of anti-Americanism.³ I will argue that while standardized empirical methods show serious limitations with regard to a performative perspective on anti-American speech, qualitative methods within the framework of empirically grounded theory construction fit this theoretical approach particularly well.

1. Current Conceptualizations of Anti-Americanism as Prejudice

As described above, the anti-Americanism-as-prejudice perspective can be seen as one of the most promising developments in current anti-Americanism research, since it provides a more detailed and conceptually consistent understanding of the matter than many other conceptualizations which, as O'Connor points out (2007, 10 ff., 19), often use the term either in a too liberal or an overly restricted way. Understanding anti-Americanism as a form of prejudice seems to avoid both of these tendencies and is therefore adopted by many researchers (O'Connor 2007, Markovits 2007, Keohane and Katzenstein 2007, Beyer and Liebe 2010). However, despite its obvious advantages, the notion of prejudice is far from guaranteeing a more concise and insightful approach to the phenomenon.

Scientific concepts essentially have to meet the same demands as any abstract concept in everyday language use:

They have to be understandable as distinctive signifiers of certain referents, but have to do so in a wide variety of different contexts. Thus, the question is: How can we *identify* anti-Americanism as a general concept that is at the same time *flexible* enough to denote a potentially infinite number of particular actions (i.e. expressions of anti-Americanism)? Definitions of anti-American prejudice typically seek to deal with this problem analytically, by naming “core markers” (O'Connor 2007, 2) or “minimal characteristics” (Markovits 2007, 12) as criteria for the adequate application of the definition. But even if these criteria are closely defined, the difficulty of judging exactly when they are met remains. To pick out just one example, here are the central characteristics of anti-American prejudice cited by Markovits (referring to Josef Joffe):

1. Stereotypization (that is, statements of the type: “This is what they are all like.”)
2. Denigration (the ascription of a collective moral or cultural inferiority to the target group)
3. Omnipotence (e.g., “They control the media, the economy, the world.”)
4. Conspiracy (e.g., “This is what they want to do to us surreptitiously and stealthily – sully our racial purity, destroy our traditional, better, and morally superior ways.”)
5. Obsession (a constant preoccupation with the perceived and feared evil and powerful ways of the hated group) (Markovits 2007, 12.)

The question is: when are these criteria actually fulfilled? For example, a statement like “The Americans are superficial and selfish” surely does appear stereotypical. But then again, there are many conceivable contexts in which it would probably not be viewed as an expression of prejudice. After all, we use simplifications and exaggerations in our everyday speech all the time, judging individuals by their group membership without being prejudiced.⁴ Furthermore, can the statement be regarded as denigrating? The context of utterance may very well not imply a strong

² The term “empirically grounded theory construction” is used here in a broader sense, not specifically referring to Glaser and Strauss’s approach.

³ A notable exception being the abovementioned study by Baethge and colleagues (2010), who very

fruitfully apply a reconstructive empirical approach to material gathered via group discussions.

⁴ Keohane and Katzenstein, who apply the notion of cognitive “schemas” to their concept of anti-Americanism point out a similar problem: “Schemas do not necessarily imply bias. Indeed they can be

based on a coherent worldview based on a reasonable interpretation of available facts.” (Keohane and Katzenstein 2007, 13)

evaluative notion or a sense of hierarchy. In addition, not all forms of devaluation or hierarchization are generally denigrating in a prejudiced way.⁵ Does a speaker necessarily have to ascribe omnipotence and conspiracy to “the Americans” for his speech to be counted as anti-American? And what is meant by the clinical term “obsession”? In what sense are speakers of anti-American discourse obsessive, and do they have to be?⁶ Moreover, if not all of these criteria are necessary, which ones in which combinations would be sufficient? Can there even be a fixed set of necessary and sufficient conditions?⁷

As we can see, notions like the one cited above focus on typical features of anti-Americanism as a definite concept, but largely disregard a systematic account of how these features are *flexibly* realized within actual utterances. This becomes especially problematic when dealing with expressions of anti-Americanism that are not cases of blunt ideological agitation, but part of everyday discourse, “speech acts of ordinary people who don’t hold political office ... and who haven’t made a profession out of writing or speaking” (Martin 2010, 40; see also Baethge et al. 2010). To be sure, most authors are aware that their definitions have to be applied in a context-specific and situated manner. For instance, Andrei Markovits has repeatedly emphasized the importance of tone and context in describing the anti-American quality of actual speech: “The content defines, but the context lends meaning.” (2007, 16) However, current research on anti-Americanism mostly approaches this problem as if it were predominantly about finding a “more precise definition of the term” (O’Connor 2007, 6), neglecting the issue of concept application. According to a practice theoretical perspective on language and meaning (Potter 2011), the norms of language use do not function like axiomatic definitions, but have to retain a certain amount of uncertainty. This “systematic ambiguity” is only suspended in the practice of everyday dis-

course (Winch 2008 [1958], 25). Applying this notion to definitive conceptions of anti-Americanism, they face the same problem as any strictly axiomatic understanding of language use. As Peter Winch formulates with regard to how ostensive definitions are unable to account for the application of the word “Everest”:

However emphatically I point at this mountain here before me and however emphatically I utter the words “this mountain”, my decision still has to be applied in the future, and it is precisely what is involved in such an application that is here in question. Hence no formula will help to solve this problem; we must always come to a point at which we have to give an account of the application of the formula.

(Winch 2008 [1958], 27)

Accordingly, the problems of applying the concept of anti-Americanism will not be solved by a more precise definition alone, but will require a conceptualization that reflexively integrates its own application *as part* of the subject matter. However, since this integration cannot be achieved in a strictly formalized manner, it will require the close description of empirical examples of the phenomenon in question. This has implications for how we conceptualize anti-Americanism in two different yet reciprocal regards: Firstly, it concerns the way in which we view our scientific approach towards investigating the social phenomenon in question. Secondly, and by the same token, it concerns the way in which we grasp the subject matter itself, i.e. how we conceptualize expressions of anti-Americanism. These aspects will be discussed in the two following sections.

2. Anti-Americanism as Performative Utterance

The conceptual problems discussed above can be summarized by the question: How can the anti-American meaning of an utterance be grasped and what, consequently, is the meaning of the term anti-Americanism? As an alternative

5 For example, the everyday distinctive practices between adherents of different sub-cultural movements surely express a certain amount of group-based hierarchy and in-group favoritism, as does everyday chat with friends about colleagues, etc. Ethically problematic as some of these practices may be, to simply include them in the concept of

prejudice would empty the notion of much of its specific meaning.

6 This also ties in with the problem of “individualism” found in most prejudice research (Wetherell 2012, 161 ff.). Can the anti-American quality of (speech) acts really be grasped as a psychological condition of the speakers?

7 My criticism here is in many respects congruent with the arguments made against definitional concepts in cognitive psychology from a graded structure and prototypes perspective (Rosch 1999). I will come back to this in section 2.

to a definition-based answer I propose a performative or speech-act-theory perspective. Simply put, the central question raised by such an approach is not *what is said* in an utterance, but *what is done* by saying it.

The notion of speech acts is most prominently associated with the work of John L. Austin, whose influential *How to Do Things With Words* dealt with what Sadock describes as “the observation that certain sorts of sentences, e.g., I christen this ship the Joseph Stalin; I now pronounce you man and wife, and the like, seem designed to do something, here to christen and wed, respectively, rather than merely to say something” (Sadock 2006, 54). After initially introducing a distinction between “Constatives” and “Performatives” (ibid.), to theoretically grasp this interplay of “saying” and “doing,” Austin eventually acknowledged that every speech act, even the mere stating of facts, can be seen to have a performative aspect (Austin 1975, 91–92, 133 ff.), and suggested three general levels of description instead: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts (Austin 1975, 101 ff.). While Austin’s “performative speech acts” primarily referred to a certain class of institutionalized illocutionary acts (to promise, to wed, etc.), I will use the concept “performativity” in a broader sense similar to the applications put forward by Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter (1992, 90): A performative perspective in this sense focuses on what Austin calls “perlocutionary” acts, i.e. the effect of a speech act within a certain context of action. Accordingly, I propose to grasp anti-Americanism as performative utterance, i.e. as the perlocutions evoked by certain contextual uses of certain semantic motifs, not the mere definable features of such uses or motifs.⁸ This notion of performativity is closely related to Wittgenstein’s view on the contextual nature of meaningful speech in “language games” that are “part of an activity, or of a form of life” (Wittgenstein 1967, 11). The meaning of a sentence cannot be grasped without understanding its functional role within a specific language game, which in turn has to be described as nested in the broader practices of a form of life: “To obey

a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess are *customs* (uses, institutions). To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be master of a technique.” (Wittgenstein 1967, 81)⁹ Let me point out that this embedment of linguistic meaning in everyday practices does not aim to describe the functions of speech acts as additional events exterior to “mere” speech, i.e. something that follows from it causally or goes along with it coincidentally. It rather describes a perspective on linguistic meaning, in which it can only be understood as a contextualized form of practice: “the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (ibid., 20). Thus, when I talk about anti-American meaning as a performative effect, I do not mean to investigate whether certain speech acts have certain direct causal effects (e.g. if somebody was actually discriminated against or harmed as a consequence of this particular speech act), but rather to highlight the practical context as a necessary component of interpreting something *as anti-American*. Such interpretation then implies reconstructing *possible perlocutions* from the specific point of view of a prejudice critique.

In the field of prejudice research, a practice theoretical approach has been developed in the theory of rhetorical and discursive social psychology, most prominently pursued by Michael Billig, Margaret Wetherell, and Jonathan Potter (Martin 2010, 106 ff.). In their work on *Mapping the Language of Racism*, Wetherell and Potter develop a criticism of traditional prejudice research, which I will apply to the argument outlined above. By pointing out the limitations of an approach that is mainly concerned with “defining the content of racism in an a priori fashion” (Wetherell and Potter 1992, 69), they focus on “discourse in action rather than language as an abstract system” (71; see also Billig 1991, 44). This approach treats “as primary what may be called the ‘action orientation’ of discourse”:

The sense of texts or talk is not seen as derived from their abstract meaning or organization but from their situated use.

⁸ Thus, when I talk about performative anti-Americanism, I am not implying anti-American speech that could be classified as “performative speech acts” in Austin’s narrower sense. I am not

talking about anti-Americanisms as something comparable to “promises,” “christenings,” “weddings,” or the like.

⁹ Note how Wittgenstein, in contrast to Austin’s understanding of performative speech, employs a much broader notion of institutions and customs.

By the same token, the nature of the use to which any text or talk is put is not derivable from the abstract or dictionary meanings of the terms used.

(Wetherell and Potter 1992, 90)

Thus, this approach suggests a distinction of “interpretative resource” and “the flexible application of that resource in practice” to reconstruct the meaning of prejudiced speech (Wetherell 2012, 171). Following this line of thinking, I apply a heuristic distinction between semantic content of utterances (in a lexical-grammatical sense) and their use in context as the basis for my empirically grounded notion of anti-Americanism. Both of these aspects, semantics and use, are to be conceptualized as essentially contingent with regard to anti-American meaning, i.e. neither of the two suffices in itself to classify a prejudiced speech act as anti-American; it is the performative effect of certain situated combinations that constitutes anti-American meaning (Wetherell and Potter 1992, 70, 90–91).¹⁰

This means that, contrary to traditional definitions of prejudice as “faulty and inflexible generalizations” that are “factually wrong” (Martin 2010, 67 ff., 104; also Wetherell and Potter 1992, 67 ff.), the criticism of anti-Americanism (or any prejudice, for that matter) cannot be primarily concerned with propositional truth claims. Even though anti-Americanism may often present itself as mere constative speech, criticism needs to be primarily concerned with the practical or ethical meaning of what people actually do when performing such speech acts, not the factual validity of their claims (Baethge et al. 2010, 373). This also serves as a strong argument against “correspondence approach[es]” and “representational analyses” of prejudice

(Wetherell and Potter 1992, 67 ff.; Holz 2001, 62), which still are rather common in anti-Americanism research.¹¹

The claim that anti-Americanism is not primarily a matter of propositional truth, however, should not be misunderstood as an argument for the arbitrariness of its semantic content. It is important to acknowledge that semantic content and functional use are interconnected: certain semantic content is needed to achieve specific functional outcomes (Holz 2001, 59–60), although it may not exclusively provide the means to achieve these functions (Baethge et al. 2010, 377 ff.).

Focusing on the performative aspect of (anti-American) prejudice also highlights the super-individual quality of the phenomenon, since it is concerned with grasping the “ideological thrust” of utterances (Wetherell 2012, 171): “This means studying thinking, and the holding of opinions, in its wider social context” (Billig 1991, 1). Although current notions of prejudice in social psychology acknowledge the contextual factors of its expression, most concepts still retain an individualistic bias, conceiving the phenomenon first and foremost by individual factors which are then placed in social context: “Prejudice remains a personal pathology, a failure of inner-directed empathy and intellect, rather than a social pathology, shaped by power relations and the conflicting vested interests of groups” (Wetherell 2012, 165). A performative approach tries to integrate both aspects, reading utterances of prejudice as expressions of “social pathologies” (see also Honneth 2007) while at the same time accounting for the fragmented and flexible character of their subjective realization.¹²

10 Despite the principal contingency in the connection of relevant semantic content and its anti-American or non-anti-American use, it has to be assumed that some motifs relevant to anti-American prejudice may coincide more often with anti-American use than others; some may even necessitate such applications. Wetherell and Potter mention a similar idea with regard to racism: “We acknowledge that there are some interpretative resources which will constitute social action in racist ways on nearly every occasion they are deployed. However, to focus on these is to ignore the other, sometimes more flexible, resources which characterize a good deal of ‘modern racism’” (71).

11 Examples of such approaches, seeking to grasp anti-Americanism via definitions of “Americanism” or “Americanization” include: Srp (2005, 32, 40) and Birkenkämper (2006, 24–25). Keohane and Katzenstein also express a representational leaning in their concept (2007, 3). For critical remarks on such conceptualizations see also O’Connor (2007, 17–18) and O’Connor and Griffiths (2006, 1).

12 The term social pathology refers to the paradoxical normative basis of critical theory, which has to simultaneously assume the falsity of ideological thought and consider itself to be caught up in it. A critical approach to the subject of investigation thus implies avoiding both “a radical elitism, which downgrades individual autonomy” as well as “an individual analysis, which accepts uncritically the frameworks of power” (Billig 1991, 13). Since such a critique cannot assume a viewpoint outside of ideological social conditions, it is not concerned with a “correction” of “definitely false” consciousness, but with the interpretive reflection and transformation of a false social practice which it considers itself to be an active part of (cf. Menke 1996; Bonacker 2000).

To provide a theoretical framework that systematically includes the considerations of speech act theory discussed above, I propose the following concept: Anti-Americanism is the performative aspect of speech acts that are characterized by the interplay of particular America motifs and particular situated uses.

Of course, this notion only provides a “heuristic framework” (Kelle 2005, 14) which, to be theoretically informative, has to be combined with empirical research. A conceptualization of anti-American prejudice will thus consist of an empirical “mapping” (Wetherell and Potter 1992) of relevant America motifs and their different situated uses, combined with examples of actual anti-American performances. Here are some examples of such motifs and uses.¹³

Table 1: Examples of America motifs relevant to anti-American speech and possible anti-American applications

Relevant America motifs	Typical uses in anti-American speech
· The United States acts as an overbearing “world police,” interfering with other nations’ affairs	· Externalization of uncomfortable aspects of (national) in-group identity, e.g. self-contradictory elements
· American culture is superficial, or Americans have no real culture	· Deflection of anticipated moral sanctioning for certain opinions or arguments (e.g. nationalism) via comparison to the United States
· Americans are hypocritical, for example in their moral and religious behavior	· A camouflaged expression of anti-Semitism or racism
· Americans are overly individualistic and unable to develop profound social bonds	· ...
· Americans are uneducated and naive	
· ...	

Again, I want to stress that the reproduction of the America motifs cited above does not necessarily make an utterance anti-American, nor do the communicative functions given on the right hand side of the table by themselves suffice as criteria for anti-American prejudice. To be counted as anti-American speech, an utterance needs to be shown to achieve one or more of the given functions

through the reproduction of one or more typical America motifs. As can be seen from the example functions listed, conceptualizing anti-Americanism in this perspective coincides with a close description of the more general ideological phenomena it is nested in. A functional connection to antisemitism and racism seems to be an important part of this ideological context of anti-American speech, while all three share strong ties to nationalist identity construction. I will point out some functional affinities and specific differences between these phenomena in more detail in the empirical examples below.

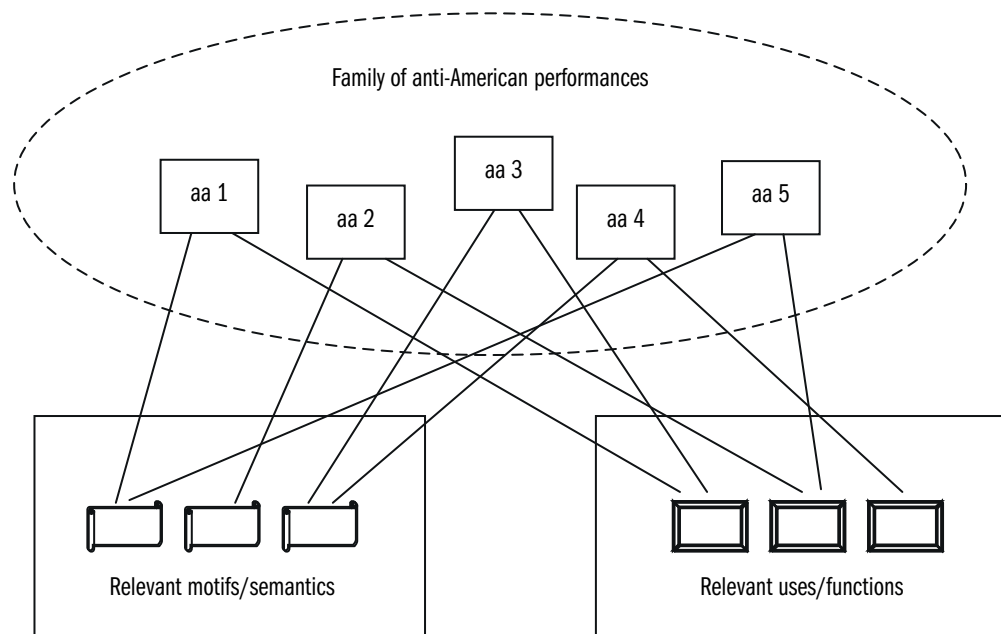
Thus far I have concentrated on the potential of a performative approach to account for the *flexibility* of anti-American utterances. However, the question remains open, how such a diversification of the concept can at the same time satisfy the need to comprehensively *identify* anti-Americanism, i.e. distinguish different manifestations of anti-Americanism *as manifestations of a common phenomenon*. I will draw on Wittgenstein’s notion of “family resemblances” to suggest an answer (Wittgenstein 1967, 32).

In his famous example of the word “game” and its meaningful use, Wittgenstein comes to the interesting conclusion that, even though there is obviously a practical understanding of the term in everyday language, it is impossible to define a single essential feature, “something that is common to all” of its applications (31). He describes several different understandings of the word, concluding that “the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail” (32). Following this general description of the distinctive yet flexible use of a concept, I propose to grasp the notion of anti-Americanism as a family of speech acts, bound not by identity but similarity of features. The concept is illustrated in Figure 1, where the two lower boxes represent the inventory of relevant semantics and applications (as described in Table 1), and the ellipse above (dashed line) comprises the family of particular anti-American speech acts.

¹³ The table represents an excerpt from the author’s ongoing dissertation on contemporary anti-American speech in Germany. The examples are pre-

liminary results of empirical work in progress and are thus to be treated with a degree of caution.

Figure 1: Anti-Americanism as Family Resemblance



The essential difference from analytical definitions of anti-Americanism is that the members of the family do not share a universally common feature (or set of features), at least none that could justify their classification as anti-American:¹⁴ “aa 1” and “aa 3” show common functions of different motifs while “aa 3” and “aa 4” achieve different functions via the same motifs. By way of resemblance, this connects “aa 1” to “aa 4” via “aa 3,” while “aa 2” is connected to the rest of the group via “aa 5.” Thus, no single feature binds all five cases together. They can be denominated as anti-American only with reference to the family of anti-American discourse, i.e. their resemblances to other anti-American speech acts whose features are not included in every family member. What makes an utterance anti-American is not located entirely in the utterance itself, but in its association to a group of utterances that make up the discourse of anti-American speech. Reciprocally, the general features of the family of anti-American discourse, i.e.

the concept of anti-Americanism, cannot be explained without reference to the particular features of its members. Thus, the anti-American quality of an utterance is not a feature that can be directly observed or defined. Instead, we need to account for what anti-Americanism is by showing similarities within its flexible realizations. This requires an interpretative act of regarding something *as anti-American*, as I will point out in more detail in the following section. As John O’Connor has suggested with regard to conceptualizing anti-American ideology, the different expressions of anti-Americanism are seen here too as bound by a “flexible coherence” (O’Connor 2007, 16). But instead of assuming an “ideological ‘core’” binding these ideas, as O’Connor does (ibid.), I stress the conceptual idea of a coreless network of commonalities. To adopt another Wittgensteinian metaphor: such a notion of anti-Americanism allows us to “extend our concept ... as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength

14 For instance, even though all expressions of anti-Americanism may include a direct or indirect reference to Americans or the United States, this

common criterion cannot distinguish anti-Americanism from non-anti-American language uses.

of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres” (Wittgenstein 1967, 32).¹⁵ Of course, the empirical analysis of such a network of similarities will at different stages result in stating the most common anti-American uses and America motifs, in an attempt to provide a general description of the characteristics of anti-Americanism. But we must not misconstrue these general characteristics as *something that exists* in the same way as the particular realizations do (ibid.). Such treatment of the social practice of anti-American speech runs the risk of creating “fictional things” (Billig 2011, 14 ff.) instead of informative accounts of what people do, thereby overlooking the flexibility and functionality of such actions.

3. Methodological Implications of a Performative Approach to Anti-Americanism

I have argued for shifting the focus of anti-Americanism research towards the empirical application of its concepts by investigating the situated use of America stereotypes. I will now point out how methods of qualitative empirical research can help to foster such an approach. This is discussed within the frame of empirically grounded theory construction, where the topic of theory application has been extensively discussed (Kelle 1998; Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2008, 16–17).

It is a commonly acknowledged insight in general epistemology and the methodology of empirical science, that any empirical observation constitutes a “theory-laden” undertaking” (Hanson 1972, 19; see also Kelle 2005, 3; Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2008, 17), i.e. any observation of something presupposes prior knowledge enabling us to see it *as something*. Applying a concept of anti-Americanism constitutes such an operation of “seeing as” (Hanson 1972), which

means that it contains a necessary element of interpretation. The anti-American meaning is not merely something which is “in the data,” but also in the act of scientific observation. I have shown above that this interpretative act of “seeing as,” i.e. applying the concept, cannot be grasped in an axiomatic fashion (see section 1). Nonetheless, methods of standardized operationalization, which are predominant in anti-Americanism research, can be regarded as an attempt to do exactly that: concept application in a formalized manner. In contrast to this, I will argue that the interpretative aspect of concept application needs to be mirrored by the methodology of empirical research, which can be achieved through the hermeneutics of qualitative empirical study.

It has been repeatedly noted that standardized measures of anti-Americanism, especially common survey instruments, “risk imposing a conceptual unity on extremely diverse sets of political processes that mean different things in different contexts” (Keohane and Katzenstein 2007, 19; see also O’Connor 2007, 6). Such measurements are most commonly operationalized via the scaling of agreement to certain statements using instruments ranging from simply asking about approval or disapproval of US politics or the United States in general (Chiozza 2007) to more distinctively assessing respondents’ agreement or disagreement with items expressing typical semantic content of anti-American speech (Knappertsbusch and Kelle 2010; Beyer and Liebe 2010; Schwan 1999). In any case, this kind of empirical application may identify the reproduction of relevant America stereotypes, but tells us hardly anything about *how these motifs are used* by the respondents. As I argue above, to assess the anti-American meaning of an utterance it is most important to observe not only certain stereotypes, but also their situated use. A standardized op-

¹⁵ As noted in section 1, my proposed understanding of the concept is very much in line with prototype theory as pursued by Eleanor Rosch. Without being able to go into further detail here, this applies especially with regard to her understanding of concepts as bound by family resemblance rather than necessary and sufficient conditions, her rejection of solipsism or individualism, the context-dependency of concept-meaning, and the participatory rather than identifying character of concepts (Rosch 2012, 68 ff.).

erationalization does not provide the necessary context to *read an utterance as* anti-American in its use. To be sure, this by no means renders standardized surveys inappropriate to the study of (anti-American) prejudice: they remain an indispensable tool for assessing the prevalence of certain patterns of interpretation within larger populations (Martin 2010, 122 ff.) and describing models of probabilistic causality (Kelle 2008, 181 ff.). But, strictly speaking, they can never grasp anti-American speech in action: the standardized operationalization provides a black box of probability, however plausible the instrument construction may be, rather than an account of the actual use of the phrases they survey. To give such an account, we need to approach expressions of anti-Americanism as readable texts that provide more vivid information about what actors do by uttering them. Methods of interpretative empirical research can provide the means for such reconstructions of the anti-American meaning of utterances. Material gathered through qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba 2005, 10 ff.), such as transcripts of non-standardized interviews, provide an opportunity to observe the reproduction of certain America images *and* interpret them as (non-)anti-American utterances in their situated use.¹⁶ Such a combination of empirical and theoretical practice can be described as a form of empirically grounded theory construction (Kelle 1998). While research following the quantitative empirical paradigm favors a “hypothetico-deductive model of theory generation” (Kelle 2005, 16), in which theory development and empirical hypothesis-testing are consecutive, the methodology of empirically grounded theory construction contests such a strict division of theoretical and empirical research practice. Instead, it favors a model of theory generation in which empirical observation and theoretical understanding and/or explanation are reciprocal: theory generation becomes the scientific practice of “seeing as,” in which theoretical and empirical aspects are inextricably intertwined (Kalthoff 2008, 8–9). Such a methodological framework corresponds

nicely with the conceptual notion of family resemblance outlined above, in which the theoretical abstractions remain reciprocally bound to their empirical realizations and vice versa.

4. Two Empirical Examples of Anti-American Speech

Applying the heuristic distinction between *America motifs* and their situated anti-American use, I will show how certain America images can be used in an ideological context that justifies reading them as anti-American speech. To illustrate my proposition that the criticism of anti-American prejudice is not primarily a matter of propositional truth, I have chosen examples in which anti-American speech revolves around images that might generally be seen as expressions of a prejudice-critique, not prejudice: the image of the *United States as a racist society* and the condemnation of *crimes against Native Americans*. I will show how these motifs are employed in the context of (1) a xenophobic racial nationalism and (2) an obscuration and relativization of the Holocaust as a means to rehabilitate a consistently positive German national identity.

The examples are taken from a sample of qualitative interviews conducted during the fall of 2011.¹⁷ Cases were selected from a sample previously collected for a standardized survey on different forms of prejudice and ideological attitudes in Germany in the summer of 2011. The interview participants were selected on the basis of their high scoring responses on a six-item anti-Americanism scale. Participants were re-contacted and interviewed by telephone, conducting semi-structured interviews with the help of a flexible interview guide. Loosely drawing on the techniques of cognitive interviewing (Willis 2005; Martin 2010, 189 ff.), the guide included the items of the anti-Americanism scale to which participants had already responded in the standardized survey. In the course of the interview they were presented with their previous responses and asked to elaborate on these.

16 To be sure, such non-standardized data are of course also “artificial” interactions, co-constructed by researchers and respondents, and cannot be conceived as providing a “direct insight” into the everyday practice of participants. What distinguishes them from standardized research methods is that

they leave as much space as possible for the spontaneous actions and associations of the respondents and thus provide material that allows for ex post hermeneutical and reflexive analyses (Davies 2008, 4 ff.; for a critical view on qualitative interviewing as a research tool see Potter and Hepburn 2005).

17 The survey was made possible by the research training group on “Group Focused Enmity: Causes, Phenomenology, Consequences” funded by the German Research Foundation: <http://www.uni-marburg.de/menschenfeindlichkeit>.

4.1. Anti-Americanism and Holocaust Relativization

The example demonstrates how the motif of crimes against Native Americans – their deportation and partial annihilation by American colonists and settlers – whose veracity cannot in itself be denied, can nonetheless be applied in prejudiced speech. At first glance one might generally want to agree with the participant's statement: "Five hundred Native American nations, whole tribes, were eliminated. [...] I think the Americans should do a lot more educational work to reflect on that"¹⁸ However, in the wider context of speech, this statement can be shown to achieve an entirely different purpose than stating and evaluating facts of American history.

The interview starts out with the participant being asked to explain his affirmative response to the survey item: "I can certainly understand that some people don't like the Americans."¹⁹ He asserts that his answer is based on his rejection of US foreign policy, i.e. the way in which the United States acts as a "world police" forcing other countries to align with an "American worldview." Asked by the interviewer to more closely describe his associations with said "world police," the participant explains:

Well, I don't want to come across as a right-wing extremist or something like that by any means, but ... If I, regarding history, come back to the Second World War (incomprehensible) ... Of course, what happened in Germany was very, very awful, and it should never happen again in any nation on earth in this way, that is totally clear. But the Americans have now designed practically the whole European educational system, so that practically a World War.... Er, and this is the crucial point, I think, at which one should become a little vigilant: One single nation cannot cause a World War on its own. After all, I think, they were all involved, England, France, Italy, Russia [...]. And to now have the Americans dictate our school system right from the beginning, telling us what we are allowed and not allowed to know...

Interestingly, the participant does not pick one of the events usually cited as current examples for American dominance, like the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but

spontaneously refers to Europe and particularly Germany as victims of American power. This turn of the conversation reveals that the issue of German national identity and its relation to the Nazi past is closely connected to his depiction of the United States. His theory about how Americans more or less comprehensively control German history education conveys a strong sense of being patronized by a foreign power: in his view Germany is unjustly accused of having caused the Second World War and Germans are led to believe so by American indoctrination. I argue that this construction is to be seen as an ideological expression of a paradox in the participant's construction of national identity. This paradox of German post-war identity, which has been described with regard to current antisemitism (Holz 2007), consists in distancing the in-group from the perpetrators of National Socialism and the Holocaust while simultaneously including and normalizing them as part of it. In such a perspective, the mass murder of European Jews appears primarily as an obstacle to a positive, continuous national identity. To express such a positive nationalism, the Holocaust and the Nazi past have to be obscured or diminished while simultaneously avoiding "coming across as a right-wing extremist." Like in antisemitic constructions, the paradox is dissolved here through a reversal of perpetrator and victim roles (Holz 2007, 39 ff.). As the participant elaborates his argument about German history and its (foreign) evaluation, the motif of crimes against Native Americans comes into play:

Of course, mistakes and acts that do not exactly conform to the Geneva Convention were committed by both sides, the Allies and their adversaries. But this means America that does not have the right to continue to this day condemning Germany alone for something the Americans already did before the world wars, that is, annihilating whole populations. I think, for instance, of the Native Americans. Five hundred Native American nations, whole tribes, were eliminated. [...] I think the Americans should do a lot more educational work to reflect on that, to somehow finally bring – let me say – that balance of justice into present day Europe.

¹⁸ The interview excerpts in section 4 are taken from the respective transcripts. In the transcripts "(.)" and "(...)" signify short and longer pauses (up to 3 seconds), while "[...]" signifies parts of the

transcript have been omitted for the sake of brevity; "..." indicates an unfinished sentence.

¹⁹ Item translated by the author. Original German item wording: "Ich kann es gut verstehen, wenn manchen Leuten die US-Amerikaner unangenehm sind" (adopted from Decker et al. 2010).

After having “normalized” German responsibility for World War II, claiming that Allied and Axis forces were equally involved in war crimes, the participant moves on to a more specific topic, stating that Americans should not condemn other deeds committed by Germans either, since they themselves committed “the same deeds” before, namely “annihilating whole populations.” Here, the participant is implicitly but clearly invoking the Holocaust and equating it to crimes against Native Americans. This reference to American history thus enables him to relativize the Holocaust without ever having to explicitly mention it. The motif of crimes against Native Americans provides an anti-American resolution to the “paradox of normalization” of German post-war nationalism (Holz 2007). This function is framed by a partial perpetrator-victim reversal, in which conflicting aspects of the in-group are externalized as false accusations from an out-group. Through the use of the motifs of an oppressive American “world police” and its control over European media and education, what should be acknowledged as an intrinsic paradox within German post-war identity becomes a conflict between a consistent, positive national in-group and a hostile external force. The perpetrators of the Holocaust and their successors are transformed into the victims of oppressive indoctrination. These aspects of anti-American speech also provide an illustrative example of the functional affinity between anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism, (Markovits 2007, 188 ff.; Holz 2005, 103; 2001, 499 ff.). However, in this variety of anti-Americanism the perpetrator role is attributed not to “the Jews,” as in expressions of secondary antisemitism, but to “the Americans.” Given the historical connection of anti-American and anti-Semitic stereotypes in which “America” has often been used as code for “the Jews” (Markovits 2007, 157 ff.), the boundaries between these attributions are rather fuzzy. Yet there is a distinction to be made: The attribution to “Americans” represents a clear “advantage” for the speaker insofar as he avoids anti-Semitic speech but still can deal with said paradox of national identity in a similar way. While the example does not classify as anti-Semitism, it would be an oversimplification to view these speech acts

as strictly distinct from anti-Semitism simply because no Jews are mentioned. Jews are not merely unmentioned, but systematically omitted as victims of the Holocaust. That this omission is achieved by America stereotypes bespeaks both a specific connection and a distinction between anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism.

4.2. Anti-Americanism and Racial Nationalism

My second example of anti-American speech refers to the motif of the United States as a racist society. As with the previous example, this claim surely cannot be generally rejected on a propositional level, since drastic instances of racism abound in American history and remain a prominent social issue. However, despite it not being “factually wrong” (see section 2), it can nonetheless be utilized in a prejudiced way: Talking about racism in the United States can serve as a preemptive deflection of the charge of racism against a speaker’s in-group. In the following example the whole topic of racism is externalized as an “American” problem, which gives the speaker the opportunity to indulge in rather open expressions of xenophobia (especially towards Turkish immigrants) and racial nationalism, while at the same time presenting himself as non-racist. Thus anti-American speech can again be viewed as an expression of a paradox within nationalist identity construction: to support racism while complying to a norm of anti-racism (Billig 2012, 140 ff.).

After the participant was initially asked to explain his agreement with the item “I tend to find Americans dislikable,”²⁰ he talks about his dislike for the way Americans retain a sense of superiority despite their failure to adjust to global trends in recent years. He then goes on to relate how his hopes for change in this respect were connected to the presidency of Barack Obama, but are currently fading:

[...] because the white man is still in charge in the United States, that is becoming more and more clear now. They are actually wrecking a whole country, just to [...] defeat a black president and – okay, to consequently regain dominant power [...].

20 Item translated by the author. Original German wording: “Mir sind die US-Amerikaner eher unsympathisch” (adopted from Decker et al. 2010).

The participant claims that a racist power elite is deliberately harming the US economy in order to bring down President Obama. When asked to explain his views on how Obama might have a problem because of his skin color, he responds:

Might have? He does have a problem because of his skin color. I mean, these [...] Tea Partiers [...] they openly proclaim that to completely defame and embarrass him in public. And to embarrass the whole administration, this is bullying or maybe even worse, the stuff they are doing over there. [...] Well, as a German it really makes you wonder how somebody can argue that publicly and with total self-confidence. Only to bring down the government [...], only to keep the black man from gaining power.

What is noticeable about this sequence is the rather emphatic distinction between the German in-group and an American out-group, marked by the phrase “as a German it really makes you wonder.” As I will argue in the following, this juxtaposition of Germans and Americans assumes a functional role in the externalization of racism. The externalizing function of the motif becomes evident as the participant is asked whether something similar (racial discrimination of a government official) would be possible in Germany. He objects: “How do you mean? Because of racism? [...] I don’t think so, I don’t think so.” Instead of acknowledging at least the possibility of such racist discrimination in Germany, the participant reiterates the already invoked clear distinction between the German in-group and American out-group. The reasons for this omission become more evident when he is asked whether he could imagine somebody with Turkish roots being elected German chancellor:

Oh dear (...) Oh dear, oh, I cannot imagine that [laughing slightly] ever happening. I don’t think so. Well, well I think the Germans, [...] so to speak, are Germans in private. (...) What is accepted (.) accepted or, how they say, tolerated, (.) are the Turks (.) Turks, Italians, Greeks. I would say they are tolerated. But nobody really loves them. [...] The Turks do have an aspiration to power. [...] Well, they lost the battle for Vienna back then, but maybe they are infiltrating the country today. I think that’s what the Germans are afraid of. Islam, the Turks (.), and you notice that (.) sometimes, when everything is being infiltrated. [...].

And in a latter sequence he adds:

Well, for all I care Özdemir could become, let’s say, become Development Minister or something like that, but he will never be Foreign Minister.²¹ I cannot imagine that happening. And there is no chance he will ever become Chancellor.

It becomes obvious in these sequences that the participant, while emphatically rejecting racism against Obama in the United States, actually shares a racist orientation himself. He expresses a strong differentialist nationalism in emphasizing the superficiality of tolerance for minority groups and how they are actually rejected by the German population.²² These xenophobic attitudes, which are presented as publicly disapproved and thus uttered only “in private,” are constructed as a constitutive element of in-group identity, since Germans are only “Germans in private.” Even the slightest mark of an immigrant background in a German citizen, as represented by the example of Cem Özdemir, serves as an inhibiting criterion for in-group membership, which clearly points to the racist distinction at the heart of this construction. However, what is most important here regarding anti-Americanism is the paradoxical combination of moral outrage over racism against an American president *and* the racist exclusion of minority members from political office in Germany. This construction can be understood as an expression *and* dissolution of a more general ideological paradox of racial nationalism in post-war Germany: It is common sense to construct an ethnically homogenous core community while the racist and discriminatory consequences of such constructions are systematically denied (Martin 2010, 71 ff.; Sutterlüty 2011).²³ The image of the United States as a racist society, in combination with stereotypes depicting America as “cultureless” that cannot be presented in greater detail here, allows the participant to resolve this paradox by externalizing the issue of racism. Because he sees America as an exception within a world of racially founded

21 Cem Özdemir is a German politician of Turkish extraction. He has been a member of the Bundestag and the European Parliament, and is currently co-leader of the Green Party.

22 Differentialism is a term coined by French political scientist Pierre-André Taguieff to describe a

current form of racism relying on cultural distinctions rather than biological ones (Martin 2010, 44).

23 I want to stress that such denial does not necessarily have to be conceived as a conscious strategy, nor as an individually motivated suppression. I suggest conceptualizing this paradox or “double sanc-

tioning” (Billig 2012, 144) first and foremost as a genuinely social phenomenon of “everyday ideology” (Martin 2010, 62). It provides the basis for paradoxical constructions that may not be recognized as such by the actors, as most probably holds true for the example presented here.

nations, i.e. a nation which consists solely of immigrants but somehow still constitutes a distinct national identity, it can serve as the external locus of “illegitimate” racial discrimination. Because the United States is the one nation where inequality and discrimination cannot be justified by traditional ethnic homogeneity, it is the place where these phenomena appear as illegitimate “racism.” Thus, this application of America motifs can be regarded as anti-American prejudice in that it serves to dissolve the paradox of a nationalist identity construction that simultaneously endorses anti-racist and racist practices.

In summary, these examples give an impression of how prejudiced speech can be enacted through the use of America stereotypes. What the participants presented as criticism of American society and politics can be read as expressions of racist and revisionist constructions of national identity. Applying the heuristic distinction of America motifs and anti-American uses, we have seen how only the combination of both these aspects of speech creates a performative effect that can be labeled anti-American. Realizations of the semantic motifs and functional aspects could be imagined in different, non-anti-American contexts: It is of course possible to criticize racism in the United States without being anti-American, just as other semantic motifs, not referring to the United States, can provide the means to express a racial or revisionist nationalism. It is the combination of reinforcing racial nationalism *through* the expression of certain America stereotypes that makes it an anti-American performance.

What may seem surprising about these examples is that anti-Americanism is not uttered primarily as hostility or discriminatory intention towards Americans. While certainly applying negative images of the United States, this kind of anti-Americanism rather seems to be an accessory to other forms of prejudice and ideological patterns, such as racism, antisemitism, and nationalism. However, since it would be problematic to limit our notion of prejudice exclusively to forms of direct enmity or discriminatory intentions (Martin 2010, 50 ff.; Wetherell and Potter 1992, 69 ff.), this should not be regarded as a counterargument to classifying the given examples as anti-American speech, but

rather as a deeper insight into the flexibility of everyday anti-Americanism and an informative example of how different forms of prejudice interconnect and support each other (Baethge et al. 2010, 382).

5. Conclusion

Discussions on what anti-Americanism *is* are often connected to the question of how anti-American prejudice can be distinguished from legitimate criticism, i.e. how the concept of anti-Americanism should be *applied*. I argue that this problem of a *general* concept of anti-Americanism that is able to grasp the *flexible and situated* character of prejudiced speech is often misrepresented as solely a problem of imprecise definitions. As an alternative approach, a speech act or practice theoretical framework was proposed, in which the performative aspects of both anti-American discourse and scientific discourse on anti-Americanism are systematically integrated into the conceptualization of anti-Americanism. Building on a distinction of *semantic America motifs* and their *situated use*, this approach attempts to conceptualize anti-Americanism as a family of performative speech acts, bound by similarity rather than universally common features. Qualitative research methods were shown to be essential to the empirical application of this approach, since they provide the interpretive means to *read utterances as anti-American* in a broader context of speech. This focus on the performative aspect of anti-Americanism was presented within a framework of empirically grounded theory construction, emphasizing the reciprocal relation between theoretical and empirical research. Two examples illustrated how such an approach can be applied. In both cases anti-American speech did not primarily express dislike or discriminatory intentions towards Americans, but rather functioned as part of a broader ideological constellation incorporating elements of differentialist racism and secondary anti-Semitism. It was shown how anti-American speech serves in both cases to express and simultaneously dissolve paradoxes of national identification. In the first example it provided the means for latently invoking and relativizing the Holocaust, thereby allowing for a simultaneous distancing from and integration of Nazi perpetrators into the national in-group. In the second example the motif of “American racism” functioned as a means to externalize the issue of racism from the in-group, while sim-

ultaneously employing racist criteria in its construction. Although these are of course only tentative results, it appears that there is a sort of “division of labor” between different forms of prejudice: While racism and antisemitism serve a rather “direct” purpose in national identity construction, e.g. homogenizing and/or glorifying it, anti-Americanism seems to *reflect* on the paradoxes and conflicts which arise from such identity constructions in the context of official anti-racist or anti-anti-Semitic norms. In the examples presented here, anti-Americanism seems to not be concerned primarily with the derogation or discrimination of “Ameri-

cans” (and a corresponding relative evaluation of the in-group), but much more with “fixing” the problems a nationalist identification creates through its racist and antisemitic expressions. Of course this is not to say that all anti-Americanism will take on such a reflexive function. The empirical examples presented here merely provide a first impression of what a mapping of anti-American speech could look like. Therefore, future research should work towards expanding the qualitative empirical base for theory construction, to broaden our understanding of anti-Americanism as part of everyday ideology.

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