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DEMOCRACY AND POPULISM EQUALITY, TRUTH, AND DISAGREEMENT IN THE AGE OF COVID

Abstracts

Judson Abraham | Virginia Tech, USA

Populist Just Transitions in the Green New Deal: A Gramscian Perspective

This paper presentation will draw from Gramscian political theory to make the case that “just transition” policies will do the most political good as components of left-wing populist projects. Just transition policies, informed by left-wing populist thought, can advance a progressive green industrial policy. Gramsci insists that progressive industrial transitions must involve all productive workers (including unskilled and informal workers) acting together to implement new technologies in a way that benefits everyone, instead of only benefiting some class fragments. Progressive industrial changes benefit the whole of society with more efficient and centralized production. During a progressive industrial transition, workers will be willing to make sacrifices to implement technological upgrades at the workplace that lead to redundancies if doing so benefits society as a whole. A clean energy transition, while beneficial for the whole of humanity, will eliminate carbon intensive jobs. Fossil fuel workers will not be willing to accept such changes without first embracing their potential status as climate defenders. Hence the need for distinctly populist just transitions. For Gramsci, populism (which he calls the “national popular”) is a nationalist sensibility that encourages workers to participate as equals in projects of cultural, technological, and economic development. A populist just transition will not only indemnify displaced energy workers, but also improve workers’ abilities to cooperate for a dynamic national culture and economy. Policy makers and unions should carefully design just transitions to avoid sparking inter-class resentments or stifling capacities for self-governance.

Daniel Abrahams | University of Glasgow, UK

The People’s Past: Democratic Constraints on Memorials and Public

Recent debate over historical monuments has focused on the question of removalism: under which circumstances should statues or other monuments to certain historical figures be removed (Burch-Brown 2017; Frowe 2019; Schultz 2019). Such debate has focused on the ethical badness of the monuments’ subjects. Comparatively little discussion has been given to the question of what makes a good historical monument, and what should guide the erection of new monuments. In this paper I explicate and defend one such criterion for good public historical monuments: since public history not only represents but also shapes the public, public history monuments should shape the public in an ethically justifiable way. Call this the democracy condition.

In a democracy, the people serve as a source of legitimacy. They are who the government is supposed to serve, and the government is only legitimate so long as it meets their needs. Consequently, who counts as “the people” is very important. One way that “the people” are defined is historically: they share a common past and historical trajectory (Anderson 2006). The Canadian people, for instance, are in part defined by their relationship to a set of historical events like the Dominion Act of 1867 and the Constitution Act of 1982. Public historical monuments present some past events historically important to the identity of the people (Abrahams 2020). However, the selection of some past events over others for public memorialization serves to include or exclude certain groups as belonging to “the people.” For example, Nova Scotian public history has been put together so as to emphasize Scottish and Norse history while excluding Black and Indigenous history (McKay and Bates 2010). Altogether this means that public history monuments

help construct the people by presenting a history that includes some groups and may exclude others. The argument of this paper is that since public history helps construct the people, public history helps to define to whom a democratic government is accountable. If this is true, then public history monuments ought to be constructed such that they do not unjustly exclude or subordinate groups, since such a public history also affects democratic legitimacy.

My argument will be made across three sections. In the first section I present an account of public history and public identity. This will explicate the relationship between historical monuments and public identity, and provide the groundwork for what follows. In the second section, I defend the claim that public history helps to define to whom a democratic government is accountable. In the third section I articulate and defend the democracy condition as a means of evaluating and guiding the creation of public history monuments.

Musa Akman | Istanbul Technical University, Turkey

The Need for Populism

This paper will try to demonstrate the natural need to participate in politics which all humans have and after that the desire to feel like being heard. For demonstrating these points, this paper's main argument will be that humanity, especially in our contemporary world, needs populism which is -unlike what prevalent stigmatizing verdict proclaims- not inherently evil and dangerous but it actually is nothing but people's active involvement in the decision-making process. Furthermore, this paper will put a demarcation between what is called right-wing and left-wing populism, and try to demonstrate that, in fact, there can only be left-populism and the other one is not truly in the category of populism but it is a corrupt way of using people's desire which is to be feel like they are a part of something, and right-wing's purpose is establishing a despotic regime. The essay will argue that, the current prevalent way of political exclusion basically paves the way for these despotic ideas to rise, since all humans desire to be part of something. Also, a further scrutinize about this exclusion's effects on citizenship, and the importance of democratic participation for a citizen will be made. Lastly, it will be shown, that if humans cannot be a part of the decision-making political body, they will try some other bodies to be a part of.

Anat Ascher | Open University of Israel, Israel

The truth of post-truth politics: where is democracy headed?

The first two decades of the 21st Century have witnessed the rise of several right-wing populist governments, thus evoking the old tension between different aspects of democracy, particularly democracy as the rule of the majority, and democracy as the safeguarding of individuals' rights and liberties, especially when these individuals belong to minority groups. In his book *Hatred of democracy*, published in 2005, Jacques Rancière has formulated this conundrum as follows: "The thesis of the new hatred of democracy can be succinctly put: there is only one good democracy, the one that represses the catastrophe of democratic civilization."

It can be argued that in the fifteen years that had since passed, the catastrophe has become very much apparent. Populist leaders around the globe are now inciting social groups against each other, promoting racist legislation, undermining the rule of law, and above all, they do so openly and declaratively. Now, one can suggest, as does Rancière himself in a recent interview, that these leaders do not truly represent the underprivileged masses, but are rather supported by the economic oligarchy, and that therefore this does not pose a true challenge to democratic government (as this is not democracy we are dealing with here, but rather oligarchy). However, one can alternatively claim that these leaders do in fact represent significant parts of their respective societies, and that in a sense, what started as the post-truth politics has actually managed to uncover some of the most inner truths of democracy, making its autoimmune nature ever more clear.

This paper will take on this later alternative. Understanding the populist governments of the 21st Century as a most troubling, yet authentic, manifestation of the innate contradiction found in democracy, it will try to unravel where does this leave the democratic political project. On the one hand, it is possible that liberal democracy as we know it, upholding both the rule of majority and protection of human rights, can no longer exist in our times. On the other hand, as more and more people take to the streets and protest against their populist regimes, thus actively engaging in the political realm, it might also be the case that our age calls for new ways of participation in the political, and perhaps for the formation of a more direct form of democracy.

Will Barclay | Carleton University, Canada
A Sheep In Wolf's Clothing

Throughout the modern era, popular support for populism and the politics of the 'far-right' has become increasingly prevalent throughout the international political system. For example, within the United States of America, the furor of the far-right recently converged, in order to jettison Donald Trump, a veritable avatar of the Tea Party and American populism, to the fore of the 2016 U.S. presidential election and into his current position as the President of the United States of America.

As a result, 'populism' has dominated the modern news cycle and all contemporary political discourse. Unfortunately, despite the fact that the ghoul of 'populism' has been persistently invoked throughout the modern era, 'populism' and its fundamental premises have remained altogether vague. And yet, although 'populism' has remained stubbornly undefined by its opponents, every populist political ideology that has emerged during the modern era has, nevertheless, been steadfastly criticized by its innumerable detractors as a malignant threat to any democracy, and as antithetical to all democratic political processes.

For instance, throughout *How to Lose a Country: The 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship*, Ece Temelkuran loudly proclaims that "Today, the voice of populist infantile politics is amplified by social media allowing the ignorant to claim equality with the informed." Furthermore, within *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*, Steven Pinker resolutely declares that 'populism' is "A very different threat to human progress..." and "A political movement that seeks to undermine [the] Enlightenment..."

However, although 'populism' and 'democracy' are inevitably misconstrued as utterly dissimilar and diametrically opposed by modern pundits, it is actually evident that 'populism' and 'democracy' are not at all mutually exclusive. Rather, if 'populism' is carefully compared and contrasted with 'democracy' and its political processes, then it immediately becomes readily apparent that 'populism' and 'democracy' are, in fact, remarkably similar.

Consequently, this essay will consult various quintessential liberal-democratic texts and documents, such as Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* and Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, in order to accurately define 'democracy' and its particular political processes.

Moreover, this essay will carefully delineate 'populism', as well as populism's fundamental political principles, in order to categorically establish the characteristics that have historically typified populist political ideologies within the international political system.

Finally, this essay will compare and contrast 'populism' and 'democracy' within the United States of America, in order to demonstrate that 'populism' and 'democracy' are actually manifestly identical. and, in fact, 'democracy' is simply a term that is deployed within democratic societies in order to denote agreeable political processes and outcomes, whereas 'populism' is merely the language that is deployed by citizens within democratic societies in order to denote any disagreeable political processes or outcomes.

Thomás de Barros | Sciences Po Paris, France

Symptom or Sublimation: Psychoanalytic Metaphors to Study Populism and Democracy

The articulation between political theory and psychoanalysis, developed by authors such as Ernesto Laclau, Paula Biglieri and Yannis Stavrakakis, constitutes an important innovation for the studies of populism. In this tradition, various psychoanalytic metaphors have been used to explain the emergence of populism and its relationship with democracy. Two of Freud's categories have been frequently evoked in this effort: symptom and sublimation.

In the case of symptom, Jason Glynos was the first to stress how Chantal Mouffe's idea of "the return of the political" to describe the emergence of populism in post-democratic times was analogous to Freud's idea of symptom as "the return of the repressed". Yet, there is still some controversy on the democratic status of this "return". For Benjamin Ardit, the idea of populism as a symptom would reveal its emancipatory potentialities by pointing to the blind spots of liberal democracy. For others, however, populism would be closer to what Gramsci called a "morbid symptom", cheering authoritarian leaders and scapegoating minorities. Similar ambiguities emerged in Ernesto Laclau's use of sublimation to explain populism. Although Laclau presented himself as a defender of a radical democratic project, his somehow incomplete incorporation of psychoanalytic categories led some critics to see his defense of populism at the antipodes of democracy.

In order to dissipate some confusion traversing the field, the paper aims to critically review the various references to symptom and sublimation made by political theorists to describe populism and its relationship

with democracy. Going back to the works of Freud and Lacan, the paper argues that the distinction between symptom and sublimation is key to respectively differentiate between non-democratic and democratic expressions of populism. It concludes with an empirical discourse analysis of U.S. politics, presenting Donald Trump's rise as an example of populism as a symptom, and Bernie Sanders' movement as an emancipatory case of populism as sublimation.

Sebastian Bierema | National University of Ireland, Galway

A General Strike against Reality: critical/conspiracy theories and post-truth politics

Conspiracy theories and post-truth politics are prominent features in the popular consciousness, with covid-denial, climate-change-denial, and Qanon taking centre stage. Conspiracy theories tend to be dismissed as divorced from reality at best, or, at worst, condemned as dangerous inroads to fascism. Engaging with Bruno Latour, this paper presents a more generous interpretation of conspiracy thinking and argues that critical/conspiracy theory is central to populist projects. Latour likens conspiracy theories to critical theory to playfully point out the excesses of critical theory. His recognition of their common logic in challenging the Foucauldian Regime of Truth, however, can rehabilitate conspiracy theories as well as disparage critical theory.

The belated vindication of many conspiracy theories reminds us that the Regime of Truth is not necessarily on the side of 'truth'. While Qanon's claim that the world is run by a cabal of Satanic paedophiles has a tenuous relationship with reality, the neoliberal claim that climate change can be solved while leaving the structures of extractivist capitalism intact is equally questionable. Questioning the way in which we imagine reality is the proper aim of critical/conspiracy theory; the term 'conspiracy theory' is often wielded as a thought-terminating cliché to delegitimise critique. From this perspective, the proliferation of far-right conspiracy theories is problematic not because they renounce 'reality', but because their critiques of the neoliberal discourse are substandard. The logic of the dominant Regime of Truth structures future political actions, meaning that collectively imagining a different reality is crucial for populist projects to succeed.

Gözde Böcü & Nidhi Panwar | University of Toronto, Canada

Transnational Populism in India and Turkey: BJP's and AKP's Populist Engagement with Citizens Abroad

While domestic or nation-state level analysis of populist politics has been studied widely, our understanding of the transnational dimension of populism, particularly as it relates to populist engagements with citizens abroad, remains underexplored. In this paper, we conduct a paired comparison of Turkey's AKP and India's BJP to demonstrate that both right-wing populist parties in power have expanded their populist claims beyond the borders of the nation state by establishing transnational networks in pivotal host countries which serve the goal of uniting the supporters of the given party based on a salient identity category. We argue that the two populist parties in power, having strategically employed polarization as a domestic strategy characterized by the discursive construction of an "us vs. them," have also extended the same into the transnational sphere through selective engagement with favorable parts of the diaspora. We suggest that these two populist parties engage with their diasporas in order to recreate and empower the us-group within diasporic communities so that they can tap into the resources of the diaspora more effectively. First, populist parties seek selective remittances from specific intra-diasporic groups to achieve domestic political gains. In the case of Turkey, we suggest that the AKP taps into diaspora to gain political remittances in the form of votes to guarantee its populist rule. In the Indian case, we observe that the BJP mainly seeks financial remittances to further its developmentalist agenda. Second, the two populist parties under study also seek foreign policy gains from their diasporas and actively engage in diaspora diplomacy with the goal of constructing lobbies aimed to further their influence in host country contexts. To demonstrate our argument, we draw on symbolic and institutional changes in policy and analyze political strategies employed in the diaspora for both populist parties.

Katy Brown | University of Bath, UK

Talking 'with' and 'about' the far right: how the populist hype means we do both

The use of populism to describe far-right parties and politics has become widespread in political, media and academic discourses, eclipsing other descriptors with serious implications. Deriving from a broader study on mainstreaming, this research explores the use of populism to describe the far right within academia, highlighting the legitimising effect this can have if not carefully nuanced.

To do so, the paper develops the notions of talking 'with' and 'about' the far right: talking 'with' refers to the appropriation or espousal of similar ideas to the far right by mainstream actors, whereas talking 'about' denotes the way in which mainstream actors describe the far right. While many scholars would acknowledge their role in the process of talking 'about', there is limited engagement with how academia may talk 'with', contributing to the normalisation of far-right discourse. It is critical that we turn our attention to the role of the populist hype in this process. Indeed, through its incessant, and at times inaccurate, use in the field and consequent muddying of its meaning, 'populism' has created a discursive link between the far right and 'the people', lending democratic legitimacy to the ideas promoted by these parties and movements. This association has led far-right actors such as Nigel Farage and Marine Le Pen to embrace the term and in turn, mainstream politicians have justified shifting policy and discourse under the auspices of being guided by 'legitimate concerns'.

For this reason, we must centralise the ethics of talking 'about' in our understanding of mainstreaming, particularly its relationship to talking 'with', in order to develop a consciousness of the role academia can play in this process.

Furkan Cay | University of Szeged, Hungary

2007 Presidential Election Crisis: Beginning of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Open Populist Practices

Turkey went to the 2007 presidential election in the shadow of polarizing debates concerning who will be a new president of the secular republic. Tensions between the AKP and the political establishment have already begun months before the election however Recep Tayyip Erdogan's insistence over the AKP's presidential candidate led to an outbreak of profound fault lines. During the process, the political establishment caused political maneuvering to prevent the election of Abdullah Gul. Consequently, Erdogan stipulated early elections and challenged the political establishment by constructing "people" versus "elites" populist rhetoric. Previous studies over Erdogan's populist policies did not emphasize the significance of the 2007 presidential election process. Therefore, extant studies remain insufficient concerning the impact of the 2007 presidential election over Erdogan's open populist practices. This article examines the presidential election process, civil-military relations during AKP's first term, and the results of the presidential election crisis over Erdogan's populist practices

Maura Ceci | Leiden University, Netherlands

Between Indefinability and Usage: toward a philosophical understanding of populism

Populism has become a buzzword within the political arena of the twenty-first century. It is near omnipresent in our discourse, most of the time without being tied to any particularly defined conceptualization. This proliferation of populist and meta-populist discourse results in the meaning of the term *populism* becoming taken for granted without ever resulting in its user's need to feel it necessary to expand on its actual meaning. The aim of this paper is to try to shed some light on the definition of the word populism and its usage. I adopt and apply some tools proposed by Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, namely his idea of family resemblance and meaning as use. Firstly, I will consider populism as a family resemblance term. Instead of trying to entangle populism within a framework of fixed and essential features, populism should be seen as contingent and contextual intertwining of different characteristics which make us immediately recognize a phenomenon as populism. Secondly, I will propose three different uses of populism within academic literature – populism as a classifier, as an admonition and as a descriptor - in order to show how the meaning that we attributed to the term might change according to the usage we make of it. Consequently, each theory of populism advanced should be conceived in light of the scope of the analysis and the specific use we make of the word within political debate. This approach would allow us to maintain the word populism in spite of its lack of a central definition, while allowing a plurality of overlapping and conflictual meanings.

Jamil Civitarese | Independent Scholar

Deliberating, Fast and Slow: Civic Productivity under Technological, Institutional, and Cognitive Constraints

In most democracies, citizens do not consume much of their time acquiring political knowledge. An already old promise, information and communication technologies have changed our relationship both with time and politics but with mixed results. On the one hand, less time is necessary for citizens to articulate their immediate demands; on the other hand, recent research suggests no positive impact of these new technologies on political knowledge. In this paper, I use a behavioral economics framework to discuss how the traditional design of electoral institutions induces low intellectual effort by voters. Under a partially accelerated participation scheme caused by technology, such voters are prone to fast and biased responses to frequent and urgent matters, but do not feel their efforts to solve them are relevant, demotivating slow and thoughtful reflection over social themes. Finally, I suggest that the design of traditional representation institutions must be adjusted to incentive higher knowledge production, thus matching participation demands and leveraging democracy's epistemic value.

Ayan Das | University of Gour Banga, India

Debajit Goswami | Netaji Subhas Open University, India

Broadly, populism may be interpreted as, the opposition of the elite by the poor. In the democratic process, populism gives the masses the opportunity to use representative politics to negotiate for socio-economic equality and justice against the ruling elites. The populist character of a political party depends on the extent to which it is able to realize popular national or regional aspirations. To identify a political party as a populist one, analysis of their policies and programs is utmost necessary. It may not be right to label a political party as a populist without a thorough analysis of the policies adopted and implemented.

Therefore, to identify a populist party, we shall consider the extent to which its policies and programmes voices the popular demands of masses and negates the dominance of the elite classes. Furthermore, the far-reaching effects of their implemented programmes, in establishing economic, social and political equality and justice for the oppressed and marginalized people, is evaluated.

In this context, we examine the policies adopted, implemented, by the Left Front-I government (1977-1982) and compare it with the Trinamool Congress-I regime (2011-2016) of West Bengal to examine their degree of populist tendencies. We identify that both adopted populist politics and so examine their different type of populist politics, in their journey from opposition parties to elected government. We explain how a party (basically State Populism) can sustain and manage their populist activities after assuming power. We also want to analyse whether the populist parties come to power to prevent the supremacy of corporate capital through their adopted policies or whether populism is a tactical process to legitimize the expansion of capital accumulation and primitive accumulation in postcolonial countries like India.

Understanding Populism from Laclauian perspective, Logic of Equivalence and Logic of Difference are essential elements, however the nature of state populism in West Bengal also necessitates the consideration of Logic of Governance as an expression of governmentality.

Adam Dorsey | Nottingham Trent, UK

Populism: A Critique and Endorsement

The paper simultaneously offers a trenchant critique and glowing endorsement of the recent rise of right and left wing populism in countries such as Britain and the United States. In order to formulate a position that incorporates these seemingly opposed ends, the paper is split into 3 parts. Initially, on one hand, I argue that, regardless of the political leaning, contemporary populisms are underpinned by a 'pragmatic messianism' comprised of the medieval Hobbesian sacrificial paradigm (Esposito, 2012) and selected elements of *Au Courant* News-speak (Nietzsche, 2019). I then contend that such pragmatism *de Jour*, which manifests in the lamentable utilitarian infused frog hopping between issues typical of current political 'thought', gives rise to nothing more than a deleterious plucking out of the eyes and bursting of the drums. For, although pragmatic messianism allows for the construction of clearly defined 'Us/Them' oppositions and the alluring solutions characteristic of today's populisms, the hegemony of the Us/Them in the Anglo-American public imaginary, I maintain, makes us increasingly blind and deaf to the significance of other types of relation, especially those that have always and already enabled people to live well together.

On the other hand, I endorse the recent rise of populisms. Specifically, I argue that the need to construct and maintain an Us/Them relation has given rise to a sudden and rapid proliferation of characteristically hostile, yet increasingly facile, caricatures of the other. The superficial, and ultimately meaningless, nature of such ‘caricaturisation’, I contend, results in a growing scepticism towards the transformative potential of pragmatic messianistic solutions, as well as any positions based on an understanding of ‘the political’ and politics as an Us/Them opposition. Therefore, although I critique the recent rise to hegemony in the Anglo-American world, I argue that the explosion of populism is to be endorsed, as the resultant scepticism simultaneously forces a growing number that would not be swept away to reflect on the possibilities and significance of the very relations populism risks obliterating.

Speaking to the sceptical, the last section eschews the Us/Them opposition. As such, I explore the potential of an unpopular understanding of ‘the political’ as always and already constituted by an ‘Inoperable We’ rooted in the meaningless nature of the World as World (Nancy, 2017). Through the exploration, I argue that such an understanding of the political and the world entails a particular way of being towards the world and others, or an *ethos*. I then examine some of the current views and practices that reveal the existence of such an *ethos*, as well as its potential to grow and blossom in the harsh soils of today.

Luke Edmeads | University of Brighton, UK

Democracy: Resisting realisation

In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* Judith Butler argues for the “unrealizability” of democracy. For her, a radical account of democracy must remain an open-ended process: its realisation would be its end. However, I argue that if democracy is to be conceived as an open, and therefore, critical practice, its critique must be aimed at the conditions which would foreclose its possibility. As such, I bring Butler’s claims of a radical democracy whose end “is no end” into dialogue with the critical theory of Adorno. I contend that Adorno’s theorisation of non-identity can offer a way to imagine radical democratic politics as an open process while insisting on an engagement with the material constraints that such a politics resist. Subsequently, this paper proceeds by examining Butler’s description of radical democracy through its critical relationship with unrealisability. It then reads the valorisation of unrealisability through a radical politics of non-identity. Through this reading I suggest the importance of Adorno’s thought in conceiving of an ‘unrealisable’ and critical democratic politics.

Zane Elward | Indiana University, USA

Neofascism and Reactionary Populism: The Failings of Liberal Democracy and the Rebranding of the Italian Far Right

The claims of right-wing populists such as Donald Trump and Matteo Salvini that they offer a more authentic form of popular sovereignty signal a contestation of the meaning of democracy, forcing a reevaluation of our political systems and the relationship between democracy and populism. Dismissing reactionary populists as “aberrations” while advocating a “return to normalcy” neglects that these politicians draw on ideas entrenched in the traditions of the far right and in our societies more broadly. It additionally obscures the shortcomings of liberal democracy that have given rise to them in recent years.

In analyzing the rise of right-wing populist politics, we can identify the particular failings of liberal democracy that fueled the ascent of far-right leaders. Italy is particularly useful as a case study, as Salvini, despite recent setbacks, enjoyed a surprising degree of popularity during his tenure as Deputy Prime Minister. By connecting his rhetoric to critiques of liberal democracy spanning the political spectrum, we can reveal the sense that the political system established in Europe following WWII was constrained, that it moved away from the nation-state and the “people,” and, in light of the rise of neoliberal policies, has left citizens feeling a profound sense of alienation and superfluity as the wellbeing of citizens is sacrificed in the name of economic growth. Reactionary populists promise to re-empower the nation, restoring popular sovereignty by personally channeling the will of the people (always understood in a narrow, exclusive manner). Eerily reminiscent of fascism, I argue that situating these claims in the history of the Italian far right underlines their connection to the neofascist projects of the 1970s, when new methods suitable to the electoral process were adopted, promoting a Gramscian cultural struggle for hegemony on the Right.

The examination of the rise of reactionary populism alongside the history of the far right forces the acknowledgement of flaws in liberal democracy that must be addressed. Indeed, the return to a form of centrist consensus politics would offer little more than a temporary solution, ultimately perpetuating the

current crisis. Rather, by engaging in the rhetoric of right-wing populists and drawing on the theories of anti-fascists of the past, we can forge a politics on the Left that can offer citizens an alternative sense of meaning and empowerment by defending liberal democratic institutions but also by going beyond them

Antonis Galanopoulos & Giorgos Venizelos | University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Anti-populism and populist hype during the COVID-19 pandemic

An abundance of commentary articles published by academics and pundits during the COVID19 outbreak associated populism with the pandemic. Well known scholars of populism as well as researchers working on remotely related topics took part in this debate, lending their authority and expertise to media practitioners willing to simplify a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. This article explores how pundit discourse employed the signifier 'populism' in the public debate around coronavirus, and identifies a typology of salient discursive patterns: (1) populism is anti-science (2) populism responds irresponsibly to the health crisis (3) populism will eventually die out because of the pandemic.

We argue that the alleged association between the two phenomena is a product of the systematically pejorative use of 'populism' in public discourse that neglects rigorous theorisations of the phenomenon. In problematizing the anti-populist media hype around 'populism', this paper makes a plea for analytical clarity in the study of the phenomenon, in the context of the COVID-19 developments and beyond.

Mareike Gebhardt | University of Münster, Germany

The Populist Movement: Affective Orders, Protest, and Politics Of Belonging

From a poststructuralist and feminist perspective, the paper critically intervenes in what Mouffe (2018) has trenchantly described as "policy research on populism"—the most dominant form of populism research in the social sciences that is based on the normative orders of (conservative) liberalism. Referring to the so-called horseshoe-model developed by political science, this populism research claims that left and right-wing populism 'look alike' (isomorphia). The paper argues, instead, that recent Western populism exceeds traditional demarcations of 'left' and 'right' to amalgamate classical left agendas, such as anti-globalization and anti-capitalist struggles, with (femo-)nationalist and ethno-sexist tropes. Consequently, the paper scrutinizes both policy-oriented research on populism and Mouffe's conceptualization of populism because both reproduce a binary logic between 'left' and '(far) right' populism. To emphasize that populism works on the grounds of one logic—an argument put forward by Laclau (2005)—I introduce the populist moment as a theoretical and analytical concept to describe the structure of the populist logic shared by a variety of protest movements and parties from the whole political spectrum to differentiate populism from radical democracy more clearly as Mouffe.

The whole argument is unfolded in two steps: First, it focuses on the relation between populism, democracy, and affect production. In reference to Sara Ahmed's (2004) works on "affective economies", it is shown how affect is produced, amplified, and circulated to shape the political. It illustrates, in accordance with Mouffe, how 'Western' populism of the twenty-first century emerges from the aloofness of liberal democracy's sober regime of rationality: Since liberal democracy discredited the affective dimension of politics, it 'cleansed' affect from political space. Populist logics, contrastingly, operate on affects to mobilize 'the we' and articulate its demands, in a Laclauian sense. Scrutinizing liberal democracy's putative soberness, the paper discusses how affect can be democratized instead of ethno-nationally instrumentalized. Second and last, the relationship between radical democracy and ('left') populism is put under scrutiny to problematize how Mouffe conflates 'left populism' and radical democracy. To unearth the pitfalls in Mouffe's recent writings on "left populism," the paper turns to Jacques Rancière's and Isabell Lorey's conceptualizations of radical democracy to portray how to democratize democracy with but also beyond Mouffe's 'left populism.'

Chris Griffin | University of Brighton, UK

Speculative Narratives of 'Reassuring Certitude': Strategic Foundationalism in Post-Truth Populism

David Graeber's *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* is a work of Left populism that attempts to displace hegemonic narratives of economic debt, particularly the moral axiom that debts must be repaid. It's also an example of strategic foundationalism. Graeber sets out to prove that his counternarrative is supported by incontestable empirical evidence, giving him recourse to objectivism and positivism, and prompting him to dismiss Nietzsche's influential work on debt as 'fantasy'.

In this paper, I explain the political consequences of the different approaches taken by Graeber and Nietzsche. From this I suggest that Graeber is trying to mitigate the anxiety caused by the disappearance of the ground of signification. Hoping to produce a conceptually accessible and convincing text, Graeber offers what Derrida calls the 'reassuring certitude' of an illusory foundation. But this epistemic premise is a gamble. While the strategic foundationalism of *Debt* gives it counterhegemonic force, it risks reinscribing and perpetuating the very economic logic that Graeber aims to displace. To draw out the relationship between fictionality and risk, I describe *Debt* as a *speculative narrative*: an imaginative retelling of the past that also speculates in the economic sense, staking something on a profitable return in the future.

Given that we're now living in a time of epistemic uncertainty – the so-called post-truth era – I think we should take the risks of strategic foundationalism seriously. What we owe to Graeber, perhaps, is to attend closely to the effects of his wager.

Gustavo Guille | University of Buenos Aires, Argentina

Populism or Democracy: Deconstructing opposition like an emancipatory politics

"Populism" and "Democracy" have become highly relevant signifiers in the political field. Very often they are considered to be opposite terms both in the hegemonic media and the academic sphere. More precisely, populism is branded as a threat to democracy and its institutions resulting in a politically conservative outlook that an emancipatory perspective oughts to deconstruct.

For that purpose, it is essential to rethink left populism as a political phenomena with emancipatory potential, stating clear distinctions from other reactionary and racist forms of the so called right populism. It is our contention this can be achieved by a derridean reinterpretation of the populist logic laid out by Ernesto Laclau in his *On populist reason* (2004), as well as Chantal Mouffe's *For a left populism* (2018).

In addition, we must insist on the institutional character of populism. In this sense, we think that we cannot deconstruct the opposition between populism and democracy without re-affirming, simultaneously, democratic institutions. This reassertion must be traversed, and therefore re-shaped, by both Justice and Hospitality as principles at the heart of left populism.

Maurits Helmich | Erasmus University Rotterdam

The Populist Critique of the 'Political Judge': A Child of Liberalism

As a corollary to last decade's surge of nationalist populism worldwide, the rulings of judicial institutions have quite regularly become the object of public distrust, particularly in Europe. In Spain, for example, the highest judicial organs have grown to occupy a key position in what is undoubtedly the largest constitutional crisis in the country's recent democratic history. Many Catalan secessionists organize in opposition to a set of 'centralist' Constitutional Court judgments, and in rejection of the Spanish Supreme Court's convictions of Catalan leaders. In the U.K., there are the two recent 'Miller cases', where the British Supreme Court (in summary) forced Government to actively cooperate with Parliament in negotiating a Brexit. The judges were accused of blocking the will of the people and were thus dragged into the wider political 'Brexit' dispute. Lastly, the Urgenda 'climate' case in the Netherlands is a striking example of a case that sparked public distrust. The Dutch Government was ordered by the judge to make nationwide policy changes action to reduce carbon emissions, leading commentators to complain about judicial activism. In all these cases, critics have accused the courts of entering the domain of 'politics', while defenders of the judgment have insisted the court did not act 'politically' in any problematic sense.

This piece studies one particular version of the 'politicality' critiques, which one could call the 'populist critique': the court acts illegitimately, because it obstructs the popular will. To assert that a court acted 'politically' in its judgments is then to conceptualize its judgments as undemocratic and thus as illegitimate. The paper contrasts this 'populist' way to think about the judge's position within the democracy with two other

paradigms. One, which can be found back in the writings of Ronald Dworkin and Jürgen Habermas, is to view court judgments as integral parts and expressions of democratic practice. The other, leading back to the Founding Fathers and contemporary authors like Andras Sajó, sees law as a legitimate counterweight to the people. The former 'integrational' tradition works with a thicker notion of the demos, whereas the latter 'confrontational' tradition works with a notion of the populus as the will of the masses. Both conceptualizations are internally coherent and yet in tension with one another. From the integrational point of view, the confrontational point of view lacks emancipatory potential, because it fails to implement democratic morality into the legal domain. From the confrontational point of view, the integrational point of view is misleading and hides conflict, because it abstracts from the actual tensions inherent to popular rule.

The main claim this article makes is that the populist critique of judicial practice parasitizes on the latter liberal 'confrontational' paradigm. Populism, in that sense, is liberalism put upside down: 'the people' (defined as the populus) is no longer the thing to be constrained, but rather the thing to be unleashed. Ultimately, I conclude, this strategy to 'depoliticize' the judge to regain judicial legitimacy in this way is self-defeating, at least when taken to its extreme. The basic insight underlying the liberal paradigm is that mediating institutions like the judiciary can function work if they are to a significant extent insulated from popular opinion. Not allowing this institutional independence politicizes and thus forfeits the judiciary's legitimacy, because it makes it an appendix to the populist's definition of 'the people'. Nevertheless, I propose, populist critiques of public institutions are an ideological child of the liberal 'confrontational' paradigm, not of the democratic 'integrational' one. Only by generating a conceptual tension by 'the people' versus 'the judge', the point is, can the populist essentialist claim sensibly be made.

Viktoria Huegel | University of Brighton, UK

Rethinking political authority: Carl Schmitt's notion of commissarial dictatorship

Informed by Carl Schmitt's distinction between commissarial dictatorship and sovereign dictatorship, this paper proposes to imagine government interventions (e.g. by the government in response to COVID19) as *authoritative* ("dictating" in Schmitt's parlé). This means that they are not understood as democratic insofar as they contradict the idea of popular sovereignty. At the same time, they might not have to be authoritarian when limited by and subordinated to a constitutional framework. Decisive for this is the difference in the temporality of Schmitt's concepts: Sovereign dictatorship rests on a theological structure. It is legitimized by an external source of authority allowing it to transcend existing political orders. In contrast, the authority of the commissarial dictator is *performative*: it relies on a reciprocal relationship with the constitutional order. This entails that if the commissarial dictator attempts to change the constitutional framework, they interfere with their own source of legitimization. The focus of critique is therefore shifted to the execution of political authority. I read Schmitt against himself here: this critique contradicts his later justification of the "Führer" as the guardian of the constitution, thus a power above it. I argue that appropriating the commissarial notion of authority can help us to resist the Right's obstruction of social policies, without having to fully legitimize extraordinary powers taken by a government.

Karolina Jedrzejczak | University of Manchester, UK

Populism and two crises of liberal democracy

This paper introduces a unique way of conceptualising the crisis of liberal democracy. Instead of looking into the interplay between the liberal and the democratic components, I argue we should focus on examining the degree of uncoupling in the political system; that is the disconnect between the government and the people. Some theorists argue that populism is always a threat to liberal democracy. More specifically, it is said populism is an 'illiberal democratic force' which might contribute to the deconsolidation of the current political system towards illiberal democracy (Mounk 2018). This view of populism is based on two assumptions. First, that liberal democracy is merely a sum of distinguishable liberal and democratic components which are in dynamic tension with each other. Second, that liberal democracy faces a crisis of 'untangling' which is a breakdown of the equilibrium between the two components.

There are two serious problems with the approach above. Empirically, it fails to account for phenomena which blur the division between the democratic and the liberal yet provide information about the health of the system. For example, the recent 'Black Lives Matter' protests, simultaneously, represent direct participation (the democratic component) and a concern for minority rights (the liberal component). Further, the 'untangling'

approach is an imprecise conceptual diagnosis of the crisis. It fails to differentiate between a liberal-democratic tension, which is an inherent corrective mechanism of liberal democracy, and another kind which constitutes a crisis. I address these two concerns by introducing the crisis of uncoupling as a competing framework to analyse liberal democratic phenomena.

I argue the uncoupling needs to be recognised as a fundamental crisis of liberal democracy. The furthering of the disconnect between the government and the people will prevent their interchange and, eventually, transform them into separate groups of rulers and subjects. A political community of rulers and subjects cannot be considered liberal democratic. This paper offers three immediate contributions. First, it puts forward an account of what constitutes a crisis which is less susceptible (than other accounts) to the typical criticism of being far too vague. Second, this argument provides support to the accounts which define populism as a chance for 'bringing politics to the people' (Canovan 2004) or, alternatively, as inherently ambiguous towards liberal democracy (Kaltwasser 2012). Since it is the disconnect that is the most problematic, populism could be a promising way to counteract the uncoupling and move towards a liberal democratic revival. Finally, in light of the persistence of ongoing debates on the nature of populism, this paper clarifies how one's view of liberal democracy influences one's perception of populism. While the argument does not indisputably resolve the task of defining populism on its own, it does offer a persuasive explanation of why the accounts of populism vary so much.

Mudar Kassis | Birzeit University, Palestine

Can a differential diagnosis between populism and a revolutionary situation help the left overcome populism?

The proposed intervention hinges on the assumption that there are certain necessary conditions for the emergence of populism that are, in part, identical to the conditions identified by V. I. Lenin for the emergence of a "revolutionary situation". Amongst these conditions is the existence of a legitimacy crisis, an elite rupture, indignation of the populace/demos, political entrepreneurship, amongst other conditions. There are other elements that allow differentiation between the two situations that are structurally comparable. These include, inter alia, the construction of a scapegoat (in populism) compared to the identification of an enemy (in a revolutionary situation); the designation of a "sacred cow" (in populism) compared to the emergence of "heroes" in the revolutionary situation; and the dependency of the populace on the entrepreneur (in the case of populism) compared to independent historical action of the demos (in a revolution).

There are two frameworks that enable the explanation of these differences. The first is to designate the populist situation as inherently right-wing, while restricting left-wing populism to the revolutionary situation. The discussion of this option will in part use some ideas from Chantal Mouffe and interrogate them. The second framework (which the presentation will be defending) is contextual. It relates each of the situations to the type of existing hegemonic structures, building on and interrogating ideas from Gramsci and Laclau.

The above-mentioned comparable differences are functions of consciousness, leadership, and organisation. The presentation will defend the thesis that the emergence of a leadership that can promote conscious political organisation in the neoliberal era faces multiple serious obstacles that are commonly expressed in the new norm of the "post-political". Overcoming this situation is a condition to transpose the popular drive into a revolutionary one

Catherine Koekoek | University of Rotterdam, Netherlands

Groundless contestation: post-truth, agonism, and democracy

This paper explores the role of truth in democracy in light of contemporary discourses on post-truth politics, intensified by the covid-19 pandemic. Political philosophical analyses of post-truth can be divided into two extremes. On one side, post-truth is seen as an ultimate danger for democracy. This 'deliberative' position holds that democratic power can only be legitimized with a mutual orientation towards rationality and truth. On the other side, the 'agonistic' position is critical of truth-centred understandings of democracy, and instead sees post-truth as a form of democratization: truth is itself understood as a 'power game' that can always be re-politicised. I argue that at stake in these analyses of post-truth are conflicting conceptions of the role of truth in democracy.

The paper builds upon Hannah Arendt's (1967) observation that the political attitude towards facts "must tread the very narrow path" between necessity (the 'coercive force' of truth foreclosing political action) and contingency (manipulating facts out of the world, resulting in totalitarianism). To translate Arendt's

republican theory into a democratic context, I introduce Jürgen Habermas' deliberative and Chantal Mouffe's agonistic theories as alternative democratic elaborations of Arendt's insight in truth and politics. Their work highlights two essential, dialectical aspects of democracy. Habermas 'institutionalises' Arendt by building an elaborate procedural discourse theory of democracy, establishing the stability of communicative action that makes it possible to count on democratic deliberation and institutions, that provides democratic common ground. For Mouffe, on the other hand, radical democracy consists primarily in the possibility of contesting a given order, and in acknowledging that all order, stability or necessity is fundamentally contingent and contestable, shaped by hegemonic power relations.

Post-truth populism across the globe contests democratic institutions and procedures in name of the people, while simultaneously undermining the very democratic grounds that underly popular self-government in the first place. Perhaps the clearest example is the current U.S. president's refusal to accept the results and the procedures of the recent election, all the while doing so in name of democracy and fair elections, backed up by unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud. By in this way undermining democratic procedures in name of democracy, post-truth politics can simultaneously be seen as a form of democratisation and as a threat to the very possibility of democracy. But meaningful democratic politics, I argue, needs both popular contestation (as Mouffe asserts) and procedural institutionalisation enabling plural publics to participate in self-government (as Habermas emphasises). As a form of ultimate contestation, post-truth politics (like agonism in overdrive) highlights only the former.

To find potential for democratic renewal in populist politics, we thus need to focus on the material conditions of possibility for popular self-government as well as on grounded forms of agonistic contestation. This (new-)materialist turn is also visible in recent contributions to democratic theory by thinkers like Linda Zerilli (2016, 2020) and Bonnie Honig (2017), who, concerned with an eroding common world in light of post-truth and neoliberalism, focus in different ways on world-building practices. The paper concludes by exploring the promises of Bonnie Honig's concept of 'public things' to rebuild democratic common ground in light of post-truth's groundless contestation.

Elżbieta Korolczuk | Södertörn University, Sweden

Conceptualizing the relation between populism and gender: an opportunistic synergy and its opponents

In recent years patriarchal gender norms and ideologies have become an integral part of the right-wing populist parties programs, and pioneering analyses have begun to appear (e.g. Dietze and Roth 2020, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2015). Studies on voting behaviors pointed to a significant gender gap in support for such parties (Spierings and Zaslove 2017), but some scholars suggested that this gap may be closing (e.g. Mayer 2015). When it comes to the contents of populist politics the studies were also inconclusive. Research conducted by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2015) shows that the specific goals and discourses of both left and right-wing populist parties depend mostly on the national context. More recent analyses, however, highlight a tendency to use strongly gendered conservative rhetoric by various right-wing populist parties (Dietze and Roth 2020, Tekin and Sayan-Cengiz 2019).

This paper aims to further the debates on the relationship between populism and gender, based mainly on the analysis of the Polish case. Rather than looking for specific gendered aspects of populism as an ideology, it examines a growing *opportunistic synergy* between the right-wing parties and ultraconservative groups opposing "gender." This synergy plays out on two distinct levels: ideological/discursive and strategic/organizational. Since populism is not a robust ideological project, it readily feeds on ideas and narrative structures promoted by the anti-gender ultraconservative movement, albeit often in an opportunistic and selective fashion. Populists also cooperate closely with the anti-gender organizations as they need new cadres in the process of a sweeping elite change. Simultaneously, the actors behind anti-gender campaigns use the organizational resources that right-wing parties offer and access to political processes, especially in contexts such as Poland where the latter are in power. What facilitates this collusion is the fact that the ultraconservative critiques of "gender" have been framed in populist terms. The movement presents itself as a necessary and courageous defense of "the people" against powerful and foreign "liberal elites," with "gender ideology" emphatically identified as a modern version of colonialism. This *opportunistic synergy* is currently challenged by Polish women, who mobilized in recent years in great numbers challenging the ruling party's definition of "the people."

Michał Kozłowski | University of Warsaw, Poland

In Poland and Beyond: How women's empowerment shapes authoritarian populism

In 2015 a wave of right wing populism has efficiently wiped out Polish political order and has been consolidating its grip on power ever since. This hardly came as a surprise – after all the growth of populism was already a world phenomenon. Yet there was something peculiar about the Polish case. The populist takeover concluded the quarter century of unprecedented economic and social development while most of the developed western countries experienced this very period as times of stagnation and uncertainty. Thus a question I want to tackle is how can a right wing populism flourish and grow in the context of historically unprecedented prosperity.

I will argue that much of populist dynamics can directly and indirectly be explained as a reaction to women's empowerment. By empowerment I mean women seizing a significantly larger amount of essential resources within the social division of labour. This process makes obsolete several forms of social control over women. There is a substantial historical evidence such processes of female autonomisation (even of lesser magnitude than today) nourish moral panic, incite political paranoia and call for authoritarian rule. I therefore believe essential elements of my explanation may apply well beyond Poland and central Europe.

Women's empowerment today is a global trend. As such it is nonlinear and non-homogeneous, at each time relative and reversible and yet powerful and coherent enough to yield a series of homological political phenomena even if they remain imbedded in very different socio-economic and cultural realities.

Inias Laureys | KU Leuven, Belgium

Loneliness and Populism: Why COVID-19 could threaten Modern-day Democracy

As the coronavirus contagion keeps spreading around the globe, it is increasingly exposing major socio-economic fractures that could undermine social life dramatically. According to UNICEF, the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic "could push up to 86 million more children into household poverty by the end of 2020".¹ In addition, WHO neurologist Dr. Konstantinos Petsanis warns, that "unless we act now to address the mental health needs associated with the pandemic, there will be enormous long-term consequences for families, communities and societies".² This raises questions as to what extent political life too will undergo evolutionary changes. In this paper, I will argue that the latter can most certainly be the case. Starting from the ideas of German-American thinker Hannah Arendt, I will argue that COVID-19 could threaten modern-day democracy significantly. To support this statement, I turn to Arendt's notion of 'loneliness'. Often underestimated, this specific notion provides many interesting perspectives from which the impact of the current crisis can be philosophically framed. Especially when connected to contemporary populism, Arendt's idea of loneliness offers many reasons to believe that the current crisis is indeed one of the most influential events that could have taken place.

Harrison Lechley | University of Brighton, UK

Democracy as Resistance

Since Ancient Greece, democracy has often been conceived as a regime of government (Held, 2006) that enfranchises the masses; drawing them into public life and into the framework of governance, either by holding public office or voting for those who do. In this paper I seek to challenge the idea that democracy can ever be understood as a form of governance. I argue that democracy provides us with a concept which perpetually resists and even becomes antithetical to the art of governance. To do this, I bring together two modern thinkers on democracy: Jacques Ranciere (1998) and Jacques Derrida (2002). Utilising their respective work on democracy and 'democracy-to-come', I theorise democracy itself as a form of resistance. Democracy here becomes an enactment of equality which works against the hierarchies and inequalities that modes of governance and logics of domination and subjection necessarily install. Consequently I highlight the Movement for Black lives, the fugitive politics of Harney and Moten's (2017) *Undercommons*, and certain forms of populist politics such as the popular response (of mutual aid, strikes and rebellions) to Argentina's 2001 *Corralito* crisis as democratic forms of resistance against the logics of racial capitalism, US military-imperialism and global financial indebtedness. In doing so I thus expand the concept of resistance to demonstrate, much like Harney and Moten, the manifold and complex ways that democracy, that is resistance to logics of domination, takes place every day.

Olga Lenczewska | Stanford University, USA

Electoral Competence, Epistocracy, and Standpoint Epistemologies: A Reply to Brennan

J. Brennan's (2016) epistemic argument for epistocracy relies on the assumption that voter competence requires knowledge of economics and political science. He conjectures that people who would qualify as competent are mostly white, upper-middle- to upper-class, educated, employed men, who know better how to promote the interests of the disadvantaged than the disadvantaged themselves. This paper has two aims: (1) to show that this account of voter competence is too narrow, and (2) to propose a modified account of this concept. Brennan mistakenly reasons as though it is obvious that socially disadvantaged and oppressed people, by virtue of lacking sufficient knowledge of political science and economics, do not belong on an epistocratic council. This is because there is another way of being competent: possessing firstpersonal experience and knowledge unique to (and acquired through) disadvantaged or oppressed situatedness. Once voter competence is characterized accurately and more holistically, the problem of epistocracy's implications of privileging already dominant genders, classes, and races (which characterize Brennan's account) no longer arises.

Jairo Lima & José Mauro Garboza Jr | UNEP, Brasil

Isn't populism a non-problem?

Based on the perspective of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe on radical democracy, populism has a great prominence in the current discussions for offering a formalization of a problem still open both in political philosophy and in law theory. Taken by its Mouffean aspect, of left-wing populism, it is necessary to take into account some elements that may be the target of criticisms when placed in a logical framework of interpretation: a) "Populism is a problem" outlines its general program around the populist theory of politics and law; b) "Populism is not a problem" reinforces its bases in an affirmative and purposeful way, resulting in the antagonism of right-wing populism and left-wing populism; c) "Non-populism is a problem" further reinforces the argument of the need to see political and legal practices only at this point; d) "Non-populism is not a problem" contrasts with the previous three. Therefore, this paper aims to start from "d" as horizon of possibility so that "a", "b" and "c" can be read from a deconstructive perspective.

Yonathan Listik | University of Essex, UK

A Case for Political Stupidity

My project proposes to challenge the account that the current challenges to democracy are disruptions of its natural development. This assumption masked a deeper repressive and undemocratic tendency inherent in political philosophy: the *polis* is the public realm of intelligence where those capable of making decisions grounded on reason are free while the *idios* is the private realm of those lacking the capacity to participate. The *people* are challenged as the principle of the democratic ethos itself. It becomes contingent or even an impeding factor for the proper implementation of societal rationality, i.e., to the proper management of society.

There is an underlying assumption that if one controls the degeneration (the stupid masses), harmony would be established. It aims at controlling rather than confronting the issue of stupidity in politics. It does not treat it as a constitutive feature of democratic politics. One of the central concepts in the Bolsonaro campaign was 'the good citizen', in the sense that the obedient citizen has nothing to fear. In other words, the intelligent and reasonable citizen has nothing to fear, only the idiots and criminals are in danger and, moreover, they should be since they are not proper members of the *polis*.

I aim to provide a conceptual framework for understanding this relation between intelligence, stupidity and power. My contribution to the debate will be to provide a new account of the relation between intelligence and stupidity and develop on the political implications of this relation. In understanding the administrative logic of intelligence my aim is twofold. Demonstrate that what is portrayed as democratic is in fact to a large extent undemocratic. And, moreover, attempt to provide an account of what could be democratic exploring the way stupidity's disruptive power of intelligence is a form on democratic intervention.

Matthias Lorenz | Independent Scholar

Antisemitic representations of 'Jewish interests' in contemporary German right-wing populism

When in 2018 a rather small group of party members founded the platform „Jews in the AfD” (Juden in der AfD, JAfD) as an organizational platform within the German right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) many were left astonished. Why would Jews support a political party that agitates against Shoah commemoration, glorifies national socialist warfare and promotes antisemitic discourse? Just some months before the JAfD's foundation party leader Alexander Gauland referred to the period of national socialism as 'bird poop' ("Vogelschiss"), metaphorically speaking for 'nothing of particular concern'. Björn Höcke, regional party leader in east German Thuringia called for solidarity with Ursula Haverbeck, a convicted Shoah negationist, and called the Berlin holocaust memorial a 'monument of shame' (Denkmal der Schande).

The Central Council of Jews in Germany and a large majority of German Jewish organizations protested against the Jews in the AfD organization. They pointed towards to links of the AfD to neo-nazis and other far right militant groups consequently stating "the AfD does certainly not represent the interests of the Jewish community" (Die AfD vertritt keinesfalls die Interessen der jüdischen Gemeinschaft) (Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland 2018).

In their program the JAfD refers to rising German nationalism as a 'Jewish interest' (Bundesvereinigung Juden in der AfD 2018). This is astonishing in so far as the usage of the term 'Jewish interest' is often linked to antisemitic discourse – particularly in context of German nationalism. But it is not the only reference to German nationalist terminology, two more attract attention: 1) the JAfD refers to Jewry as 'Volksgemeinschaft' (ibid.) – a term uniquely signifying a völkisch, racist and unquestionably antisemitic conception of the German people in contemporary post-war German. 2) In relation to political antagonism the JAfD proclaims a shared enemy of Jewry and non-Jewish German nationalism: "the opponents of Jewry" are supposedly mainly the same as the 'inner opponents of Germanness/German Identity' ('innere Gegner des Deutschtums') (ibid.). Likewise, the term of 'inner opponent' (or 'inner enemy') is dominant in German antisemitic and national socialist discourse: relating to Jews as 'inner enemies' of the German Volksgemeinschaft.

In my paper I aim for an analytical reading of the term 'interest' in relation to conceptions of identity, identification and representation in the JAfD discourse. This analysis is grounded in a critical understanding of German antisemitic discourse. In a second step I will argue for an understanding of interest as a chain of equivalent demands in the Laclauian sense eventually aiming for the establishment of a 'people' as a contingent – and therefore potentially contradictory or obviously irrational – result of politics (Laclau 2005). Therefore, I will test Laclauian concepts in order to critically theorize a consequently antisemitic representation of Jewish identity as well as non-Jewish German identity. In this instance Laclauian theory of the establishment of 'people' in relations of equivalence/association and difference/antagonism does not relate to a potentially emancipatory political subjectivity but to its radical opposite

Zoran Lutovac | Institute of Social Sciences, Serbia

Pandemic and stabilocracy in Serbia

The political order called stabilocracy is in fact an autocratic order based on the undemocratic rule of a strong leader, an order of underdeveloped democratic institutions and a very limited rule of law, suppressed civil liberties, but supported by the EU and the US for "regional stability".

Although it is constituted as a state governed by the rule of law, in which there is a division of power into legislative, judicial and executive power, as a state in which civil rights and freedoms are supreme - in political practice there is no real division of power, the opposition is treated as an enemy is usurped state institutions and controlled private and state media. This was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic through the campaign on "care for the health of citizens" and through the election campaign held without basic conditions to be free and fair and at a time of health threats to citizens.

Enormous power is concentrated in the hands of an autocrat who controls state and public institutions. All of this, seemingly, can be an advantage in making quick and efficient decisions in crises like a pandemic. Democracies are often criticized for being slow and inefficient, for having complicated procedures, and for these weaknesses to be especially evident in crises.

However, the example of Serbia has shown that the opposite is true: all the weaknesses of autocracy in times of crisis are completely exposed, and the lack of democratic and liberal procedures and values directly affects the public interest. This especially refers to the fact that there is no institutional control of the executive and that the media are in the service of such an uncontrolled government, and not of the public

interest. In times of crisis, it is shown that democratic "complicated" procedures and "complex ways of decision-making" are obstacles to political abuse and a security mechanism for the protection of the public interest.

Michele Luz & Letícia Baron | Federal University of Pelota, Brasil

The role of nostalgia in the populist far right discourse

The proposed paper aims at discussing the relation between populism, identity, identification and affection. Defining populism as a mode of political identification that constructs and gives meaning to "the people" as a political actor, it critically adopts a discursive approach of populism, drawing from the works of Ernesto Laclau. It argues that political identities are complex and built in a relational, challenging, incomplete and binary way. In that sense, populist logic operates in order to change the boundaries of what is sayable, hence, giving birth to a new political order. This operation, when mobilized by reactionary discourses, often involves a nostalgic feeling about the "old days", bringing an idealized perception about a specific moment that belongs in the country's history. In that sense, the role of the "nostalgic voice" is to retrieve, from a mythical moment in the past, an unachievable feeling of completeness, which can be signified in social imagery by different symbols. In this terrain, a dichotomous perception of society that provides a sense of wholeness often aligns signifiers like religion, morality, tradition... meanings more commonly articulated by reactive discourses of the far-right. Based on the recent populists experiences, the research aims to analyse the relevance of this idealized historical appeal to generate reactionary political affection and identification.

Spiros Makris | University of Macedonia, Greece

The Spinozist metaphysics of multitude: A reflexive approach

The relationship between *democracy* and *populism* tends to be the prevailing element of late modernity. For some, populism must be seen as the crisis of democracy in the era of neo-liberal globalization. In other words, according to this position, the deregulation of modern capitalism brought to the fore the deregulation of democracy itself. This is the mainstream interpretation of this relationship that dominates upon the traditional fields of Political Science and International Relations.

Nevertheless, the profound condition and the metaphysical substance of this critical relationship between democracy and populism must be sought in the fertile field of contemporary social and political theory, especially in that disciplinary area where both democracy and populism are associated with the onto-theological characteristics of the *People* in the sense of *multitude*.

For the economy of the reasoning, I define this theoretical approach as a Spinozist one, coming from the related philosophical approach of Baruch Spinoza. For him, the multitude is regarded as an *abyssal* entity full of passions and emotions which its metaphysical inclination has not a specific ideological content. In other words, the multitude is perceived as an *empty signifier*, so to speak, that could lead politics either to *democracy* or *authoritarianism*. This is the basic lesson we have learned from Spinoza.

In the contemporary social and political democratic theory, from Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss and Cornelius Castoriadis to Claude Lefort, Étienne Balibar, Antonio Negri and Chantal Mouffe, to name just only few of them, democracy is not taken for granted. It is perceived as an *agonistic* mode of politics that is stigmatized of many self-catastrophic moments.

In this respect, in this paper, I try to reflect further on this Spinozist aspect of modern democracy bringing to the fore the metaphysical and even onto-theological facets of democratic multitude in the historical era of a *globalized populist tide*.

In fact, what is at stake here is the critical question of a self-devastating and chaotic democratic multitude. To put it another way, is it possible a democratic people commit a political suicide? Otherwise, can democracy be undermined by populism in the sense of a democratic regime that moves towards its *metaphysical limits*?

It is well-known that Castoriadis claims that democracy could be likened with a life next to the rim of an active volcano. It is exactly what Jürgen Habermas asserts concerning the dangerous role of so-called monetarist European elites in the making of the *European populism* since the capitalist crisis of 2008. He says that the whole thing looks like a leap towards a volcano.

From this point of view, it is absolutely critical to investigate further the metaphysical attributes of modern democracy by raising the crucial question whether populism is a bright or a dark face of democracy. These are some of the burning questions that this paper try to unfold by having as a reflexive starting point the philosophical thought of Baruch Spinoza and as a point of reference the contemporary social and political theory of democracy, multitude and populism.

Giacomo Marossi | University of Eastern Piedmont, Italy

Has populism been defeated by the COVID crisis? A definite "no"

After Trump defeat and with the retreat of populist parties in the polls, some journalists and pundits are wondering whether the populist momentum may have come to an end thanks to the COVID crisis. In my presentation I will try to show that this assumption is wrong and that, on the contrary, populism is in well shape and has nothing to fear from the COVID crisis. In fact, responsible measures, like the ones put forward by non populist governments in countries like Germany, Italy, Spain and France are, as I will show, populist policies.

To support this thesis I will use my definition of populism as the representation of the ordinary people. By that I mean a specific form of political representation characterised by five key elements: 1) Rule of the people. Populists rule in the name of the ordinary people; 2) Majoritarianism. Populist representatives represent the ordinary people and therefore the majority of a society against its minorities; 3) Manicheism. Populists represent society as symbolically divided between the positive pole of the ordinary people and an opposite negative pole made of one or more minorities that the people seems to fear or despise at a given moment; 4) Neutralism. Populism is neutral towards any particular characterisation of the people and adaptable to the situation; 5) Delegate representation. Populists represent the common people as their delegates in a direct and unmediated way. Thanks to this definition of populism we can appreciate why, in the context of COVID crisis, I argue that populism is not declining. On the contrary, at this very moment, it changed shape and should be associated with the kind of mainstream political positions characterised by the request of strict measures to protect the health of ordinary citizens. In fact, if populism is the representation of the ordinary people and if the ordinary people is scared by the COVID emergency, then populism should be seen as overlapping with the kind of responsible policies put forward by mainstream parties and not with the position, adopted by many traditionally populist parties (i.e., Donald Trump and Matteo Salvini), of going hand in hand with deniers.

Thanks to this position, paradoxically, populists find themselves side by side with the industrial and financial establishment opposing any kind of lockdown and not with the large majority of the ordinary people requesting protection and healthcare. This is true to the point that, in some cases, deniers are even seen as a feared minority by the people. So, to put it in a slogan, we may say that it is not populism that has been beaten by COVID, but more populist parties that got confused by the crisis and chose the wrong side of this particular fight.

Dario Mazzola | University of Bergen, Norway

The Essence of Populism: On trends in global politics

The rise and the nature of populism is becoming increasingly relevant to political scientists, political theorists, and citizens alike. By building on recent literature published by Nadia Urbinati and Michael J. Sandel, I will pursue the path of understanding the roots of populism rather than deploring it.

Populism is complex and composed and, as a global phenomenon, it has as many manifestations as contexts of appearance. From Russia to the US, from Italy to Latin America, populism reacts to the disempowerment of masses brought about by globalist neoliberal politics, to increasing elitism sustained by economic disparities, and to changes in the methods and forms politics take, and in the needs politics is asked to respond.

However, a common trait throughout all its different versions seems to revolve around the instauration, with varying degrees of fictitiousness rather than authenticity, of a renewed relationship between the populace and the governing power which bypasses elites. These latter are seen as responsible for stalemates in political reforms required by historical processes such as globalization, for hollowing out the democratic process through the crystallization of an establishment behind superficial and oftentimes symbolic party differences, and for pushing forward a liberal agenda that the electorate perceives as no longer or not fully responding to its exigencies.

Far from subverting these traits, the COVID pandemic seems on the way to exacerbate them. By drawing from the example of migration, I show how populism can present itself in right, left, or even centrist incarnations, but the aforementioned component remains almost invariably one of its defining features.

Fabio Mengali | University of Trento, Italy

Vox populi and the voice of capitalism: dominion and exploitation within right-wing neo-populism

At the root of this study is the thesis that in many Western countries right-wing neo-populism corresponds to the authoritative facet of neoliberalism. In a nutshell, by exacerbating already existing social hierarchies (along the axes of race, gender/sexual orientation, and class), neo-populism takes a step forward to drawing new boundaries of exploitation and dominion. As a result, this kind of populism withholds democracy, since it fosters social inequality and asymmetries.

Right-wing neo-populism is the manifestation of a new form of capitalistic accumulation intended to maximize labour exploitation by redefining the boundaries between the time of reproduction and that of production. Following Silvia Federici's theories, not only does "accumulation" underly the privatization of material resources, but also a process enclosing rights and freedoms in order to attain class division and obtain unpaid labour. The political construction of "the people", in fact, draws a line casting aside "the others/enemies"—subaltern subjects and minorities (women, non-white people, LGBTQIA+ people, etc.)—who undergo social misrecognition and personal attacks unleashed by populist-led governments and neo-populist forces. It follows an increase in reproductive labour on the part of these subjects, whose creation of value favourable for capitalism is neglected. First, in the context of the crisis of public welfare, right-wing neo-populism, by reinforcing "traditional roles", promotes women's and other subjects' dependence within the household. From a capitalist standpoint, this operation is consistent with the acquisition of free material labour needed for the (re)generation of the "productive" labour-force. Second, the condition of subaltern subjects is hardened by the re-articulation of such symbolic-psychological features as merit, guilt, and debt, which are essential for capitalism to induce workers to create surplus value. Individuals not complying with hegemonic identity (that is, white high-middle class heterosexual male) promoted by populism are liable to harden their work efforts. Minorities and subalterns have to strain more in order to deserve an equal treatment in the workplace, as they have yet to be assigned with as much merit as it is required by the norm conforming to the hegemonic identity. Accordingly, their sense of guilt/debt boosts them to a) intensify their work performances (production) and b) sharpen skills and competences in their free time, as well as their mental labour to endure inequality and discrimination (reproduction).

Neo-populism pushes certain kinds of labour into the reproduction domain and naturalizes them, a strategy aimed at hiding relations of power and exploitation. The capitalist system does not pay for the time and efforts spent for reproduction: they are free labour upon which the extraction of value is grounded. In this way, a deep class division occurs because of the differential distribution of surplus labour and power. As much as they are exploited as well, hegemonic subjects tend to regard inequalities as a way to regain their privilege and social mobility impaired by the progressive inclusion (far from being fully attained) of minorities and subalterns within the labour market and the public sphere.

Boris Mihacevic | University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Emotions, politics, and truth in light of covid-19

Spinoza stated that passions or emotions than reason more easily lead people. Of course, this is not something new; Aristotle explained in his *Rhetoric* the importance of attunements in public space. Passions cannot be regarded as anti-social; something subjective in the psychological sense. Far from it; they originally open up the world and being-with-others, as Heidegger declared. In this sense, the essence of politics and even philosophy is not primarily something rational or cognitive; from the history of philosophy, we know that the start and the end of philosophy rested on the power of wonder. On the other hand, at least how Spinoza understood, the art of politics rested on the manipulation of passions against themselves. From Spinoza's ontological principle of *conatus*, the art of politics was that of self-preservation; however, not in the sense of the accumulation of power but in endless striving for mutual harmony with citizens because they also possess *conatus*. The power of State is conditioned and limited by the power of *potentia multitudinis*. Since every individual have *conatus* that forms its essence, every individual as its own little monad reflects different objects from different points of view. Therefore, the same object can affect different passions to such an extent where it will create disharmony between citizens. In other words, the same and different causes affect different conceptions and perceptions within the multitude of citizens. For example, one individual will want to destroy what other regards as something good, etc. However, the opposite is also true; from *affectuum imitatio* principle, the emotion towards others is immediate. The misery of someone will affect me the same way. Things that we imagine other strives for will have the same worth for me, etc. Passions have an immediate reciprocal function. Even though the State is a rational entity, every rational theory based on the

development of State's origin is necessarily contradictory because, for Spinoza, we should not look for causes of State's formation in the products of reason but in the common nature of people. The reason can indeed control emotions; however, it can control it only as a part of a stronger emotion of joy. The rational or factual truth cannot have its revealing power solely by its existence. In this sense, the politics must take into consideration the whole spectre of the nature of the human being; its passions, motives, drives, etc. With wise and prudent policies, it must harvest mutual recognition between citizens and the State because citizens cannot renounce their *conatus*. Thus as Hannah Arendt somewhere stated, the art of propaganda is not so much in imposing certain fixed ideas into the multitude but in extracting it from people and reshaping it according to *conatus* of policies. Even if for Spinoza, there is no space for morality in his political philosophy, the politics must and will seek to address those policies, which will not attack the citizen's sense of dignity and values. In other words, politics must promulgate the emotion of hope instead of fear; it must promote rational perceptions instead of suspicion and wild imagination. However, in light of COVID19 situation, can we only sense fear and imagination running wild? Or maybe cynicism? How can we understand the cynical or conspiratory attitude toward Covid 19? Are people more convinced by imagination than factual truth? If so, what are historical and ontological causes for this? And finally, if the same object affects different emotions and views, is nominal agreement about COVID 19 possible or not? That being said, my paper will try to address these questions.

Igor Milić & Luka Nikolić | University of Trento, Italy

Together Alone: Populism and its Misdemeanors

Before it even begins, we must note that populism is not a novel feature of socio-political dynamics. It is indispensable to note that the history of Europe has been full of ideas with more or less similar manifest appearances. Some of them are nationalism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia (Derrida, 1994:100). Therefore, populism is not disruptive to the reality, its callidity stems from a somewhat more sophisticated and camouflaged hegemonistic tendencies when compared with predecessors.

Through the lenses of poststructuralist theory, this paper aims to answer the question: what are the blind lays that enabled populism to be perceived as rational by employing a set of irrational practices? This research has twofold relevance. First, it covers a scantily treated academic debate on the underlying logic of populism which stands behind the explicit acts. Second, by debunking its functionality, the road is being paved for different pragmatic applications in order to stop the proliferation of populist myths. Our quest starts with Karl Schmitt and his work "The Concept of the Political" where the common enemy is defined as public (1932: 42-55). Since populism is based on homogenization of certain socio-political actors against a public enemy which can be as big as the whole world, we claim that populism cannot exist without the confirmation of the Other. This divine relational ontology enables us to pinpoint the three main blind lays of populism.

In order to elaborate upon populism, we first need to aporetically counterpose the People and the people, or quite appropriately Dasein and Das Man (Heidegger, 1962). Namely, populism, at least nominally, speaks at once to the People and is not on speaking terms with the so-called establishment. Yet, by means of this exclusion, the promise of populism becomes unattainable. In an intriguing interpretation of Plato, Rancière explains this through the concept of demos, bluntly definable as the populace qua a political unit: "[...] the demos, or people, is at the same time the name of a community and the name for its division" (1992: 64). While addressing us all from an apparently neutral position, populism can thus easily be proved to crumble in front of its own implementation: as soon as it dares to keep its promise, to speak to the People, it shaves off one its fragment and materialises as both a multitude and its excess; as the new plebs versus its rogues; as at once a demagogy and democracy; as *populus* versus *demos* (Derrida, 2003). The primordial legislator is thus inherently divided.

Second, populism amounts to an incomplete revolution pertinent to both the (radical) Left and the (radical) Right. Whereas subversion has originally been pertinent to the left side of the ideological scale, populism is the agent which has made the two overlap. Political elites know how to use both notions. Regardless of their position, populists exploit the Latin proverb *divide et impera* in their very calls for unity and turn individuals into the abstract and ultimately legiferating population. In this way, populism and population form a vicious circle of influence which is ultimately characterized by at least some form of hegemony and domination. As a revolution which devours its own children, populism yields to the very forces it opposes.

Finally, populism is not only phantomatic and recurrent, but one must also address the populist upheaval of Kantian ideals of international community and perpetual peace. Namely, however embedded in vernacularity, populism quite counterintuitively aims at ubiquitous, vehicular and global character (Müller, 2016: 49). Hence, here as well, populism ends up reproducing its very enemy, subtly upheld and recognised

as valid: this adversary is barely visible, prone to sudden appearances and populism threatens it not that much with the demolition of its global agenda, but rather with its supplantation. Taken together, the transnational population of and for populists longs for its own oecumene. Precisely this is the ultimate message of Eduardo Bolsonaro's tweet for Matteo Salvini over the relatively recent Cesare Battisti's arrest: "A present is on its way".

Ben Jack Nash | Independent Artist

Just what is the matter?

The proposed paper approaches the subjects in question from the less typical perspective of a practising artist using a model developed in the studio rather than the library. It argues how an understanding of concepts such as political ideologies can be understood in a similar way to how I understand physical matter through my lens as a contemporary sculptor. It will explore how culture, values and beliefs are closely comparable to the behaviour of material, space and movement.

I will argue how the expansionist nature of neo-liberalism - greater mobility of people and trade, enlarged definitions of social acceptance, transparency etc are typical characteristics of an abstract entity. Populism on the other hand rallies in the opposite direction. It is identified with characteristics which convey an idea of limits, confinement and clearly defined roles. It favours more traditional, nativist and protectionist policies. It seeks the leadership of 'real' people over the more removed elite. These more inward looking traits typically represent a more material and tangible entity.

A similar matter based approach will be taken with regards to the recent pandemic. Covid-19, like any virus, is quintessentially abstract matter. An important part of an abstract identity is the ability to move freely filling up space. This is best achieved below the radar, under an ephemeral and intangible shroud. Other large abstract forces such as the digital dimension, the stock exchange or ideas show how these less perceptible characteristics provide the toolkit to effect profound change upon our existence as is currently evident. Taming the virus has effectively meant taming an abstraction by deploying its counterpart - materiality. A more material version of space is no longer open and accessible but embodies containment, limits and lockdown.

The paper will consider how when it concerns their own country, authoritarian populist leaders are quick to close in on themselves to limit a perceived abstract threat. But when it came to shutting down the virus, the likes of Johnson, Trump and Bolsonaro were decisively slow.

The talk will conclude with illustrating how the world has been witnessing a move more generally towards a more abstract state at breakneck speed in terms of technology, climate change and communication and that the shifts from neo-liberalism to populism are part of this more general trend.

Michał Nawrocki | University of Warsaw, Poland

Populism as a process of (re)constructing community: two dialectics of populism

In my paper I would like to propose a theoretical framework for understanding populism, that combines both its socio-political and socio-cognitive dimensions. The key element of populism, frequently described by numerous scholars, such as Jan-Werner Müller, Cass Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser or Jan Zielonka, is the process of categorisation and exclusion, that aims to establish and extract the 'real', 'pure' people as opposed to corrupt elites or foreign migrants. This process, as I would like to argue, has two distinct dimensions which can be described as two dialectics.

The first one is the dialectic of establishing the community. This dialectic binds together two processes described by Roberto Esposito as communisation and immunisation. The former pertains to a universal commitment, an obligation to do each other favours (the word originates from the Latin *munus* which means a gift), which transcends the individual and establishes social reciprocity, while the latter describes the process of establishing an individual by rejecting this universal commitment. These two processes are inherently intertwined and, in the case of populism, they exemplify how a community can be created by an act of exclusion. By destroying the wider community, which bonded the 'real' people with corrupt elites or alien refugees, migrants or minorities, populists can create a new community, establish its boundaries and redefine its identity.

The second dialectic of populism, which I would define as a dialectic of selecting experiences, combines both the articulation and marginalisation of experiences in such a way that those hitherto excluded are expressed in public debate but only in a form that fits the vision of a community proposed by the populists. Populism, described by Jacques Rancière as a resistance against the technocratic and

undemocratic liberal elites, raises numerous vital issues that were thus far overlooked and re-establishes the needs and problems of 'the people' as the central element of the political dispute. At the same time the issues in question are not selected equally or 'democratically' – they are a product of a complex game in which people adjust and adapt their own experiences to better suit the vision of community held by the populist leaders. This mechanism is often largely unconscious and is driven by basic cognitive mechanisms of human mind, as observed by a leading Polish populism scholar Maciej Gdula.

Populism is often defined as a 'thin ideology' that may 'thicken' and thus combine with different ideologies, be them rightist, nativist or other. That is why populism as a concept continues to be so elusive and ill-defined. The two above-mentioned dialectics offer a detailed and nuanced description of populism and help to understand the sources of its recent success. The key element of this 'dialectical populism' is that it transforms and re-establishes 'the people', both as a political concept and a specific group of people. In this sense populism has both a political and biopolitical dimensions. The populist reconstruction of the community is possible through the creation of a discursive space stretched between the inclusion and the exclusion and between the common and the individual. It is the discursive game of labelling and negotiating meanings and selecting and adapting experiences that gives populism its potency. An important weakness of many theories of populism is the view that the populists and their supporters share a predominantly one-way relationship. The presented dialectics of populism illustrate that the key element of populists success is the fluctuating agency that characterises both the populist leaders who promote a certain image of community and their supporters who, by adapting and enriching this image with their own experiences, solidify themselves as a political entity and gain their own agency.

Malena Nijensohn | Independent Scholar

For a populist feminism. Potentialities and limitations of populist articulations for a feminist resistance to neoliberal technologies of government

In recent years we have attended a phenomenon of massification –alongside with neoliberalisation– of feminism. Whereas feminist struggles and statements gained visibility in popular culture (mass media as well as social and digital media, advertising, marketing, to name a few), visibility is always produced by a frame that organises what is to be seen, so we can legitimately ask: How does feminism have to be framed to become intelligible in neoliberal times? If, following W. Brown, we understand neoliberalism as a governmental reason, where all *political* meaning is reduced to *economic* metrics, we can see the emergence and rise of a neoliberal feminism that, instead of challenging hegemonic power relations, re/produces them in the name of resistance. The new political subject of the self-empowered woman, *i.e.* an entrepreneur of herself that overcome the obstacles of power relations individually, is a case in point.

At the same time, there are feminist movements struggling against neoliberal capitalist hegemony, when they critically examine not only sexism and patriarchy, but also cissexism, heteronormativity, racism, classism, ableism, fatphobia, and so on, for not only they expose the power relations that distribute precarity differentially, producing the inclusion of privileged subjects and the exclusion of marginalised ones, but they also articulate feminist demands with other social and political demands, that they only have in common the same enemy, namely: neoliberalism.

How can feminist movements develop a counter-hegemony to neoliberalism in a context of pervasive and ubiquitous capitalist neoliberal hegemony? In this paper, I intent to examine the contributions that *On Populist Reason* (E. Laclau) can provide to the feminist debates and to the struggles for the construction of an anti-neoliberal meaning of such movement. In order to do so, I will first develop a critical perspective on what I understand by neoliberal feminism and I will then analyse the possibilities of a populist feminism.

João Nunes de Almeida | Independent Scholar

The Digital Blind Spot of Populist Formations: Towards a Critique of Nihilist Conceptions of Technology

The conception of technology as a mere *means to an end* process has been primarily questioned by Heidegger's take on modern technology. In 1953, Heidegger unveiled the underlying nihilism of modern technology as a mere quantification of humans as "standing-reserves". According to this view, the world we now live in consists in a social totality of human stocks ready to be exploited by humans themselves. Contemporary digital technologies, for instance, remain within such nihilist conception of modern technology from which human bodies lose their autonomy before the capitalist regime of accumulation. In this sense, the discursive formation of peoples cannot be separated from the renewed eschatology of digital technologies

that thrives on non-autonomous humans as stocks to be depleted. Thus, the critique of progressive or reactionary populist discourses will remain inadequate if the very performativity of peoples is seen as distinct from the underlying conception of contemporary digital technologies. This paper will aim at a critique of recent democratic populist strategies that heavily relied on the above conception of modern technology without aiming at alternative ways of conceiving technology.

Emilia Palonen | University of Helsinki, Finland

Theorizing Hegemony, Populism and Polarisation for the Era of Hybrid Media

Hybrid media systems era and the mainstreaming of affective politics globally is central for contemporary political theorizing. It is tied to the emergence of populism, polarisation of societies through new political divisions rather than interests. This paper draws from the existing critical theorists that contributed to related conjunctures: Walter Benjamin who was discussing mechanical reproduction, arcades, and the layered momentary flashing past, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe whose work was influential in addressing new social movements and theorizing hegemony. The post-Gramscian reading of hegemony here implies mobilisation and establishment of new constellations of meaning that in turn can need to be maintained and questioned. It has been highly influential in the alt-right sphere where social media, new forms of reproduction, and ideological state apparatuses, to follow Althusser, meet. Post-Marxists theory is mobilising more on the right than the left, but it is also necessary to consider the need to speak in terms of hegemony and political meaning making cross the political spectrum, beyond essentialist readings. The paper proposes makes several theoretical contributions: (a) it reveals how the re-emergence of alternative hegemonic projects and emergence of populism has not only brought politics back to politics but questions how we conceptualise democracy as “demography” of socio-economic distinctions; furthermore (b) it operationalises the Laclaudian concept of populism into a truly anti-essentialist analytical formula through which the us-them/what-to-be-opposed and affectivity can be disentangled; (c) it unveils the logic of political polarisation as bipolar hegemony where two sides co-constitute each other generating consensus inside; (d) discusses how populism is indeed momentary rather than constant dwelling on its emotional appeal is related to the critical flaneur, Now-Time as temporal and spatial experience; finally (e) it connects the theorists with the immediacy and hype of hybrid media systems era. In sum, it develops on the dimensions of performativity and hegemony that emphasises political meaning making. This set of theoretical interventions, quickly introduced, enables same theoretical devices to be explored across the globe rather than to be tied to the parochial contexts of people-vs.-elites or particular traditional party systems, or the mechanical reproduction over the digital era.

John Park | California State University, USA

Meritocratic Democracy Over Democracy & Epistocracy for Minority Rights

I contend that a hybrid meritocratic democracy is better than democracy and epistocracy for minority rights. I propose a new development in democratic thought in that a democracy fused with a meritocracy is better than other forms of democracy for minority rights.

Jason Brennan argues against democracy in significant part by relying on political science studies demonstrating that the public largely is politically ignorant and has various cognitive biases that make democracy unreliable. In response, Brennan posits an epistocracy, which is rule of the knowledgeable. Political power is distributed according to competence, where for example, those who have greater political knowledge can have votes that carry greater weight.

As the data shows that socially advantaged groups in the U.S., like wealthy Caucasians, generally have more political knowledge than minority groups, Brennan anticipates the objection that for an epistocratic democracy, advantaged groups will have more voting power over others. Thus, we will have unfair policies favoring the advantaged. Brennan responds by writing that experiments show that minority groups are unlikely to know how to promote their own interests and that advantaged groups mostly vote for their perceived national good, which benefits minorities.

I object to Brennan because new studies show that high information voters actually don't agree on a variety of issues. Rather, they vote based on their tribal affiliations. Democracies are not about individuals having the power to vote and put forth their own policy preferences. Rather, democracies are really about political parties and identity groups along with their group agendas. Given that high information voters succumb to tribalism, we can't rely on them to always pick good candidates.

I advocate a specified version of a meritocracy, or rule by the merited, that's hybridized with democracy as it can better handle the empirical data against a democracy. Moreover, unlike an epistocracy, this meritocratic democracy can better account for minority rights. A meritocracy screens for merit in candidates while an epistocracy screens for knowledge in voters. With my hybrid, in order to run for office at the national level, there will be education, non-ideological-based testing, and experience requirements in local government. For instance, a candidate must show that they had low hate crime numbers when holding office at the local level. Those many who pass the requirements then must be elected by democratic vote.

I contend that my hybrid does better than other democratic-based theories in that, although not foolproof, it's more likely to have virtuous officials than democracy in light of the social science data since only those who have demonstrated sufficient merit can run for office. It also is able to address minority rights better than an epistocratic democracy in that elected officials will have provided good reason to believe they're meritorious regarding minority rights.

Daniel Petz | Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

The dark side of nonviolent action? Inquiry into the increased use of nonviolent action by the political (far) right

While nonviolent action has largely been seen and employed as a tool of the political left, minorities, underdogs and groups out of power, in recent year there has been a shift in the use of nonviolence by actors on the political right and particularly by actors on the political far right, who have at least in some countries been much more engaged in nonviolent action on a range of issues from anti-immigration, anti-abortion, anti-gun control, anti-mask during the Covid 19 pandemic etc. Several recent cases highlight those actors' creativity in applying a range of nonviolent methods and repertoire that was not frequently used before.

This paper investigates this shift. It starts by looking into the legality and legitimacy of the use of nonviolent action in democratic systems as a form of political participation, repertoire of contention and means to wage conflicts nonviolently. Then, building upon theories of nonviolent action, it attempts to identify qualitative differences between the use of nonviolence by actors on the political left and political right. In this process, it will look at a number of examples, which on the political right are the 2/12 movement in Indonesia, the Identity movement in Austria and recent right-wing protests in the United States during both the Obama and Trump administrations. It will also engage with counterexamples of the use of nonviolent action on the political left such as the climate movement, Black Lives Matter protests in the United States and the anti-globalization movement. It further aims to analyze if this shift in the use of nonviolent action by the political right can be understood as connected to the current phenomenon of right-wing populism and the global trend towards deconsolidation of democracy.

Airlangga Pribadi Kusman | Airlangga University, Indonesia

The Dynamic of Islamic Populist Activism in Indonesia: From Islamism to Reactionary Politics

This article focuses on the hegemonic ties between dominant predatory social forces and Islamic populist groups in post-authoritarian era of Indonesia. It explains during the first five years of Jokowi administration, even though the Islamist political party could not claim domination in State's power, somehow it can't be identified as the failure of Islamism politics in Indonesia's post-authoritarianism. The Islamic populism groups in Indonesia are still exists and even some of them are strengthening their power in social arenas by articulating reactionary dominant power of ideology as well as their own aspiration through the conservative populist rhetoric in electoral moments. This phenomenon explains why, in many political events, such as the last 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial Election, and political race towards Presidential election 2019, the Islamic conservative ideas can influence the rhetoric campaign of dominant politico-business alliances by dictating populist rhetoric. These have adopted the social intolerance various Islamic symbolism of conservative Islam to make inroads into its constituencies. By elaborating the relationship of Islamism group with dominant social power which occupied the political arenas in Indonesia's post-authoritarian eras, this article tries to explain the historical accommodation between such dominant forces and Islamic groups during the late authoritarian era, the interaction between neoliberal globalization circumstance, the progress of digital communication and embedded structural power in Indonesian post-authoritarian and its implication in order to strengthen grievances among Muslim communities, and the resource mobilization within Islamic movement network.

Mark Reiff | University of California, Davis, USA
The Unbearable Resilience of Illiberalism

The rise of Donald Trump and Trumpism, and the rise of similar forms of illiberalism throughout what was thought to be the irrevocably liberal-democratic world, suggests that racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, religious hatred, tribalism, a rejection of the rule of law and reason, and an attraction to authoritarianism is endemic in the human psyche, and therefore in human culture. The purpose of this book is to explain how complacency and a misunderstanding of the precepts of liberalism have allowed its antithesis to rise once again. Drawing on the work of a great many illiberal thinkers from both the right and the left, many of whom are little known within liberal circles, I construct an unconventionally thick description of how the fundamental presuppositions of liberalism and illiberalism differ, a description that enables us to see that the liberal-illiberal axis is as important and multi-faceted as the traditional left-right axis along which political theorists, politicians, and political parties are typically evaluated. I shall then discuss how the battle between liberalism and illiberalism might be joined, and more importantly, what counts as an argument in this battle and what does not. For one cannot use an argument based on a fundamental presupposition which the other side rejects without begging the question of which set of fundamental presuppositions are correct, something that explains why liberals and their opponents so often find themselves unable to make sense of one another. I shall then offer some suggestions about how liberals can more effectively respond to the rise of illiberalism in their own communities and in others, and explain how we can better organize and prioritize our efforts to keep the ever-present attraction of illiberalism at bay. I end with an explanation of why things are likely to get worse before they get better, and specifically discuss whether and if so how the public health and economic ramifications of the coronavirus pandemic will affect the struggle between liberalism and illiberalism.

Gustavo Robles | National University of La Plata, Argentina
Authoritarianism and the sovereign subject

The aim of this paper is to carry out a critique of the political anthropology of certain liberal democracy theories in order to shed light on the new authoritarianism. In short, we can say that according to these theories the establishment of a democratic order is based on a public sphere in which sovereign individuals and autonomous subjects can express their authentic opinions and interests. My hypothesis is that this anthropological assumption of a "sovereign subject" is inadequate to understand the new social authoritarianism. To show that I will resort to the studies on authoritarian subjectivity carried out by the first generation of the Frankfurt School, as well as some recent research works on social authoritarianism. This will allow me to discuss two important points: 1) the problem of political and social authoritarianism must be inquired not only in the dimension of the public opinion or in its institutional and political aspects, but also at the level of the subjectivities. 2) This implies taking into account the problem of the ideological constitution of our identities and the political dimension of the emotions. Thus, I want to show that many democracy theories are unable to understand the social authoritarianism since they do not consider these dimensions in their political anthropology.

Gianluca Ronca | Collegio Ghislieri, Pavia, Italy
Solidarity and responsibility at the Covid-19 time. A Sartrean suggestion to political emancipation

In this paper, I set myself the objective of justifying an interpretation of mutualistic solidarity of an emancipatory mold by basing it on a relational phenomenology of Sartrean origin. Criticizing the contemporary essentialist and biologic approach to the human subject, I wish to deepen the category of help and the function of the call of solidarity in a context of contemporary political crisis.

The paper will be divided into three moments:

- first, I expose the Sartrean intuitions of the "relational ontology" contained in the "Cahiers pour une morale". "Aide" and "generosité" appear to be linked to the condition of going beyond exploitation and alienation which distinguish human relationships from the present. For our speech, the figures cited by Sartre allow us to suggest the minimum conditions for collective emancipation;

- second, I highlight the incompleteness of such an ontological interpretation of Sartre's work, preferring, with founded arguments, a critical phenomenology of responsibility functional to the evaluations of contemporary mutualism practices put into question by the Covid-19 emergency. The Other, in these pages

of the Cahiers, is found to be the source of true "social values" which have to do with the project of the liberation of the Ego. Responsibility and generosity are the subjective values that herald the realm of personal freedom. By the two moments, now considered together, of conversion and the appeal to others for the success of any true moral project.

- in the third part, I review study some proposals present in today's Italian mutualistic debate on the justification of a quarantine income. From a sort of manifesto, we can read: "claiming a *quarantine basic income* means taking note of the situation and putting forward a simple concept: It is also essential that we imagine and demand universal countermeasures to fragmentation: we demand *quarantine basic income* and immediate *welfare* for everyone. Could we imagine these as a form of Sartrean freedom-in-situation?"

Sergio Schargel | UFF, Brasil

A Brazil of three Brazils: Is Bolsonaroism a form of populism or fascism?

The worldwide process of democratic recession, now in its fourteenth consecutive year according to the *Freedom House*, has revived the discussion on which term to use to name the anti-democratic movements that are spreading all over the planet. The planet reacted with surprise when Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a self-declared anti-democrat, was elected in the 2018 Brazilian elections. Bolsonaro, despite having been a deputy for over 30 years, sold himself as an outsider, with the traditional populist discourse to fight the elites, spreading manichaeian polarization and aiming to return to an imaginary past. Much has been discussed about authoritarianism, totalitarianism, reactionaryism, populism, fascism, among other concepts. In the specific case of fascism, there is a disagreement about the possibility of expanding and moving the concept beyond its emergence in Italy in 1920. If possible, this inevitably ends up expanding it and considering that, in a different space-time, fascism will acquire new characteristics, although it retains points that allow it to continue to be understood as such. Thus, this article will deal with the opposition between the concepts of populism and fascism in the light of Bolsonaroism, as well as its relationship with other Brazilian authoritarian movements of the past, such as the Integralism and the Military Dictatorship, aiming for a study of applicability of political theory. Oppositions and similarities between the contemporary application of both objects will be worked on, taking specific characteristics as points of intersection. This will make it possible to expand the state of the art regarding the conceptual discussion of fascism and populism and to understand which concept has the best applicability for the specific case of Bolsonaroism.

Himadri Sekhar Mistri | Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

Political Identity and Creating 'Other': Understanding the Rise of Hindutva Populist Movements in Contemporary India

The structuralist view of populism is largely based on class. Regardless of populism's different types of manifestations in different historical and geographical contexts; exclusion, oppression or exploitation are mostly seen as root causes of it by structuralists' and thus they argue populism creates a political subject out of particular class while creating a common political identity and common political consciousness. While examining the different 'meanings' of populism, the paper critically analyzes the structuralist view of it and from post-structuralist perspective argues political identity formation is not solely class based phenomenon; but it is individuals identifying themselves part of 'the people' engaged in political discourse and to do that the paper explores the rise of Hindutva populist movements in India. Hindutva as an ideology is hierarchical and advocates caste based practices; which is discriminatory towards 'lower castes'. But Hindutva movements in India are seen highly successful in bringing lower castes in their movements; while not compromising with core ideas like caste. The paper argues, articulation of political identity transcends boundary of class and caste and relies on creation of non-Hindu 'other' through rhetoric of 'Hindu unity' against non-Hindus. The paper analyzes different texts and literatures of Hindutva organizations leading different movements like 'Cow Protection', 'Love Jihad' and 'Ram Janmabhumi' and shows how political identity formation and 'othering' are the central points of Hindutva populism in contemporary India. The paper finally analyzes the orientation of the populist movements in India and argues that their direction is towards majoritarian (Hindu) cultural nationalism.

References to Carl Schmitt are widespread in theoretical accounts of populism. Liberals such as Nadia Urbinati and Jan-Werner Müller maintain that Schmitt's theories and his illiberal interpretation of democracy in particular have paved the way for populists, who, in turn, are making use of his ideas. Populism, they claim, is thus applied Schmitt. At the same time, the left's most influential populist theorist, Chantal Mouffe, underpins her theory with an adapted Schmittianism. The paper questions both uses of Schmitt and proposes a different interpretation of populism.

I argue that Mouffe's move of accommodating Schmitt and his critique of liberalism comes at the price of giving left populism a bad name. However, the liberal equation of populism with Schmittianism is equally problematic. In order to de-legitimize populism, liberal theorists obscure the tension between populism and Schmitt's political thought. Observations of "Schmittian moments" in populist politics rely on superficial analogies and the application of decontextualized 'tidbits' of Schmittian theory to contemporary populism. In sum, both interpretations are based on a selective and anachronistic reading. This renders Neo-Schmittian readings of Schmitt as neither helpful for understanding populism nor instructive for leftist democratic theory.

Contemporary right-wing populism in Western Europe and the US is successful because it promises to protect those who consider themselves (prospective) losers of post-democratic modernization, and not because it follows the Schmittian playbook. It is a retrograde and reactive, protest-affine ideology of old-time democracy. The right-wing populist's politics of retro-democracy are linked to the etatist container-model of the state, but their socio-psychological breeding ground is not Schmittian authoritarianism. Right-wing retro-populists increasingly mobilize supporters from heterogeneous class backgrounds by promising to restore the economic, cultural, and political constellation of Fordist "democratic capitalism" (which Schmitt despised). In particular Schmitt's notion of "state of exception" as well as his version of political existentialism ('decisionism') and his post-etatist "concrete order thinking" are incompatible with these retrograde leanings.

How should the left confront the politics of retro-democracy? It should listen to Richard Rorty's advice to tune down the politics of group difference and start to focus on issues of money and promote majoritarian interests. A populist style of politics as well as an anti-elitist stance against bosses and oligarchs are helpful in this regard, neo-Schmittian claims on the nature of 'the political' are not.

Svetlusa Surova | Gnarum/BARI-Global Network, Slovakia

COVID-19 measurements and their consequences for democracy and individual rights in Slovakia

This paper examines the impact of COVID-19 measurements on democratic political system, citizens and human rights in Slovakia. Study focuses on the policy responses and their consequences for democracy, rule of law and individual rights. This topic is approached from the political science perspective. The study applies a new institutionalism approach and qualitative research design. This includes a case study, interviews, text- and document-based techniques.

Study analyses adopted measurements in Slovakia to fight COVID-19 from the constitutional and institutional perspective. As many other countries, Slovakia has closed borders, schools and universities, public places except unessential ones such as groceries, food shops and pharmacies. Individual freedom of movement and assembly were limited during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study shows that biggest challenges for the democratic political system, rule of the law and individual rights were concerning: 1) the bodies which were suggesting and bringing adaptation (some of them didn't even have any grounding in law); 2) procedures of their adaptation (many of them were adopted in short legislative procedure or in a very untransparent way; or not publicly published; 3) content of the adopted measurements (law on tracking individual mobility during COVID-19 was suspended by the Constitutional law).

Beside this, members of Roma minority were facing discriminatory approach even in the times of COVID-19 pandemic. Fifth Roma settlements were put into quarantine due to few positive cases with coronavirus, secured by police and soldiers. Force teams were also assisting testing in Roma settlements. Quarantine, police, armed forces, drones and other military equipment show unequal and discriminatory approach to Roma. None of these measurements was applied to other groups or majority citizens.

This study argues that COVID-19 pandemic was used to legitimize various governmental policies which were significantly limiting individual rights and challenging democracy and rule of law. In many cases adopted measurements were undemocratic, discriminatory towards minority citizens and even illegal.

Dan Swain | Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic
Marxism and the Democratisation of Authority

In a rare moment of visionary speculation, the American Marxist Hal Draper suggests that "the dying away of the state can be viewed as one stage of the dying away of authority per se." This thought is even more striking, because it appears at the end of a sustained criticism of anarchist politics, in which Draper insists on the necessity of disambiguating and demystifying the concept of authority. Against the anarchist, Draper insists on the necessity of two forms of authority: A democratic authority 'from below', and a 'despotic' authority imposed on human productive activity by nature. However, he also holds out the possibility that the latter form of authority might itself be democratised, restricted to its relevant sphere, and ultimately caused to die away, in parallel with (but on a longer timescale than) the coercive state. Perhaps indicative of Marxism's general lack of attention towards the concept, Draper's attitude towards authority thus seems deeply ambivalent, defending it as necessary while still anticipating its disappearance as possible and desirable.

This paper will suggest that despite, or even because of, this ambivalence, Draper's remarks provide a valuable starting point for a Marxist approach to political authority, and perhaps even 'authority per se'. As well as opening Marxism up to dialogue with other political traditions for which authority has been a major concern, Draper's account touches on issues that are of urgent contemporary relevance: First, in a world that is increasingly characterised as involving a conflict between the technocratic and popular (or populist) authority, Draper encourages us to reflect on the way that both political and technical authority are bound up with the needs of material production and reproduction, and thus with social classes. Moreover, he also raises the possibility of a reconciliation between the two, in which technical authority no longer appears in the form of technocratic commands that restrict democracy, but as part of democratic self-determination. Second, when environmental catastrophe and pandemics demand pose the question of how to achieve mass collective action in line with scientific recommendations, he points towards the possibility of instituting political authority that is distinct from the state, operates 'from below', and is somehow 'in disappearance'. Whether or not we can, or should, join Draper in anticipating authority's dying away, these are possibilities worth reflecting on and holding on to.

Lasse Thomassen | University of Copenhagen, Denmark
The "populist" constitution of liberal democracy

This paper analyzes Jan-Werner Müller's and Chantal Mouffe's influential positions on populism as a strategy for the Left in order to clarify what is at stake in current debates about populism and, thus, to identify the political challenges more clearly. Müller and Mouffe both start from different versions of post-foundationalism, but understand post-foundationalism differently, and this has implications for how they understand democracy, populism and the legitimacy of the constitutional order. The different understandings of post-foundationalism also have implications for the question of how to guarantee pluralism, which is so central to debates about populism today. Pushing Müller's post-foundationalism to its logical conclusions, I show how he cannot uphold the distinction he makes between democracy and populism. Mouffe goes further in her post-foundationalism, but she too tries to control the effects of the post-foundationalist starting point in ways that are ultimately untenable.

Callum Tindall | University of Nottingham, UK
Populist Political Volatility: The Brexit Party as a Disruptor of British Political Stability

This research investigates the breakthrough success and subsequent decline of the under researched Brexit Party as influential disruptors within contemporary British politics. It begins by outlining polarised British public perception of Brexit Party, from its initial unlikely European Election victory to subsequent General Election decline. During this period, unparalleled British political volatility occurred. In an unprecedented turn of events, four different parties (including Brexit Party) led 2019 General Election opinion polls. The key question this research consequently considers is how did Brexit Party influence this British political volatility? This is tested using shaping and accommodating theory to explain the party's extreme political volatility (rising sharply in the summer before quickly declining before the General Election) through constructivist discourse analysis.

During its initial political success, Brexit Party used catch-all populism alongside a simple unification of public demands for a “clean-break Brexit”. Antagonistic populist binaries helped entrench their support such as “democracy or betrayal?”. This accommodated a democratic mandate for Brexit, whilst filling the political void left by fragmented Conservative and UKIP parties. Harnessing public demand for a Brexit resolution and distrust in Parliament’s failure to deliver, Brexit Party were key disruptors enforcing government change. This includes the end of Theresa May’s time as Prime Minister and the replacement of pro-Brexit Boris Johnson.

However, Brexit Party success was not prolonged into the following General Election; as leader Nigel Farage’s decision to stand down in Conservative held seats saw receding support. This limited Brexit Party’s anti-establishment strengths as they struggled to entice voters with their proposed “political revolution”. Supporting the incumbent Government heightened their legitimacy crisis as a minor party, which often perform badly in the UK’s first-past-the-post General Elections. Followingly, their predicted parliamentary seats went from highs of 150 to 0. Furthermore, as a single-issue movement, the party’s attempt to shape policies were limited and ineffectual on a national scale. Attempting to shape policy with proposals for free WiFi on public transport and scrapping HS2 were low priority for voters.

The findings suggest that Brexit Party have been more successful when representing and accommodating public opinion to exploit political opportunity, rather than seeking to shape discourse. With Brexit Party reforming to “Reform UK” to capitalise on a political vacuum for an anti-lockdown party, political opportunism appears ongoing. Seeking to influence politics as parliamentary outsiders, breaking British political tradition, and increasing direct democracy remains a core focus. This study sets a precedent for understanding how outsider populist parties can enter the political mainstream by focusing on accommodating public demand for change, despite the hegemony of established parties.

Guilel Treiber | KU Leuven, Belgium

Mass-Society, Social Media and the Return of the Crow

The 2016 election of Donald Trump and the results of the Brexit referendum led to vocal expressions of discontent with popular democracy. In a controversial contribution, democratic theorist Jason Brennan argued that there was staggering evidence against the continuation of popular political participation. In Brennan’s view, democratic participation not only “fails to educate or ennoble,” it tends to “stultify and corrupt.” Brennan’s critique does not yet represent a widely shared position. Another, more common reaction, identifies the threat as a tension between the popular and the liberal aspects of liberal democracy. Populists, it claims, tap into a strong, widespread resentment against liberal elites; by doing so, they undermine the delicate equilibrium achieved through decades of political struggles between democratic popular sovereignty and liberal protection of individual rights.

I argue that both paths lead in the wrong direction. Neither an outright rejection of democracy nor a frenetic account of the demise of its liberal aspects should replace a careful analysis of the element at the heart of this debate: the masses. We are undergoing a technological revolution, inhabiting a world of social media often blamed for the recent malaises of democracy. However, social media’s production of a new form of crowd politics has been overlooked. My project remedies this blind spot, showing how an analysis of the crowd in the age of social media casts light on these conditions. It develops a new philosophical perspective, enriched by historical analysis and informed by the most recent empirical research in political science and social psychology. It charts the emergence of a new kind of crowd, analysing how it influences opinions, participates actively in online debates that easily turn acrid and violent, and profoundly shapes how we do politics, with far-reaching consequences for our lives in society and for the future of our planet.

Wojciech Ufel | SWPS University, Poland

Pseudo-Populisms in Semi-Peripheral Conditions: Discussing the Evidence from East and Central Europe

Recent years has brought an outburst of populism movements alongside the whole democratic World, which has been accompanied by a growing interest in populism presented by philosophers and social scientists. Academicians in the last decade had been very prolific (and successful as well) in defining and describing both right-wing and left-wing populisms.

However, in several semi-peripheral countries, there is a group of parties and leaders who are often considered populist, yet fail to fulfil these basic principles. It is because themselves they are well-established

politicians, actually being a part of the system for decades, who suddenly change their rhetoric to fit anti-systemic resentments, hence being able to gain a lot of democratic support. However, once (back) in power, they dismantle basic democratic institutions of the society in order to secure their authority, while at the same time maintaining basic principles of dysfunctional liberal economy. Under these conditions they abuse their positions in order to create a new "elite", or "poligarchy", consisting of their close collaborators and supporters. I propose to call these parties "pseudo-populist".

In my paper I focus on three, interconnected questions: In what conditions do pseudo-populist parties appear? What are their main characteristics? And what change do they bring to political regimes?

In order to answer these questions I will analyse three cases from Eastern and Central Europe: Hungary, Poland and Serbia, while combining three theoretical approaches. First is World System Theory, applied in order to explain peculiarities of semi-peripheral social, cultural and economic context of liberal-democratic capitalism, which has been implemented in this region after 1989 (2006 in Serbia). In this context I argue that this is precisely what created conditions, in which pseudo-populism could flourish. To support this argument and answer further research questions, I also apply elements of discourse and institutional approaches, to indicate main similarities and differences between "regular" and "pseudo"-populism in regards of what they say and do in order to come and stay in power.

Tivador Vervoort | KU Leuven, Belgium

Critique of Reification as a Critique of Forms of Life

Contemporary thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School have argued that the social critiques of their predecessors (Lukács, Adorno, Horkheimer) often suffer from functionalist tendencies that obscure lived experiences of social agents which could provide resources for political contestation. Rahel Jaeggi's proposal for a *critical theory of forms of life* (2013) provides an impetus for a more nuanced consideration of the relation between social totality and political action. By understanding forms of life as ensembles of intersubjective normative practices that guide the collective conduct of life, Jaeggi provides a monist view on social totality in which both practices of critique and the normative aspects of the dominant social order are part of the same social fabric. Consequently, political contestation can be shown to emerge from the conflicts, contradictions and crises *within* social totality. As such, a critique of the norms and rationalities that organize social life as a whole remains possible, without falling back into functionalist defeatism.

To further develop the political significance of a critique of forms of life, the *standpoint* of a form of life vis-à-vis social totality needs to be taken into consideration. Standpoint theories such as those of Georg Lukács and Patricia Hill-Collins and Sandra Harding suggest that the subordinated position of specific groups within social totality grants a "strong" form of "objectivity" which is richer than the claims to objectivity presupposed by positivist social sciences: even when agents participate in the norms of a social order, they can experience a significant part of their social life beyond these norms, granting a standpoint to question – and ultimately contest – the hegemonic norms. Lukács' work on reification emphasizes, however, that the "form of objectivity" which is central to the rationality of modern capitalist societies, ground a social ontology in which the historicity and malleability of social organization is obscured. More recently, Michel Foucault's work on the genealogy of the modern state has similarly approached this question, by stressing that in neoliberal governmentality, "the general form of the market" conditions the form of subjective self-practices. Both Foucault and Lukács thus show that the generalization of market rationality complicates the picture of forms of life as resources for political contestation. I will claim that only by accounting for the standpoint of a form of life vis-à-vis dominant societal norms, can a politics of forms of life provide a resource to shed critical light on how hegemonic norms and rationalities organize society as a whole – ultimately demanding to be governed differently.

Davide Vicini | Independent Scholar

Populism as an extreme consequence of the split between politics and the truth of modern politics

The aim of my paper is to show how the problem of the split between politics and truth is already present at the origin of purely modern political theory, i.e. in Hobbes' work. A notion such as that of populism therefore finds legitimacy precisely in this precise epistemological rupture and in the subsequent historical process. Populism is in this sense not an accidental event in the development of representative democracy, but rather its natural conclusion. In fact, the notion of representation itself includes the renunciation of drawing on some truth, in exchange for obtaining a neutralization of internal conflicts. In the modern political rupture operated

by the Hobbesian authorisation mechanism, there is an attempt to base politics no longer on an eternal and immutable divine law, but rather on the authority of the sovereign. It is no coincidence that Hobbes published the *Leviathan* about the very end of the War of the Three Kingdoms, as an attempt to provide a theoretical framework to avoid other fratricidal wars. The core of this attempt is precisely the new centrality that is attributed to the authorisation mechanism with respect to the content of the law. Hobbes' sovereign is absolute not only in terms of the mere force or violence he can exert on citizens, but also, and above all, from a logical point of view: there are no criteria (leaving aside perhaps the ambiguous position of the natural law), to legitimately oppose his actions and decisions. However, to consider this absoluteness as radically opposed to the democratic form would be a mistake: strictly speaking, and this is the second claim of my speech, Hobbes is in fact a democratic thinker. In fact, the notion of people (in Greek *demos*) plays a central role precisely in the logical mechanism of authorization highlighted above. In fact, the multitude becomes the people at the very moment of the sovereign's authorization, and then returns multitude, to be governed by the sovereign. The latter is legitimated by the authority of the people, and is therefore a democratic sovereign. The reason why this sovereign is one and absolute is precisely to provide "a body" to the people, who can unify only in the figure of the legitimate sovereign, and must be autonomous, i.e. receive no law from anything or anybody other than himself. The loss of reference to an effective content of the law, in favour of the procedural production of legitimacy, makes it possible to relieve politics from the heavy burden of another central concept in pre-modern politics, that of "truth". Hobbes writes: *auctoritas, non veritas facit legem*. In the subsequent development of suffrage, the procedural aspect is even more marked, and the impact of the quantitative aspect becomes even heavier than the qualitative one: it is the majority principle that determines the authority of the legislator. Populism, therefore, radically follows the demands and breaks of representative democracy with respect to pre-modern politics, adapting them to the issue of suffrage. Populism can therefore be read as a radicalisation of what are the most characteristic features of modern political conceptuality.

Fabian Voegeli | York University, Canada

Switzerland: A Populist Democracy? The Indeterminacy of Direct Democracy, Staging of Conflict, and Exclusion

Instead of directly engaging in the contemporary populist crisis of liberal democracies in Europe and beyond, this paper queries the relation between modern democracy and populism through a rereading of the political history of direct democracy in Switzerland vis-à-vis post-foundational theory, especially Claude Lefort's work. This reinterpretation of the making of Swiss democracy and its specificities problematizes three (mis)conceptions that are not only prevalent in the Swiss national imaginary, thanks to a historiography that is rather complacent with liberal mythology, but also cloud many assessments of the phenomenon of populism: democracy as a child of liberalism, the sovereignty of the people hinging on its unity or oneness, and (concordance) democracy as consensus-oriented. This foregrounding of its conflictual and agonistic qualities as well as its mechanisms to institutionalize the emptiness of power might not only help us to revise the common understanding of Swiss democracy, but also provides a (nother) historical example of populist politics as an articulation of the symbolic dispositif of modern democracy, which brings into focus the ineradicable ambiguity and indeterminacy of the democratic form that lends itself to promoting equality as well as fostering exclusion.

The paper begins with a discussion of the "Democratic Movement" of the 1860s, whose struggle against representative government instigates Switzerland's tumultuous transition to more direct democracy. The movement's quasi-populist, antagonistic discourse in the name of "pure" or "real" democracy, as well as the desperate laments of its liberal adversaries over the loss of the people's "unity" if the tenet of representation is retired, reveals some striking parallels to the contemporary developments and the debates on democratic "renewal" that accompany them. The repudiation of the system of representation from which direct democracy historically emerges in Switzerland not only upends the liberal order ruled by the desire for a people incarnated as One through the government's representation, but also imparts to the disposition of democracy a lasting "antinomy between people and representatives," which now becomes a constitutive factor in the partition of the social. The relentless rebellion against the claim to be represented, against the liberals' insistence on unifying and "embodying" the sovereign it claims to represent, inscribes direct democracy with a divisive and disembodying impetus that continually fractures the very society supposedly in need of unification. The line of demarcation the *populus* draws between itself and those who represent continually thwarts the fusion of the people, and always ensures its escape from being fully contained by "bodily" representation.

Heeding Lefort's advice that "what is most important about democracy is not what it 'does' but 'what it causes to be done'," this paper then turns its attention to two effects of the symbolic transformation the

Democratic Movement initiated, thus tracing its impact on the slow rise of concordance (or “consociational”) democracy and revealing a process of the institutionalization of conflict that differs from the majoritarian norm of liberal democracy. Firstly, the intrusion of direct democracy into the national arena brings to life a new political subject, as nothing less than the national sovereign, who can only constitute itself by means of its own division, and who ought to render itself absent in order to be present. The Swiss demos is plagued by what Lefort has already diagnosed as the flip side of every direct-democratic decision, namely, that it effectuates the people’s disintegration into individuals (or individual votes) and re-presents an inner conflict that pits a minority against a majority.⁴ The extraordinary frequency with which this happens in Switzerland instills an almost permanent sense of discord and fragmentation; the very moment that the subject endowed with the right to speak sovereignly announces its existence, it is forced to reveal its own fracturing along manifold lines. The Swiss national sovereign is furthermore split into two incongruous yet coexisting collective subjectivities, which deepens its inability to express itself with one voice, constitute itself as a permanent whole, or make itself ever “fully” present: As if its voice is being doubled (or bisected), whenever the Swiss demos speaks its decisions are proclaimed at once “in the name of the cantons and the people,” since initiatives and mandatory referendums need to be approved by the majority of both voters and cantons. This constitutive division (or doubling) creates a being that escapes location from any vantage point available within the structure of Swiss citizenship and marks the Swiss people with a peculiar incongruity: In the absence of a congruent body it can thus only present itself as political sovereign of the nation when it simultaneously exhibits its own disappearance. Like every subject, then, the Swiss demos is constituted in dispute with, or excess of, itself: and it is this non-identity which propels it towards a vantage point from which society can perceive of itself as one form distinguishable from others. Under the conditions brought about by the democratic invention, society now constitutes itself by virtue of the purely “symbolic” character of what Lefort calls its “quasi-representation,” and hence the non-coincidence with what it supposedly re-presents.

Secondly, following the symbolic rearrangement that has rendered obsolete bodily representation, concordance democracy answers the need for a new staging of society by serving as a theatre of conflict and disagreement rather than consensual unity, so as to assist in construing the locus of power as “empty.”⁶ The appearance of direct democracy on Switzerland’s federal stage towards the end of the 19th century precipitates the existing regime into a crisis that ignites a discontinuous reordering, the result of which eventually will be given the name of “concordance democracy.” From here onward, parliamentary and executive politics are, or need to be, shaped into a new arrangement that defies both the majoritarian and the coalitionist model of politics, and instead endows every political issue with the potential to redraw the dividing line among parties and hence to reconstitute a new fleeting majority and minority. These novel conditions make it impossible for the nation to be represented by a single actor or a stable coalition of actors that presents itself as such; the nation can no longer, and in reality never could, be represented as One. Every moment that previously aimed at re-presenting the nation’s unity now has the capacity to render visible its irretrievable absence, in its place revealing a lacuna at the heart of each momentarily emerging power-relation, which, in turn, serves as the arena for divisive conflicts to be played out. Perhaps even worse is that since the “unholy alliance” has imposed itself onto the game of politics as the chief form of association, also all moments of seeming agreement are now infected with the potential to turn into an exposition of the underlying divisiveness rather than a show of unity. The elevation of this polemic disposition forces, or enables, concordance democracy to stage discord in lieu of the old projection of unity. In other words, consociational “power sharing” does not do away with existing antagonisms, but instead works precisely because and with the divisions they are rooted in. Whereas the symbolic dispositif of majoritarian, representative democracy aims at concealing the multiplicity of social conflicts by concentrating them into the one between majority and minority, this more agonistic form of democracy partakes in and harnesses their visualization and proliferation. It has not only displaced the traditional lines of demarcation within the sphere of politics but has also attributed to disagreement a new principle role, so that its articulation of divisions assumes a responsibility for society’s self institution more generally, namely the creation of social bonds through the institutionalization and conspicuous staging of conflict. Once community is no longer created in the image of a body but through the exhibition of its hollowing out or disembodiment, it falls to the politics of concordance democracy to delineate what Lefort calls the “symbolic place of power,” which enables society to see itself, and to render visible its “emptiness,” which presents society with the immanent origin of its own self-image and hence the “indeterminacy” of its supposed “foundations.”

Or, as one of the first historiographer of the Democratic Movement put it in his conclusive remarks: “So has the stone that the liberalism of the [18]30s discarded, the radicalism of the [18]40s did not know how to sculpt, [now] become the cornerstone.” Based on this exposition, we can now inquire into the role and effect of this indeterminacy, which consociational semi-direct democracy is particularly ‘successful’ in putting to work, by asking: What are the conditions that determine whether the room for contestation, objection, or questioning either widens or narrows under semi-direct-democratic consociationalism’s institutionalization of conflict? In other words, to what ends and to whom does this practice of popular sovereignty in cahoots with

consociational politics provide or deny the capability to voice claims, assert demands, and challenge the existing conditions? When, how, and for whom do the manners in which conflict and indeterminacy operate under this symbolic dispositif promote and/or stifle the ability to dispute wrongs and enforce claims, i.e., under what conditions does it foster heterogeneity and inclusive pluralism, and when is it conducive to homogeneity and exclusion instead?

On the one hand, consociationalism enshrines the permanently divided nature of the social and manifests emptiness of the place of power, rather than creating consentient unity and a harmonious whole. Instead of countering this tendency by introducing the majority principle into the equation and thus serving as a national unifier, semi-direct democracy similarly enforces continual contestations that keep multiplying and redrawing antagonisms, to break the seemingly common will into individual disagreeing ones, and to render evident the politically constituted and hence contested nature of majorities able to assert hegemony, which in turn might subject existing conditions to a recurring questioning or even open up the public discourse to demands of certain minorities.

On the other hand, this revelation of certain divisions of the social through the combined mechanisms of consociational semi-direct democracy, and their endorsement, are also deployed to cloak other divisions and even become an instrument of exclusion. The very absence of the national sovereign provides the conditions for both its forceful, compensating reassertion as the sole true 'representative' of the people and its need for conservation in the face of an inherent fragility that invites corruption, infiltration, or manipulation. From this point of view, popular referendums and consociational politics serve as mutually amplifying ritualizations of acclamation that fosters popular fusion, and modern democracy more generally as a technique of domination that deploys its own institutionalized openness as a shield against more fundamental critique, for and through the strategic exclusion of Others.

Its consociational, semi-direct, and decentralized shape make the symbolic dispositif of Swiss democracy a particularly suitable test lab for examining this dual tendency of democratic indeterminacy, which works simultaneously as a potential for emancipation where its divisions can be harnessed for new claims to represent the demos and attain rights or unsettle existing relations of power, and as an exclusionary, corporative drive that urges the sovereign people to guard the divisions and antagonisms on which its democratic freedoms seem to thrive by conserving its delicate composition and expelling the threatening remainders.

Karolina Wiśniowska | Jagiellonian University, Poland

Populism in times of crisis - possibility of a technocratic solution

On 19th March 2020, when the world is dealing with the coronavirus disease pandemic, President of the United States is photographed with his notes, where the phrase 'corona' is crossed out and replaced by the word 'Chinese'. He is not the first. The strategy of attributing the blame for this unprecedented crisis to political enemies is used by many, including Chinese, Russian and Hungarian sources, among others. It can be described in terms of populism - understood as a political strategy consisting of antagonizing 'the people' against 'the enemy' (and against 'the establishment' consisting of everyone who is protesting against it). In times of crisis, it is seen more clearly than usual, but bioethics was for long the field for populist politics. As history shows, previous epidemics led to the scapegoating of minorities for outbreaks of diseases. Populism can also be explained as a strategy of negating pluralism and the global pandemic is a situation when there is such a danger. Legislators act in a rush - many drastic measures are introduced to law systems in the time of a disease outbreak. They are supported by the majority of citizens who are understandably afraid for their safety. Some of those changes are not temporary, but they are going to apply also when the crisis is over. One of the proposed solutions to deal with those problems is to establish a technocratic body that would govern during the crisis. There are some advantages to this approach - experts may not be as much dependent on political interest as politicians and suppose to have the knowledge needed. On the other hand, there are some problems: first, especially if there is not enough data, experts also make mistakes and there is no similar accountability to the public as there is in the case of politicians. It can result in distrust and absence of real agency. There is also doubt if the executive would willingly share power. Finally, lack of experience in governing can end in a stalemate in the body and - as a result - in its inability to decide. Technocracy in times of crisis is not impossible, but it should be established mainly with the goal to avoid populist practices and authoritarian-style abuse of power. We also need the technocratic body's ability to act decisively and its responsibility for malicious actions. The most important features of the body should be to: 1) be established in a regular democratic process, during normal circumstances, 2) hold the authority to announce the crisis and to act during it for the short, fixed period, 3) be predictable and transparent - appointment of its members, way of making decisions and accountability should be regulated by strict formal

procedures, 4) be flexible in the aspect of expertise needed, 5) be impartial - the majority of its members should be appointed not by politicians, but by expert bodies, like academic and professional associations, 6) be experienced - members should have experience in governing outside of politics, 7) be accessible - include the contribution of a social factor. In my talk, I will present possibilities as well as advantages and disadvantages of establishing a governing body for critical situations as a disincentive to possible abuses of power by populist politicians.

Philipp Wolfesberger | UNAM, Mexico

Frictions of populism, class and identity in contemporary Mexico

Current Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) showed the world how to transform from “left populist” to “left nationalist” in just one day. Parts of international and national media described the favorite of the presidential elections 2018 as a left populist that might turn the country into state socialism, nationalizing the economy and monopolizing political power. But suddenly, when his election victory was consumed he was introduced to the world as a left nationalist. Now, nearly two years later and after several glimpses of crisis we can evaluate how the former “populist” became a “nationalist” and how such transformation is part of the difficult configuration of democracy, corporate media and social movements in Mexico. The theoretic foundations of this paper circle around the relation between class and identity in Laclau’s populist reason while recovering Gramsci’s organic intellectuals (linked to popular masses). I will show how the presidential election campaign of AMLO was shaped by an inclusion of traditional historic materialist class discourse (“the poor”), a persistent critique of the established political culture (“corruption”) and identity (“moral leadership”). Populism as specific political logic is creating necessary antagonisms in the Mexican version of neoliberal democracy. Such logic determines the frictions of class and identity between urban poor and rural indigenous communities, and discourses of nationalism vs. communality of autonomous indigenous government. This investigation also tries to contribute to studies of the peculiarities of the “golden age” of progressive Latin American governments in the long decade of the Millennium and the delayed, counter-cyclical Mexican version of left politics.