Introduction
Seventy-eight per cent of Austria’s citizens are nominally Catholic; approximately 20% of them could be considered as practising. While some parts of the Catholic Church are progressive - in 1995, for instance, 500,000 Austrians supported a referendum organised by Catholic theologians in favour of contraception, homosexuality, and equality for women within the church - other tendencies are what one might call ‘fundamentalist’. ‘Opus Dei’ and the ‘Engelswerk’, for example, support a reactionary view of the Catholic church.¹

Beinert (1991) defines five attitudes, common to Catholic fundamentalist movements generally, which can be found in Catholic fundamentalist movements in Austria:

• the use of war-metaphors and a clear identification of enemies;
• a dualistic world view that eschews self-criticism and self-reflection;
• reductionism embedded in traditionalism;
• intransigence, which creates the cohesive ‘glue’ of the movement;
• strong authoritarianism and the cult of one personality or leader.

Though Beinert’s categorisation seems comprehensive in general terms, it neglects gender relations and the construction of womanhood within fundamentalist movements. In the Catholic fundamentalist movements of Austria, women are represented as obedient wives, dutiful mothers, spiritual servants, inferior to men, and asexual.

The convergence between fundamentalist Catholic organisations and right-wing political parties became pronounced - and dangerous - in the mid-1980s with the rise to prominence of Joerg Haider. In 1986 Haider became the chairperson of the Austrian Freedom Party (FP …) and under his leadership the FP … campaigned openly against the presence of immigrants in Austria; to the horror of many Austrians, the FP …’s racism and xenophobia found a ready audience.

Haider’s rise to power was assisted by the right-wing Catholic press. In particular, Der Dreizehnte. Zeitung der Katholiken für Glaube und Kirche (hereinafter referred to as Der 13.), a Catholic weekly that reflects a particular fundamentalist worldview, anointed Haider its favourite son when, during the course of elections to the National Council in 1995 it hailed him as ‘the first leader who is a practising Catholic’ (13 November 1995).

This paper takes as its focus the complicated relationship articulated in Der 13. between Austria’s political far right and Catholic fundamentalism. Its time-frame is the early and mid-1990s, before the FP … and the … VP (Austrian People’s Party) (which defines itself as ‘traditionally Catholic’) gained enough electoral support to form a coalition government in 2000.
In this paper I also show that the political far right and the Catholic fundamentalist movement, as represented by Der 13., share a particular view of womanhood; their joint goals are to regulate women’s lives, restrict women’s personal decision-making power, and reinforce patriarchal relations of power between men and women.

The political discourse in Austria has changed with the coalition government between the FP … and … VP: externally, as a reaction to the success of the FP …, the European Union imposed sanctions on Austria for about a year; internally, the population in Vienna have organised themselves to demonstrate every Thursday for the past two years or more against the coalition government (’Donnerstagsdemonstrationen’). Haider himself was never formally part of the coalition government and he resigned as chairperson of the FP … at the time when the FP … entered the coalition government. At a provincial level, however, he was elected governor of Carinthia in 1999, and remains in this position until today. The participation of the FP … in the coalition government has been characterised by many situations of conflict and crisis, much tension, and frequent changes in the FP … personalities in government. Recent political polls in Austria show that the FP … is now losing votes and influence. At the same time, the politics of the … VP have moved distinctly to the right, and its discourse has thus become dangerous, especially as the general public has on the whole not perceived this move to the right.

Even though, I base this analysis on readings from the church newspaper Der 13., it is important to note that the fundamentalist movements in Austria are very diverse, Der 13. being only one stream among them, and that the arguments presented here only apply to a specific section of Austrian society, and are not intended to generalise about the Austrian context.

**Links to the state**

Fundamentalist movements promote a particular kind of politics in order to gain political power. Austrian Catholic fundamentalists, as they express themselves in Der 13., do have similarities in ideology and worldview to the right-wing Austrian Freedom Party (FP … ).

Even though church and state are separated in the Austrian constitution, Catholic fundamentalists regularly challenge this division and promote the idea of a state connected to the church.

In the Christian view of things, government is legitimate only when it is exercised in the name of God, not in the name of the people, as under Hitler.2

The link between politics and the church is taken for granted in the statement that the power of government is only exercised legitimately in the name of God: rule under God is the only true one. Secondly, the rule of God is seen as positive, whereas rule by the people is negative; in a sentence that verges on the surreal, Hitler the arch-fascist and authoritarian is cited as the embodiment of ‘rule by the people!’ Hitler’s authoritarianism is of course congenial to the fundamentalists, whose ‘rule of God’ is intrinsically authoritarian. Der 13.
mentions Hitler this way in order to be superficially 'politically correct' and to disguise the real ideological content of its views; at the same time, the very fact of mentioning him is like a nod and a wink to its readers.

**Links to the right-wing political party**

In Austria, Catholic fundamentalists not only claim state power; they actively involve themselves in the politics of the state, through the FP ..., whose chairperson from 1986 to 2000 was Joerg Haider. Catholic fundamentalists did not always agree with Haider and support him (which only goes to show that fundamentalists make opportunistic alliances - Haider conducted politics in the same fashion). Their position was, however, that although the person of Haider might not be acceptable to voters, his politics were.

*Der 13.* regularly recommended to its readers whom to vote for at election time. *Kulturkampf* (literally 'the battle between cultures') is one of the most frequently used terms in the newspaper; it represents the dualistic framework 'good versus evil' not only in terms of morality but also in terms of politics.

*Kulturkampf* is the open stage on which the general counter-positions of Left and Right are illustrated with striking clarity. The Left is everything which is anti-Christian, anti-idealistic … and materialistic. The Right, by contrast, is everything which is determined by the orientation towards the ideal. Such an orientation facilitates access to Christianity…. The Right is … the Freedom Party, although its name could lead to confusion, if we take it too literally and ask for freedom in absolute terms.⁴ Right is explicitly the only political orientation which is acceptable and ‘good’, and, as *Der 13.* says, in the context of Austria, ‘Right’ coincides with the FP…. Only ‘freedom’ is contested because freedom in its literal meaning would give autonomy to the individual, which is undesirable. The acceptability of Joerg Haider comes to the fore explicitly when he is presented as ‘the first leader [who] is a practising Catholic’⁵: *Der 13.* obviously ‘forgets’ to tell the reader whether he is the first political leader in general or the first FP … leader. This statement, written some three weeks before the December 1995 elections, can be understood as a recommendation to Catholicist voters.⁶

In contrast to the sympathy expressed with Joerg Haider, all other parties are targeted as enemies and their practice is characterised as ‘the work of Satan’. All liberals, socialists, social democrats, communists, greens, but also feminists and even conservatives - though they are traditionally Catholic - must be fought against in the *Kulturkampf*. The conservatives are not sufficiently conservative and their ideology is not enough to the right, as *Der 13.* complains: ‘The … VP [Austrian People’s Party] goes in the direction of the left instead of to the right’.⁷
Volkstum (‘folklore’) of the Austrian Catholic fundamentalists and the FP ...

In 1993, Austria faced a ‘Referendum on Foreigners’, initiated by the FP ... under Joerg Haider under the title ... sterilis zuerst (Austria first) and clearly directed against foreigners. This event exposed the attitude of Catholic fundamentalists towards foreigners and their relation to the FP... . Not only was the text of the referendum printed with an explanatory comment in Der 13. of 13 January 1993, but half a million copies of a special issue on the referendum were also published. This is the sort of thing the newspaper said:

[A referendum] … is needed … [because] … Austria is not a country of immigrants! … Why should this important issue not be regulated in the constitution? … [We need to] limit the number of school pupils of foreign mother tongue: why should this basic educational issue be made subject to the self-created multi-cultural coercive situation? … [We are] against illegal commercial activities. A successful fight against the criminality which is imported from abroad is not inhuman or racist … The answer to these questions would help to decide whether to support the referendum or not. [We are] against brainless followers of the zeitgeist, against neoliberals … against the international powers who are enlightened reciters of the multiculture which is installing itself through ethnic cleansing of the substance of our Volk and our own Christian-based understanding of life and culture, … against systematic discrimination against marriage and the family, against the juridical and medical abortionists … against anti-fascist committees and platforms shared with militant unions … Not for a political party and its leader! But for Austria and the Austrians! 8

These words, written by Kurt Diemann, editor of Der 13., reveal the racist ideology of the paper, its political orientation and its attitude towards foreigners. Diemann not only gives a clear recommendation to sign the referendum but also justifies it. Another edition of the paper mentions that ‘rising foreign infiltration … jeopardises our cultural substance and identity’.9 The rhetoric used is close to the demagogy of right-wing politicians not only of the present (Haider) but also of the past (Hitler)! This racist argumentation is justified as love for the Volk and for ‘Austrian’ culture.

Shortly before the referendum, a protest demonstration against racism and xenophobia was organised in Vienna. More than 200,000 people gathered at the Heldenplatz in Vienna to show their solidarity with foreigners. The organisers - who included progressive church groups, both Catholic and Protestant - asked people to bring a candle to be lit at dusk on the way to the Heldenplatz. Guest speakers, including Salman Rushdie, Andre Heller and Cardinal Franz König, called for respect, tolerance, understanding, and a multi-cultural Austria. Der 13. reported the demonstration as follows:

The ocean of candles … [is] … mass propaganda in the style of Goebbels which will damage the reputation of Austria … because the evil … ascribed to the Austrian Volk does not exist in reality but is used by the Kulturkämpfer as a cowardly weapon in their fight against the church, the Volk, and the fatherland … 417,278 signatures …
were obtained for the referendum of the FP … ! Before the referendum took place a counter-demonstration was organised in Vienna with 200,000 participants … (13 February 1993)

What Der 13. never reported was that the referendum did not get enough signatures for the issues it raised to be put on the parliamentary agenda. In addition, Der 13. never mentioned that the demonstration took place only in Vienna (1.5 million inhabitants), while the referendum was Austria-wide (8 million inhabitants, 5.9 million voters).

The construction of womanhood

Religious fundamentalism is inevitably linked to identity politics, where women play a crucial role because they are ‘repositories of culture’. The creation and reassertion of religious identity, as a distinct feature, relies on women as biological, cultural, social, and ideological reproducers as well as signifiers of difference. These reproductive roles of women are directly linked to ‘domestic’ women. Balmer states that a ‘cult of domesticity’ can be observed in the fundamentalist project, which in fact is also part of right-wing politics, and can be analysed on a symbolic and actual level.

The control of women and their sexuality is central to these processes in order to create a common and coherent identity forming the basis for successful mobilisation. Gender identities are constructed through the reaffirmation of traditional values and culturally acceptable feminine codes of conduct, which pressurise women to follow the terms of reference set by the fundamentalist discourse. These values are demonstrated visibly in the public sphere, either through the presence of women (e.g. in their dress) or through their absence (because of their confinement to the household).

The cult of Mary

Catholicism constructs a particular womanhood that centres on Mary, the mother of Jesus. Catholic fundamentalist movements rely even more on the ‘Virgin’ Mary to affirm their Catholic identity and set boundaries with ‘other’ religions, such as Protestantism.

The presentation by conservatives of Mary as the model for all women has several implications for the construction of a Catholic fundamentalist womanhood: Mary is defined in her biological role; she is first and above all a mother. On a symbolic level her motherhood is ‘pure’ because she remains a virgin, despite conceiving Jesus; she is thus without sin. The purity and chastity of Mary appear to demand specific sexual behaviour of women, which restricts and controls them. Mary’s purity is also in stark contrast to Eve, the female seducer. Mary is a follower of Jesus; she is his admirer and student. She is hierarchically inferior and has no autonomous opinions. She is an instrument, an object and servant of God; this has clear implications for the sexual division of labour. However, through her spirituality she is a teacher and model for others. Finally, Mary is also the nurturer of Joseph and Jesus and responsible for social reproduction within the family, which results in her confinement to the house.
All these roles are primarily linked to the domestic sphere. Mary is not seen in public, except in her traditional roles. Though some of these roles are contradictory (motherhood versus virginity), they serve a purpose consistent with the ideology and aims of the Catholic fundamentalist project.

**Catholic motherhood and its implications**

Biological reproductive capacity is a crucial feature to ensure the ‘survival’ of faith, culture and the nation. Given the example of Mary, in conservative Catholicism motherhood is the most rewarding task and function of women. This is reflected in Der 13. in the following passage:

> The woman is in the order of love and life closer to God because she can receive, bear, and give life. Because of this all motherhood is holy.\(^{15}\)

This glorification of motherhood explains the militancy of the Catholic fundamentalists against abortion. God’s will and women’s biological reproductive capacities serve as justification for their stand against abortion. A similar militancy could be observed under the Nazis during the Second World War: abortion earned the death penalty for German women within the Reich. Motherhood of course was reinforced to produce children for the war effort, but in both instances, women are perceived exclusively as mothers.

The stand of the Nazis - to protect the life of the ‘unborn’ - and the discourse of the Catholic fundamentalists are quite similar:

> We ‘celebrated’ the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and commemorated the victims of the so-called holocaust. But who is mourning the victims of the holocaust in the womb?\(^ {16}\)

Here the holocaust is first of all doubted (‘so-called’); then it is played down by comparison with the ‘holocaust in the womb’, which is taken as fact. According to Der 13., ‘abortion is murder … [this is] technically the right term’; it is also a ‘capital crime’.\(^ {17}\) By ‘assassinating the child in the womb … motherhood is assassinated as well’.\(^ {18}\) Women are solely defined as mothers, and are not allowed to live in any other role. Abortion means the killing of the woman-mother, who loses her own right to live through this act.

**Perceptions of sexuality**

The focus on motherhood and the condemnation of abortion affects the perception of sexuality. Motherhood is connected to only one possible form of family life, the heterosexual marriage which aims at the production of children. Sexual relationships outside marriage not only are a sin, but they also damage the health of women: for women, pleasure is not ‘natural’.\(^ {19}\)
Catholic Fundamentalism, Right-Wing Politics and the Construction of Womanhood: the Case of Austria

Michaela R. Told

The words sexual garbage [used in reference to women] … are still valid. I do not wonder that women are more and more the ‘objects without love’ for men. Those who do not impose sexual privation in young years and who do not fight for sexual purity do not deserve other things.\(^20\)

Women in a pre-marital or extra-marital relationship become objects; they are in fact ‘garbage’. Characteristically, only women are targeted – men are not even mentioned; they do not share women’s degradation to ‘objects without love’. In some ways this suggests that women are the only ‘evil’; men are never so. This in fact follows the traditional interpretation of Eve (symbol for all women as seducer and the immoral), versus Adam (symbol for all men).

The norm is a heterosexual relationship, legitimised by the church through marriage. All other forms of partnership are strictly forbidden; they are deviations, and perverse. ‘The relationship of two men or two women cannot be a true family’, said Der 13. on 13 April 1994. Joerg Haider also believes that ‘today’s form of partnership is denaturalised. This is not a model in the national sense’.\(^21\)

In the pages of Der 13., homosexuals are the enemy both within and outside the church.\(^22\) In many instances, homosexuality is linked to feminism, emancipation and the destruction of family life. This is not only expressed in clear statements but also in the language, which is misogynist towards women and homosexuals. This attitude towards sexuality also implies that sexuality outside the given ‘rules and regulations’ is negative and sinful.

Perceptions of the family and the sexual division of labour

Motherhood is - according to the fundamentalists - the fulfilment of each woman. It involves, of course, withdrawal from the public sphere.\(^23\) Women become confined to the household and defined through it. The implied sexual division of labour is God-given and clearly hierarchical. The (ordinary) man works in the public sphere, and is rarely referred to as a ‘father’. Women as mothers remain in the private sphere. This separation between private and public is not to be challenged, and if one does so, then one is an enemy, most probably a feminist doing ‘Satan’s work’. This dichotomy is additionally justified by the example of Mary:

[Mary is] the most motherly of all mothers … the most suffering of all sufferers … We should follow the example of Mary, how affectionate and loving she is and how carefully she looks after her child, Jesus. Then we would know how we as modern mothers should deal with babies and small children.\(^24\)

Women are socialisers and nurturers. Their place is in the kitchen and within the household, and their role is clearly defined:
God has not given the same tasks to each person … The man is called to earn his livelihood with the sweat of his brow, while the woman has the pain of bearing children … Why should women go to work today? Besides the ‘real’ need to work, most women just work to get money.25

A family policy which is directed towards the destruction of family life cannot succeed. Women have been told that they will find self-realisation behind the production line of a factory. Men as supporters of the family have been discriminated against.26

Women need to remain in the household and should not attempt to penetrate public life. Their ‘true’ task is to give birth in pain and to suffer. If they do come into the public sphere, then they can only perform factory work, not high-ranking jobs. Women at work – who anyway are not wanted - are capable only of monotonous, repetitive work. Moreover, it is not women who are victims - men are the ones being discriminated against. Thus, equality is prevented by the ‘natural’ hierarchical order:

The newest findings in the realm of medicine and anthropology prove that the sexes are not the same and hence the structure of the brain cannot be the same.27

The three witches of the Enlightenment - ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’ - are mutually exclusive: if equality, then no liberty, and if liberty, then no equality.28

‘To your husband you will direct your desire and he will rule over you’ (Genesis 3:16).29

Women are biologically different, and this is used both as justification and excuse for rejecting women’s participation in powerful positions, within the church hierarchy and within the family. Women should not have decision-making power in the private and in the public spheres. The inequality between women and men is the will of God (which is of course a male will, never a female one).

Joerg Haider has a similar understanding of the role and tasks of women:

The feminist illusion of the self-realisation of the woman and mother at the workplace has proved to be a big error … Many women who are pushed into the full-time professional life are not happy. The necessity to earn money results in their neglecting their task as mothers. The multiple burden of women is not only physically too much, but also makes them intellectually and psychologically tired. We have to encourage women to do what they really like - looking after children and seeing them growing.30

Characteristically, Haider also wants women to stay at home and perform domestic tasks. Haider obviously knows what is best for women, what they really like and want to do. Women do not have their own voice; they need Joerg Haider to speak for them. The relationship
between men and women is, for Haider, hierarchical: ‘A partnership consists of two functions: the serving and leading part. This is how it is!’31 Though Haider does not specify who is who in this partnership, his general discourse on women makes it very clear who serves and who leads. *Der 13.* is explicit about the hierarchy:

Humbleness [ DERmut, literally: courage to be humble] … (is) … the courage to serve:

*Dienmut* [courage to serve - a play on words!] is by nature given to women.32

**Regulations concerning women’s appearance**

The introduction of norms with regard to dress and clothing is one visible form of regulating and controlling women. In fact, fundamentalists of all religions rely on dress as an expression of their faith and their identity. Given the patriarchal system in which the Catholic fundamentalists are located, none of these norms concern men. The Bible provides a number of chapters where women are directly targeted and where the norms concerning their appearance and dress are stated. *Der 13.* refers to chapters in the Bible which are of ‘special concern’ for women:

And every woman who prays … with her head uncovered dishonours her head. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off: and if it is a disgrace for a women to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head (1 Corinthians 11: 5-10).33

Through ‘a sign of authority’ on their heads, women’s status, role, and identity are explicitly marked. Women have to follow these norms, and lose the power to decide on their own appearance.

**Towards a conclusion**

In this paper I have attempted to show that Catholic fundamentalists – similarly to right-wing political movements – construct a particular womanhood that regulates women’s lives, restricts women’s personal decision-making power and re-enforces patriarchal power relations between women and men. How can women’s rights be ensured, and what attempts have been made to do so in the Austrian context?

As Austria is still a predominantly Catholic country, many progressive Catholic groups adapt their interpretation of Christianity to the present, and do not rely on the past. Hence, several attempts have been made to change the structure of the church and initiate reforms. Importantly, Catholic women and men are in many instances working together to interpret the Bible in a different way and facilitate the acceptance of women as equal partners within the structures of the church.
One example of this is the ‘church referendum’ initiated by a group of male and female theologians in 1995 against fundamentalist tendencies in the Catholic Church. Their major demands concerned the equality and acceptance of women within church structures, as well as ‘modern’ attitudes to sexuality, including the acceptability of contraceptives, homosexual relationships, and the concept of sexuality as pleasure. More than 500,000 persons (Catholics and others) signed this referendum (more than signed Haider’s ‘Referendum on Foreigners’!). Catholics in Germany and Switzerland followed this example and initiated a similar referendum in their own countries. The official Catholic Church in Austria could not neglect this referendum, and discussions followed with the more progressive bishops in Austria; however, actual changes have so far been limited.

This ‘church referendum’ did not target the fundamentalists directly, but rather dealt with the official church. The strategy of many of the progressive groups is not to provoke direct confrontation with the fundamentalist movements but to try to liberalise more moderate and conservative church circles. This is especially important because the official church itself restricts women and regards them as the servants of priests.

In 1996 the Women’s Synod, an international meeting of Catholic feminists from around the world, was organised in Vienna. Austrian feminist theologians insisted on the meeting being held in Vienna in order to demonstrate against fundamentalist tendencies and discrimination against women within the official church. These theologians are an active group whose primary concern is to empower women within the church and expose the different ultra-right and centre-right fundamentalist groups and their impact on women.

The hope of these progressive groups is to foster broad support within the population, which would force the official church to reject the fundamentalist tendencies within their own structures.

Another strategy to ensure women’s rights is through regulation from outside. As fundamentalism aims to take over state power, one important aim is to keep state and church strictly separated. Even though this is the constitutional position in Austria, the influence of the church in state affairs is still strong. The introduction of ‘ethics’ as a subject in schools, instead of the traditional ‘religion’, is an important step in the direction of keeping church and state separate.

The constitution of the state would appear to demand that political parties do not rely on religion as their ideological basis, as both the … VP and the FP … currently do. A secular and conscious civil society could demand this, and could also demand a different construction of womanhood through their voting power. The Austrian context demonstrates the power of the voter impressively in connection with the FP … , which is changing its political programme to fit with the dominant discourse.\(^\text{34}\)
The empowerment of women thus starts with women's articulation of their own demands. The population does have the power to demand changes and to start a new discourse. This can only be achieved, however, when Catholic and non-Catholic, men and women, come together and take a common stand against fundamentalist, fascist, racist and discriminatory tendencies in the country. Presently the Catholic Church in Austria is losing members and thus influence. Through consciousness-raising, women and men should be mobilised to speak out against fascist and anti-women statements, both by fundamentalist groups and representatives of the official church.

Endnotes
2 Der 13., 13 July 1995.
3 The term Kulturkampf, used in Europe in this context, refers to the nineteenth century when Bismarck attempted to implement materialist and secular ideas and as a result came into conflict with the Catholic Church (amongst others). The term thus has a slightly different connotation here than in the more commonly used term, 'clash of civilisations'. For more about this issue in general terms, see Sadik J. Al-Azm (1993) 'Islamic Fundamentalism Reconsidered: A Critical Outline of Problems, Ideas and Approaches, Part I', in South Asia Bulletin, XIII (1&2), pp 93-121; and (1994) 'Part II', XIV (1), pp 73-98.
4 Der 13., 13 June 1993.
5 13 November 1995.
6 The political programme of the FPI – adjusted in 1997 - refers in chapter 5, article 1, to Christianity as 'the foundation of Europe'. In the explanation to article 2 it says that Christian churches are 'natural partners' to the FPI.
7 13 June 1993.
8 13 January 1993; emphasis in the original.
19 See Pfieger, op. cit.
20 Der 13., 13 May 1993.
22 13 September, 13 October, 13 November 1995.
24 13 November 1993.
26 13 January 1993.
27 13 February 1996.
31 Quoted in Bailer-Galanda, op. cit.
34 For instance, the ‘Women’s Referendum’, held in April 1997, provoked discussions about the establishment of a Women’s Party. The mainstream political parties immediately responded with changes to their political programmes to reflect the demand for women’s rights.