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Volume 29: Populism

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Volume 29

Populism

Edited by Aimee Imlay and Matthew Wentz

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Volume 29: Populism

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Cover art: 2020, Colin Penndorf. Colin has been a lifelong artist, developing his skills in the trades of performance, music, and the visual arts. Colin is the Fine Art Director for the 567 Center, a small gallery and art studio in Macon, Ga. He is the President of the Ocmulgee Artist Guild, a collaborative artist collective also run out of Macon, Ga. His biggest goal is to shift the traditional gallery style of the past into new, immersive art experiences designed with community and collaboration as key components in attracting new and diverse art lovers. Colin would like to give a special thank you to Jessica Whitley for her help with this photographic series.

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 Harry F. Dahms

2019 – 2020 *disClosure* Collective

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Editors' Preface and Acknowledgements

Aimee Imlay and Matthew Wentz
Editors-in-Chief, *University of Kentucky*

The 2019-2020 *disClosure* collective is thrilled to present the 29th volume of *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*. This volume focuses on theories of populism and brings together a wide range of perspectives relating to the phenomenon, experience, and study of populism. The recent uptick in populism signals political, economic, and/or social unrest across the globe, yet, populism remains a phenomenon that is difficult to define. Our goal with this volume was not to define populism. Instead, this issue engages conversations about the various types and origins of *populisms*, as it is our belief that the development and definition of populism is both historically and socially contingent.

The articles, artwork, and poetry contained in this volume illuminate the various conceptualizations and understandings of populism as well as the historical and social conditions which foster populism. Topics include left-wing populism in the United States, the relationship between populism and truth, national populism, the theoretical and ontological roots of authoritarian populism, and much more.

We present interviews with the four scholars invited to the University of Kentucky's Committee on Social Theory 2019 Spring Lecture Series: Chip Berlet, Paulina Ochoa-Espejo, Kenneth Roberts and Maria Pía Lara. In addition, this volume contains an interview with Nancy Maclean, the Fall 2019 Social Theory Distinguished Speaker. In these interviews many themes emerged including the importance of a conceptual distinction between types of populism, the relationship between billionaires and the erosion of liberal democracy, right-wing extremism, the emergence of populism in the United States and the link between 'the People' and populism.

This volume is a result of the conversations inspired by University of Kentucky professors Stefan Bird-Pollan (Philosophy), Carol Mason (Gender and Women's Studies), Yanira Paz (Hispanic Studies) and Carlos de la Torre (Sociology) in the Social Theory 600: Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Social Theory capstone course during Spring 2019. The course explored populism from a historical and comparative perspective and shaped the development of this volume. We are indebted to the professors' expertise and perspectives in this course.

We wish to extend our gratitude to Stefan Bird-Pollan who served as the faculty advisor for the *disClosure* collective this year. We thank you for your invaluable support, guidance and for introducing us to Han Woo Ri where we will be sure to enjoy many more meals in the future.

We would also like to thank the University of Kentucky's Committee on Social Theory for its support, particularly the Committee's Director, Tad Mutersbaugh. We also thank Adrian Ho, Director of Digital Scholarship at UK Libraries for his support throughout this process.

We are grateful to the *disClosure* editorial collective members who graciously worked on this journal on top of research, coursework, teaching and personal responsibilities. Finally, thank you to our contributors and artists for sharing your perspectives and your work with us.

Poems on the Effects of 21st Century Populism

Jason David Peterson, *Twin Cities Poetry Workshop*

Three poems exploring the toxic effects that today's populism is having on families, society, and the environment. The selection includes "How We Got Here," "Beyond the Ticket Booth," and "The End of Conversation." Keywords: poetry, family, environment, society.

How We Got Here

We ate everything in the house. The yard picked clean— nothing even that any
starving memory could hold out for. We ate our anger and soon our love
and the patience of others.
We ate our hunger and moaned as it grew heavier inside us.
We ate the world raw and the bitter green
and salty blue and endless black on black went down in a flush of burn and clay.
We ate the future before it limped away.
We ate the rules
of all of this, and now it has no meaning.
As if nothing was ever made or eaten—
an infinite nothingness that won't digest, and so there is only us.

Beyond the Ticket Booth

Held waters dislodge in a rage oceans rash, pale as salted grass and caverns cave, the sky's
grey head pinned to the valley by the cold boot of rotation forced to take all of this in.

I am watching a spring of summers buried under the fall of winters
a furious sun towing the black sheet faster than the chariot could ever pull her

an ashen rain we'll soon gather and weather.
Think of them all—

the incredible things we've done to fuck things up—
I want this to be the end

we paid for, some ragged stub to let us know we got our dollars' worth of show.

The End of Conversation

Anyone can scream.
They're doing it in rounds
—overworked throats and played-out phrases decoupage our city
in pith and spittle, so how can I tell you
of outrage? A whisper carefully delayed,
a currency in flames, an act of kindness?

There's no wrong answer but we all still lose, gasping in the crowded air.

If I were dying now of that very violence, it would kill me faster having to explain.
So I lie in silence, wave my arms making logic angels in the massacre
of words, and wait for a new sound to articulate.

“You Cannot Slaughter Ideas”: Liberalism and the State of Exception in Argentina

Arlo Elliot, California Polytechnic University San Luis Obispo

*Existing historiography of Latin America has highlighted the role of liberalism in the 19th century formation of modern states, but it is typically viewed as historically discontinuous with the subsequent violence of the 20th century. Narrowing the focus to Argentina, we see historians like Jeremy Adelman asserting that the promise and successes of the early liberal republics were historically isolated from the brutal military rule that would emerge following the Peronist era. More intellectual histories of Argentina like David Rock's *Authoritarian Argentina* also focus on the prominence of conservative nationalists in this period of violence. Incorporating the work of the Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben, I argue that embedded within the legal and practical framework of Argentine liberalism is the possibility of a “state of exception”, wherein the sovereign body suspends the law in the name of saving it.*

*The purpose of applying the theoretical lens of Agamben's work to Argentina's politics are twofold. The first is to overcome the idea that the development of liberalism in Argentina and the extra-judicial violence that succeeded it are historically discreet phenomena. The two share a connective tissue, as described in the work of Agamben, and the same laws that brought the liberal “public sphere” into being also simultaneously demarcated an illegible outside, producing beings outside the law. The second is the issue of how we as historians bear witness to an event like the disappearances and murders of political dissidents, as detailed in the government report *Nunca Mas*. Looking at that extra-judicial violence as an aberration outside of the arch of “historical progress” not only denies those affected a voice, but also crucially cedes a portion of the political realm of memory to the same ideas that helped formulate the “state of exception”. Keywords: Agamben, state of exception, Argentina, liberalism, homo sacer, Habermas, public sphere.*

Introduction

At the end of his book *Republic of Capital*, Jeremy Adelman writes a eulogy to what he calls the “unfinished revolution” of liberalism in Argentina, highlighting among other things, “the failure of political parties to act as the conduits for political integration” and thus head off the swelling of dissent and subsequent legitimization crises that would define the 20th century. (Adelman, 1999, 291). The question that bears asking is whether or not liberalism in both Argentine and general context ever offered truly popular political integration. In Argentina, the

founder of the liberal tradition is widely considered to be author, activist and eventual president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. In his epoch-defining work *Facundo*, first published in 1845, Sarmiento informs us that there are two forces in Argentina: one of civilization and progress, and one of fatalism and barbarism, diametrically opposed and incompatible. A close reading of this text reveals that Sarmiento believed that it was an obscure and barbaric nature of the *gauchos*, or Argentine cowboys that commanded much of the rural economy, that stood in the way of liberal republican government in Argentina.

The Republic of Argentina underwent a number of radical shifts following the framing of its first constitution in 1853, eventually culminating in a legitimacy crisis that overthrew Isabel Perón, then president, and replaced her with a military junta. In understanding the erasure of political and historical subjects, it is important understand the historical conditions necessary to strip a human being of their rights. When it came to power, the junta declared a state of siege and over the course of seven years of authoritarian rule snuffed out the lives of as many as thirty thousand *desaparecidos*, or “the disappeared.” Seeking to respectfully bear witness to the *desaparecidos*, this paper will seek to interrogate the grounds of history and memory in Argentina to see how the state of exception becomes not only possible but institutionalized. The paper seeks to link these two disparate events in Argentina’s history by the use of critical theory, engaging with the ideas of Jurgen Habermas and Giorgio Agamben to illustrate how the conditions within liberalism allowed for the suspension of the rights of subjects, the invocation of a state of exception, and ultimately the justification for mass murder. While the era of early liberalism and the period of military rule in Argentina are separated by over one hundred years and a radically different international and domestic circumstance, this paper seeks to use the former to cast light on the latter and build on existing critiques by scholars like Agamben of how a liberal rights based framework can break down with a dramatic impact on society. Existing political, cultural, and racial tension can become inflamed and lead to both state and civilian violence. This is what happened in Argentina, yet rather than considering it as an aberration from the development of republicanism or liberalism in Argentina, this paper seeks to put it on a continuum with those political and social developments. Sarmiento viewed civilization and barbarism as irreconcilable forces in the Argentine social order, and the latter would have to be excluded or destroyed to make a liberal government function. By examining Sarmiento’s writing, this paper seeks to bring into question whether liberalism in its Argentine context ever lived up to lofty ideals of equality and universal rights for sovereign citizens, and whether or not its incompleteness or limitations allowed or prepared ground for the military junta that would eventually come to control the country through martial law.

The essay will be divided into three parts. The first will be a brief exposition of a theoretical framework for the state of exception furnished by Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben. The second, in two parts, will be an analysis of Argentine liberalism during the 19th century, beginning with a reading of *Facundo* interrogating the tension between civilization and barbarism and Sarmiento’s demarcation of what makes a legible subject. This will be used to inform an exposition of the subsequent development of institutional liberalism in Argentina, with the guiding historical reference being Hilda Sabato’s work *Political Participation in Buenos Aires*. The third and final section of the essay, also in two parts, will analyze the continued influence of

liberalism in Argentine amidst an increasingly volatile political climate, eventually resulting in the 1976 coup. This will conclude with a reading of *Nunca Mas* and other testimonies of the *desperados*, seeking to bear witness to subjects that have been stripped of their rights and made illegible.

Theorizing the State of Exception and Bare Life

How does a body become excluded from the social order? Giorgio Agamben stresses that *homo sacer*, or bare life, plays an essential role in modern politics, “in which a human life is included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed)”. (Agamben, 1998, 8). Agamben, drawing from the work of Carl Schmitt, reminds us of the paradoxical role of the sovereign in modern jurisprudence, where the sovereign is at the same time “outside and inside the juridical order”, “having the legal power to suspend the validity of the law” (Ibid, 15). The sovereign, operating from this position of paradox of being both the administrator and suspender of laws, is able to decree when laws no longer apply and thus designate beings “exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable” (Ibid, 28). Bare life is characterized by this ambiguous relation to the law, abandoned by the juridical order to the power of the sovereign. The extinguishing of this life is neither homicide (profane) nor sacrifice (religious); rather, the designation of bare life is what constitutes the authority of the sovereign (Ibid, 83). Using analysis indebted to Michel Foucault's notion of biopolitics, Agamben points to the concentration camps in Nazi Germany as a physical reification of the state of exception, a space “in which not only is law completely suspended but fact and law are completely confused” (Ibid, 170). The construction and maintenance of the camps in Nazi Germany was furnished by the scientifico-juridical discourse of eugenics, which provided the justifications for designating beings as outside of the law, reduced to bare life (Ibid, 146). The social implications for the manufacture of bare life are obvious and devastating both for Agamben's example of Nazi Germany as well as the abstract juridical model he provides. Any legislative apparatus that can waive or void the rights of subjects by emergency decree necessarily grants those rights precariously; at this point, any pluralistic protections for minority groups or political dissidents granted by a liberal government can easily be stripped because of a real or imagined threat to sovereign authority.

This is a sketch of the theoretical framework that will be referenced in this study. Recognizing that Argentina has a different historical reality and intellectual tradition than Germany, the framework will be used minimally and when applicable. The first use will be in recovering a sketch of figures outside the law in the thought of Sarmiento (and the thinkers and policies he influenced) and in articulating what constituted bare life in late 19th century Argentina. The second will be in retracing the figure of bare life in the state of exception instituted by the military junta, this time manifested both in the physical space of the detention centers and in the practice of torture and execution. It is from the particulars of Argentine history that we may better understand and give nuance to the critical theory and history of the state of exception; likewise, the theory grants us a lens of viewing the social history of Argentina in a new light.

Argentine Liberalism and the Demarcation of Legible Subjects
Facundo: Civilization or Barbarism

Since publication in 1845, the specter of *Facundo's* influence in Latin American political theory and the proposed dialectic of civilization and barbarism has loomed over Latin American literature and political critique (Sarmiento, 2003, 2). Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria notes in his introduction that Sarmiento attempted to give "Argentina a national discourse, a set of figures and ideas through which the country could think of itself" (Ibid, 10). To understand that discourse, this paper will perform a close reading of those figures and their influence to locate the threshold of bare life in Sarmiento's prose. In tracing the life of Juan Manuel Quiroga and his myriad grievances with the regime of Juan Manuel de Rosas, Sarmiento also articulates the values and aspirations of a particular vein of Argentine liberalism that would become influential in the nascent republic. Thus, this analysis should not be thought of as arguing that *Facundo* became the guiding doctrine for all policies of the government, but rather represented an influential strain of thought that created a vision for Argentine public life. The central figure that Sarmiento writes against is that of the *caudillo*, or strong man, and the *gauchos*, or cowboys that support them. In Sarmiento's framework the prominence of the *caudillos* is a problem relating to the social life of *gauchos*, which he contrasts unfavorably with European enlightenment principles such as reason or the scientific method.

Sarmiento casts the knowledge of the *gaucho* (and of the *caudillo*) as originating from a profane and obscure source. His central premise, as in the title, is that the Argentine consciousness is going to be formed through a "struggle between European civilization and indigenous barbarism, between intelligence and matter." (Ibid, 59). He is deeply concerned with both the geography of the Pampas (the arid mountains of Argentina) and its resistance to more European modes of civilization, remarking that their topography has "reproduced in the pastoral habits of America the same grave countenances, hospitality, and dress of the Arabs." (Ibid, 60). The knowledge that exists in the Pampas comes about by way of poetry; awakened by the terrible expanse of the desert, with Sarmiento writing that "the man who moves among these scenes feels assaulted by fears and fantastic uncertainties, by dreams that disturb him while he is awake." (Ibid, 61). Yet Sarmiento draws a crucial distinction, between "learned poetry, the poetry of the city" and the "popular poetry, innocent and disorderly, of the *gaucho*" (Ibid, 62). This is the opaque source that the *gaucho* derives his authority from; notably, poetry could be set against a more modern form of knowledge production, such as history or science, emphasizing the crudity of the *gaucho's* epistemological framework.

In perhaps the liveliest section of the whole book, Sarmiento creates several sardonic portraits of the types of *gauchos* one might encounter in 19th century Argentina. The *rastreador*, who "is a serious, circumspect person, whose pronouncements are accepted as evidence in lower courts." (Ibid, 64). He can track thieves even if their tracks are two years old, and does so silently, with dignity as if though "microscopic power develops in the visual organs of these men" (Ibid, 66). Next is the *baqueno*, "the most complete topographer, the only map a general takes along to direct the movements of his campaign" (Ibid, 66). Like the *rastreador*, he works in silent pronouncements, as if "a traveler asks to be taken directly to a place fifty leagues distant, the *baqueno* stops for a moment, searches the horizon, examines the ground... and takes off at a gallop

as straight as an arrow, until he changes direction for reasons only he knows.” (Ibid, 67). He can tell the direction an enemy is approaching by the movement of wildlife; we learn that “If condors and the crows fly in a circle in the sky, he knows whether there are men hiding, or a recently abandoned camp, or simply a dead animal.” (Ibid, 67). The authority that these men are granted in the society of the Pampas derives from a source that is illegible for Sarmiento; for him, these are absurd rituals codifying unearned positions of power.

Continuing with his satire, Sarmiento tells the reader that the *bad gaucho* is a horse thief by occupation, feared for his prowess on the horse and with weapons, and respected even those he robs from (Ibid, 68). With each theft “The poets of the surrounding region add this new deed to the biography of the hero of the desert, and his renown soars all across the vast countryside.” (Ibid, 68). The *cantor* meanwhile is a figure ripped from the Middle Ages; a bard or troubadour who contributes to “the ideal image of that life of revolt, civilization, barbarism, and danger.” (Ibid, 69). The *cantor* “is doing the same work of chronicle, customs, history, biography as the bard of the Middle ages, and his verses would be collected later as the documents and data on which future historians would base their evidence”, except that Argentina does not yet have a society “with a knowledge of events superior to that which this poor fellow unfolds in his innocent rhapsodies” (Ibid, 70). The methods by which the *gauchos* constitute their histories and knowledge is, for Sarmiento, archaic and arcane; a byproduct of feudal living conditions and a lack of modern education.

Sarmiento effusively presents the reader with these portraits of *gaucho* culture as, presumably, comic relief for an otherwise serious book. Yet we can catch a glimpse of his beliefs in it nonetheless: the knowledge of the *gaucho* arrives through obscure means; it is not legitimated through European institutions, through the press or the nascent public sphere. There gatherings take place in the *pulperia*, an “assembly without public objective, without any social purpose” (Ibid, 74). It is an impenetrable discourse that, for Sarmiento, signifies barbarism and contempt for reason. The people of the Pampas have no interest in government but wield mighty influence over it nonetheless, as Sarmiento writes that the people did not demand representation at Buenos Aires through violence but “with the barbarism they sent to it in Facundo and Rosas.” (Ibid, 127). Acclimated in a nomadic lifestyle and profane knowledge and cast from the mold of the Pampas, Argentina has birthed “two distinct, rival, and incompatible societies... One Spanish, European, Cultured, and the other barbarous, American, almost indigenous.” (Ibid, 77). The *pulperia* is neither a *salon* nor a coffee house, and the sense of public obligation for the *gaucho* starts and ends with his obligations to his *caudillo*.

The bifurcation between civilization and barbarism emerges for Sarmiento as one group dedicated to abstract ideals and the progress of humanity and the other hopelessly and illegibly resistant to enlightenment. It is for Sarmiento not just a matter of culture but race, as he tells us that “The American races live in idleness, and demonstrate an incapacity, even when forced, to apply themselves to hard, uninterrupted work.” (Ibid, 51). Sarmiento notes Africans “provided [Rosas] with excellent, incorruptible soldiers of another language and a savage race.” (Ibid, 223). When discussing the influence of Facundo himself, Sarmiento notes that his sayings “have a stamp of originality that gave him a certain Oriental aspect, a certain tint of Solomonic wisdom in the mind of the common class.” (Ibid, 101). This is no compliment, but rather another

suggestion that any wisdom held by the fabled *caudillo* is foreign to civilization. Sarmiento has no doubts as to where this civilization lies, and proposes that the best solution to the barbarism of the countryside is to encourage a massive European migration (Ibid, 249). This can be seen in part as a reaction to the Rosas regime, where following the French blockade of Buenos Aires “Death to the foreigners!” became a common slogan (Ibid, 249). Yet it can also be read as a further demarcation of civilization and barbarism, this time along racial lines. Over a hundred years later in 1978, the Argentine Minister of the Interior, General Albano Harguindeguy, announced that it would become necessary for Argentina to encourage European immigration “to remain one of the three countries with the highest proportions of white population in the world” (Jaroslavsky, 2004, 100).

What is revealed in Sarmiento’s writing is the figure of bare life, beings placed on the outside of legible society in order to constitute a normative inside. Sarmiento and Harguindeguy, the junta general, are both addressing a vastly different public in vastly different eras of Argentine history, yet both trace the figure of a legible inside and an excluded outside based on whiteness and alleged European virtues. Sarmiento at this point is merely a writer and not a legislator, yet his ideas are crucial to giving shape and form to the liberal dialogue and policies that would be developed after the fall of the Rosas regime. In the next section we will ask, more generally, how does the figure of bare life come to be constituted in the nascent Argentine public sphere?

Institutionalization of Liberalism: The Public Sphere in Buenos Aires

A fellow member of “the outlaw generation” of Argentinian writers that Sarmiento belonged to, Esteban Echeverría’s 1838 short story “The Slaughterhouse” can be thought of as a counterpart to *Facundo*, highlighting the “barbarity” of the city of Buenos Aires instead of the countryside (Echeverría, 1980, 3). Depicting Buenos Aires during a period of flood and famine, the people of the city go wild when a small shipment of fifty cattle arrive, and even the rats “were revitalized when they heard such wild cries and began to run in every direction” (Ibid, 7). The cows arriving were seen religiously, as a gift from The Restorer of Laws (Rosas), and the first slaughtered was for him; even the butcher shop was governed by a *caudillo* (Ibid, 8). But as impatience for the fresh meat spread through the crowd, “one could see four hundred black women crouching in a line unraveling in their laps the tangle of intestines and pulling off, one by one, the little pieces of fat that the butcher’s blade had missed” (Ibid, 11). Knife fights and snarling dogs were a “miniature version of the barbaric way individual and social issues and rights are aired in our country” (Ibid, 11). A boy is beheaded by a rope attached to a bull in revolt, and the crowd barely notices the death before they chase after the bull, by which time the crowd was so riled that “one of the women lost control of her bowels, another said Hail Mary’s in two seconds flat, and two of them promised St. Benedict to give up their jobs as scavengers... No one knows if they kept their promises.” (Ibid, 14). After the bull is wrangled, the crowd, now with lust for more blood, notices a man whom they deem to be a “Unitarian dandy” and promptly knock him off his horse. The *caudillo* judge of the slaughterhouse instructs the crowd to take the man to a torture table, where “cards and drinking glasses were cleared only when tortures or executions by the Federalist henchmen of the slaughterhouse took place.” (Ibid, 17). The Unitarian dies in the struggle, much as the bull did, and Echeverría dispassionately remarks at the end that “it can clearly be seen that the focal point of the Federation was the slaughterhouse.” (Ibid, 21).

"The Slaughterhouse" pours over many of the same themes as Sarmiento, and as with *Facundo* a definite outside can be determined: the irrational and bloodthirsty rabble of the city, with racial overtones. It is a vignette of barbarism arriving at the city, *caudillo* culture set on the ill-suited stage of Buenos Aires, with the one figure representing civilization in the story literally dying not from violence, but from horror and outrage. In order to transform the city, liberal reformers had to establish a sovereignty that derived its authority from something other than direct violence. Hilda Sabato's excellent book *The Many and the Few* details that sovereignty began to look like with the formation of a bourgeois public sphere in Buenos Aires, drawing on the work of social theorist Jürgen Habermas. The public sphere is, for both Habermas and Sabato, a space where a small bourgeois group is able to participate in free discussion of art, culture, and politics that then comes to shape society, as well as legitimating public institutions through their origin in free debate. Writing near the time of Rosas fall, Sarmiento notes proudly that five hundred copies of *Facundo* were circulating the republic, showing a nascent seed of public discourse planted in an extremely select group (Sarmiento, 2005, 215). For context, Sabato informs us that the population of Buenos Aires alone was nearing three hundred thousand, so those five hundred copies of *Facundo* would have landed in the hands of a population that was characterized by literacy, access to an amount of free time for reading, and an interest in public debate (Sabato, 2001, 154). The limited scope of who was able to access the public sphere should be considered in both the case study of Buenos Aires as well as the historical model of the public sphere, as it reveals a wide gap between the narrowly selected "public" and the broader group of the "people". Tracing the thought of German philosopher Immanuel Kant, Habermas argues the public sphere reflects both a juridical and practical order: the law enshrines the subject's duty to the public, and the subject's performance of public duty conversely grants the law legitimacy (Habermas, 1989, 115). This idea works on a hypothetical model if enfranchisement and full protection of the law is eventually extended to everyone; that is, if everyone can be made part of a public. The Argentine Constitution of 1853, which was critical to enshrining the public sphere, gives no reference to who the rights of citizenship are extended to; it is left ambiguous. When one hears Sarmiento tell us that the Argentine *gaucho*, due to geographic isolation, "lacks the basis for all social development; since the ranchers do not meet together, they have no public needs to satisfy; in a word, there is no *res publica*," it is not hard to imagine why the framers of the Argentine Constitution would have been hesitant to extend citizenship to everyone (Sarmiento, 2003, 55). The public sphere for Sarmiento could not extend to these people of the Pampas, therefore the legitimation of liberalism depended on their exclusion.

After the fall of Rosas, the press in Argentina expanded rapidly, numbering over a hundred papers a mere 30 years after the *caudillo*'s fall (Sabato, 43). An improvement over the circulation of news in the Rosas era, these papers appeared in different languages and with different ideological nuances, reflecting a number of the groups that would come to constitute the Argentine public sphere (Ibid, 47). In 1850, Sarmiento had written "Periodical publications are in our time like daily respiration; neither freedom, nor progress, nor culture is conceivable without this vehicle that links societies to one another." (Sarmiento, 2005, 205) Yet it is not pure extensivity: Habermas reminds us that public debate was also predicated on the simultaneous existence of a private and intimate sphere, where privileged members of the bourgeoisie reflected on societal concerns and then extended those reflections outward into public discourse

(Habermas, 50). Newspapers were an outgrowth of this class, and eventually “the function of the bourgeois public sphere crystallized in the idea of ‘public opinion’” in the late 18th century (Ibid, 89). Similarly, Sabato shows us that the multitude of papers in Buenos Aires belied the small circle of individuals who ran them, and public opinion was important among the elites to legitimate political rule (Sabato, 51). This was because the Argentine press fostered a space where opinions could be discussed that “did not imply the contestation of government authority or political power”, providing a means for privileged members of the public to air grievances without implying a threat to the overall order of society (Ibid, 136).

In February of 1875, an angry mob burned down a Jesuit school in Buenos Aires, with *La Tribuna* writing that “these are not the events produced by a cultured and civilized people. No: that was the savage spirit of the rabble.” (Ibid, 144). *El Espanol* attributed the causes to “native elements that are used to electoral violence”, raising the familiar specter of the indigenous *gaucho* (Ibid, 145). Despite the finding of guilt at the hands of a racialized mob, the papers had been responsible for shaping and promulgating the Anti-Jesuit sentiments, going so far as to call for protests to Jesuit schools and referring to Jesuits as “vermin” and “assassins” (Ibid, 145). *La Tribuna* even wrote after the incident that “The memory of the excesses shall recede, sooner or later, but the protest against the advances of the Church will never die.” (Ibid, 152). At this point, the press was beginning to wield influence not just on the bourgeois class that contributed to it, but on a diverse group of literate and semi-literate city dwellers that was rapidly expanding by the time of the attack on the school (Ibid, 154). It was no longer just the five hundred copies of *Facundo* circulating around the republic; it was rather an entire public relations industry that was reflexively shaping and molding the discourse of the city. Habermas illustrates how in Europe the degraded public sphere transforms from a space to mediate public opinion into a manufacturer of public opinion through public relations (Habermas, 221). Sarmiento, in a work written during his career as a politician, implored his fellow patricians that educating the masses should be done “Out of selfishness” to “blunt that instinct of destruction which is now dormant but which political life itself... must awaken.” (Sarmiento, 1948, 293). Sarmiento believed there was grave danger in exposing the uneducated masses to new forms of democratic participation, and that the violence that was endemic to the Rosas regime might resurface.

At the end of *Facundo*, Sarmiento writes that “The political doctrines that nourished the Unitarists up to 1829 were incomplete and insufficient for establishing a government and freedom; the Pampas stirred, and that was enough to make their edifice, based on sand, fall to the ground. This inexperience and lack of practical ideas were remedied by Rosas, in the minds of all, with the cruel and instructive lessons that his frightful despotism gave them.” (Sarmiento, 2003, 242). If Sarmiento sees the promises of the Unitarists (forbearers to Argentine liberalism) as unfulfilled, it is this new liberal public sphere that has formed as a corrective to the weaknesses of that former liberal regime. Yet Sarmiento informs us that Rosas will be remembered as “a great and powerful instrument of Providence, which accomplishes everything important for the future of our homeland”, for he has tamed the *caudillos* of the interior and “The day that a good government is established, it will find local resistance conquered and everything in place for the union.” (Ibid, 239). This is open to interpretation: could the liberal state that imagined in a

generation of writers and thinkers have come into being without the violence of the preceding years? If the foundation of the liberal state necessitated a period of violence, would a period of violence be necessary again, when societal contradictions reemerged?

Bearing Witness to the State of Exception

The Degradation of the Public Sphere

What can be seen throughout the development of the public sphere in Buenos Aires is not only the extension of citizenship and rights to a critical public, but also a delimitation of that public, and the spectre of beings excluded from the political, reduced to bare life. It is here again that we turn to a critique of the very notion of a public sphere. Habermas would admit that the access to the public sphere is restricted to certain sections of the bourgeoisie who have the time to engage with the multifarious strands of thought that were publicly blossoming (Habermas, 50). Yet the legitimacy of the public sphere as a source of sovereign authority derives from the active dialogue between all members of that public; paradoxically that public has been historically created through the designation of a limit of who is allowed to speak publicly. The rights of citizenship enshrined in the 1853 are a bold promise; yet it is a promise that is underscored by that documents ambivalent and decided silence on exactly who is a full citizen. This is a contradiction that never resolved itself in the Habermasian notion; instead the public sphere degrades and is turned from a space in which public opinion is formed through dialogue and becomes a space in which non-public opinions are manufactured and broadcast to a mass of people. Full access to the public sphere by the proletariat or peasant is never attained; this is the conclusion of Sabato as well, although she argues that it at the very least formed a space of mediation and negotiation. Without denying the subaltern voices of Buenos Aires in the 19th century, we can ultimately see that the promise of the public sphere, while grandiose, was ultimately unfulfilled.

As problems and contradictions inherent in mass politics began to arise in Argentine society in the early 20th century, the ghost of Sarmiento was revived throughout Ezequiel Martínez Estrada's fatalistic historical survey and social critique *X-Ray of the Pampa* (published 1933) as a way of understanding the predicament of the republic following a coup in 1930. Estrada returns to the desert, writing that "[the Pampa] is the land of disordered adventures in the fantasy of a shallow man", where "the coarse man discovers new beginnings" and "the cultivated man finds his end." (Estrada, 1971, 7). Yet the problems this time are not confined to the countryside, as following the 1853 revolution "residual elements of reaction took refuge in Buenos Aires (Ibid, 227). The "elements of reaction" that Estrada describes are the same that Echeverría diagnosed a hundred years earlier; a barbarism arrived at the city. Estrada in many ways reflects a final and frustrated culmination of the Argentine liberal: disillusioned with the people for being unable to accommodate to the contradictions and imbalances of a system that frequently denied them full personhood. Of course, Estrada does not ascribe these people a voice: his American *gaucho* was "a floating being, parasitically dependent on the cow and the horse, with nothing to restrain him in his ambitions or his career, since nothing knew bounds here – neither the law nor property nor life." (Ibid, 22). Estrada still sees a barbarian desert where "politics has no exit to well-structured forms", and instead "it projects its energies to the level of magic, of mysterious and arbitrary powers." (Ibid, 279). The social mores of the Pampas are not fixed in meaning or tradition, but are

rather transitory “pseudostructures, firm in the basic outlines of their physiognomies, but hollow in meaning and in substance.” (Ibid, 345).

Estrada's analysis reads as a 20th century version of *Facundo* but without the larger than life *caudillo* characters to frame it. Those characters are replaced in Estrada's analysis by the oppressive geography of the Pampas, the decaying Republican institutions and the hypermodern “bureaucratic organs” of the state, where libraries and schools become places where books are “removed from life and from reading, they line the walls and impose silence.” (Ibid, 363). He retraces Sarmiento's steps and notes obliquely that the Argentine people “are still in the Hesiodic period of improvisation when the poet is faced with the materials of reality but not with its problems”. (Ibid, 387). If Sarmiento's *cantor* was a figure of the Middle Ages, the poet of the modern Pampas is a figure from early Greece! The poet is, as always, the *caudillo*, “always the antiengineer, the technician of that anodyne reality, stronger than that reality and capable of stamping it with the bias of his talent as an improviser and a creator.” (Ibid, 388). Estrada goes on to tell us that “What Sarmiento did not realize was that civilization and barbarity were the same thing, like the centrifugal and centripetal forces of a system in equilibrium.” (Ibid, 398). The liberal reforms under Sarmiento did not stamp out the latter; instead “The defeated barbarity, with all its vices and its faults of structuring and of contents, had acquired an aspect of truth, of prosperity, and of cultural and mechanical advances.” (Estrada, 399).

Estrada was at the time one of the leading thinkers in Argentina, and the work, which advances a similar thesis to Sarmiento, made shockwaves at the time it was published. The idea that is important to keep sight of is that there might be people within the republic of Argentina who are incapable, due to an element of their nature, of being members of an enlightened or liberal government. For both Estrada and Sarmiento, the barbarism they saw boiling up in the Pampas was a product of backwards *caudillo* culture; Estrada suspected that one could not extricate barbarism from civilization as easily as Sarmiento hoped. Yet his pessimism is directed almost solely at the people and their mute resistance to civilizing elements: read as a contempt of the masses, he avoids structural critique in favor of fatalist aphorisms, tautological geographies, and hangs the fate of Argentina on the unchangeable nature of the *gaucho*.

Twenty years later in 1952 an American journalist covering the rise of Perónism, the populist political system associated with president Juan Perón, wrote, “Another dictator and his spectacular wife dominate the Argentine today”, before launching into a detailed parallel biographies of Juan Perón and Juan Rosas and their wives (Cowles, 1952, ix). The report that follows is a dubious and Sarmiento indebted sketch of Rosas coupled with a crude reading of how taken Perón was with European fascism and Stalinism and is the outcome of “the union of neo-fascism and communism” (Ibid, 246). While these remarks reflect media sensationalism more than anything else, Perón was so taken by both the Argentine and international media to be the second Rosas that it became a popular narrative of the Argentine bourgeoisie. *La Prensa*, a conservative Argentine daily newspaper that had had been founded in 1869, promoted these narratives and quickly came into the cross-hairs of the Perónist regime. After being charged with crimes against the nation, the paper published an editorial the next day that led with a Sarmiento quote “Barbarians! You cannot slaughter ideas.” and denounced “Anachronistic scenes, blind hatred persecuting ideas, gallows being raised.” (*Defense of Freedom*, 1952, 158, 162). On March 20,

1951 the paper was claimed by the state, although the editor filed a public protest decrying that “*La Prensa* has, for more than eighty years, served the Republic in the organization of its institutions, in the dissemination of information and culture among the people”, with “absolute impartiality” and any investigations will confirm the paper’s “moral authority” (Ibid, 177). The analysis in the previous section indicates that the formation of a public sphere in Argentina was, at best, incomplete, with popular opinion and populist politics being used as tools of the media to shape the political and social realm.

In *The Fourth Enemy*, James Cane explores the disintegration of the public sphere in Argentina, noting that the 1951 expropriation of the newspaper created a “public sphere devoid of the embarrassing indicator that the Peronist movement had yet to achieve the total consensus of all Argentines long claimed by its founder” (Cane, 2011, 226). He also argues that “the opposition increasingly found itself with little to gain by remaining within the bounds of Peronist legality and little to lose by stepping beyond them.” (Ibid, 226). Yet were the people, who long were denied a voice in the public sphere, actually the ones formulating an opposition? Ten years later, on the eve of another coup, the Argentine General Onganía addressed the Fifth Conference of American Armies at West Point in 1964, stating that the authority of government will be compromised under the influence of “exotic ideologies”, which present a threat “to the basic principles of a republican political system” (*Nunca Mas*, 1986, 386). He goes on to say “Since the people are powerless to exercise this right by themselves, it is the duty of the institutions which the people have armed and given to the mission to sustain the effective validity of the Constitution, to act on their behalf.” (Ibid, 444). Perónism and the reaction to it by Argentine elites is a hotly debated history that can be but briefly touched upon here to highlight that both Perón and his opponents appropriated the institutions and the ideals of republicanism, populism, and liberalism to further their political ends. Yet, tracing out a genealogy from Sarmiento, this cynicism and calculated use of the public is not a new occurrence in Argentine history. It is within the backdrop of this cynicism and escalating crises that we arrive at the 1976 coup and the Process of National Reorganization (PNR) (Rock, 1993, 224).

Bearing Witness to the *Desparecidos*

On March 24, 1976, the first day of the coup, the members of the Supreme Court of Argentina were suspended and replaced with judges hand selected by the junta, who “has to swear to uphold the Articles and objectives of the ‘Process’” (*Nunca Mas*, 386). The government during the PNR declared a “state of siege” to justify their free movement inside and outside the law; the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared (the Commission) declared that it is “inappropriate to talk of the authority of an illegal government in relation to the state of siege since this was intended to be use in the last resort to protect the legal state, and not... to legalize political persecution by a dictatorship which destroyed our republican institutions” (Ibid, 403). The contradictions here, while obvious, bear examination. The liberal republican government derives its authority from public institutions; yet, under a state of siege, the public’s access to those institutions can be suspended indefinitely until the crisis is over. The junta’s aims in the PNR and declaration of a state of siege were explicitly stated as protecting the ideals of the republic; yet the Commission deems those claim illegitimate because they suspended republican institutions, which occurs de facto in a state of siege. To analyze the state of exception from the

top down is to wrestle with ambiguity of sovereignty, when the sovereign is both inside and outside the law. The junta's declaration of a state of siege amounted to a simultaneous suspension of all laws and an extension of absolute law over the bodies of the Argentine people.

This is the reduction of beings to bare life, stripped of rights and in ambiguous relation to the law. As this paper has argued in its survey of Argentine intellectual history, this figure does not appear for the first time here. When Sarmiento stared plaintively at the Pampas and waxed on the incompatibility of the indigenous and black people with European progress, he etched that figure. That etching undoubtedly bore influence on the Argentine Constitution of 1853, which deliberately omitted any reference to whom citizenship was extended to, an ambiguous and precarious relationship to the law was enshrined for most subjects. The justifications any government gives for suspending liberty are always dubious, but liberalism in Argentina was formulated with a deep suspicion of the masses, and whether or not their habitudes and way of life would stand in the way of progress. At the time that the radical PNR began, it was again Argentines who, although allegedly under the influence of "exotic" ideologies, became excluded from the political order in the state of siege, giving the junta the flimsy legal justification to snuff out their liberty and lives.

Walter Meza Niella was 14 when the police raided his family's house in January of 1978. They struck him on the head with their rifles, knocking him to the ground, and then grab his still stunned body to use as a human shield while they searched his house for his father (Jaroskavsky, 32). Being held by the hair, he remembers when a soldier shouts "Aha! Look at the old man! I had an idea that he was a real Peronist, but he's got books by Karl Marx here." (Ibid, 32). He and his mother were then taken to a facility and tortured for information about the father, and suffered a brain aneurysm due to repeated head trauma (Ibid, 32). While recovering from the aneurysm, he learned that his father had managed to escape to Brazil, but was captured on his return to the country.

Luis Alberto Urquiza, a psychology student working for police intelligence services at the time of his arrest, testified "Francisco Gontero, who, from a distance of four or five meters, loaded his 45-calibre gun and fired three shots, one of which went through my right leg at the height of my knee... The same person then ripped my trousers and poked a stick and then his finger into the wound." (*Nunca Mas*, 28). He was released after two years detention for lack of evidence. Why was a psychology student who worked for the police tortured? The military regime had a disdain for psychoanalysis, as Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera stated in *La Opinion* in 1977 that "the inner intimacy of the human being was attacked by Freud, in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*" (Jaroslavsky, 100). Yet whether the target is Marx or Freud, the result is the same: the banishing of profane knowledge that threatens society by force, in this case the violence of the police under the military junta.

The bodies of the *desparecidos* were sent irregularly to cemeteries around Argentina (Nunca Mas, 231). Before arriving at the cemeteries they were often stored in unrefrigerated warehouses and lockers, typically arriving infested with maggots and in various stages of decomposition. There were never any names on the corpses; occasionally there would be the name of what policeman or police unit sent the corpse. Autopsies were banned on the bodies of political subversives, so little information was gathered about how they died. Stripped of names

and unreported, these anonymous deaths are what characterized the *desparecidos* and the form that law took in the state of exception, enacting itself on the surface of bare life. Pregnant women who were held at the Campo de Mayo Military Hospital were blindfolded and given Caesarean sections to accelerate births; their children were often never seen by them, instead raised by the staff of the hospital (Ibid, 295). In this sense there is an extension of the PNR over both life and death, and of course a vanquishing of all rights and recourse for former subjects now reduced to bare life.

Conclusions

In *Nunca Mas*, the official government report on the *desparecidos*, the Comission states that the doctrines behind repression were originating in the general movement to repress the influence of left-wing and communist movements that was encouraged and funded by the United States. The Argentine General Camps wrote in 1981 that “France and the United States were our main sources of counter-insurgency training. They organized centres for teaching counterinsurgency techniques and sent out instructors, observers, and an enormous amount of literature.” (Ibid, 442). Yet they do not turn a critical lens to that older imperialism of ideas, the migration of liberalism from France and England to the heady discussions on the streets of Buenos Aires in the 19th century. The US could not have aided in repression if the existing apparatus for repression did not exist, and that apparatus was not built overnight.

David Rock, in his influential *Authoritarian Argentina*, writes that the true source of the conflict was not Cold War ideological conflict but in fact a conflict between regressive Nationalist movements within Argentina, which “became the expression of deep-rooted historical forces in Argentina that continually challenged and resisted the mainstream liberal conceptions of the state and society” (Rock, xv). For Rock, the authoritarian and military regimes in Argentina never achieved a coherent ideology, and “Nationalists surfaced as major contenders for power only at times of threatened political breakdown”. (Ibid, xx). Highlighting the often incoherent and contradictory doctrines pushed forth by the military regime, at one moment denouncing “Marxist psychoanalysis in the universities” and at the next stating that “liberalism engenders communism”. (Ibid, 203). Agreeing with Rock that one cannot simply point to the United States as the culprit in Argentine affairs during the tumultuous years of repression and violence, and the impetus for the suspension of democratic rights must be found elsewhere.

Yet this paper disagrees with him that these right ideas were lurking in the shadows of Argentine society waiting for “periods of extreme political strain or breakdown”. Rather, these ideas were in plain sight within the framework of Argentine liberalism. To view the junta as an aberration or deviation is to ascribe to a historical tautology of liberal progress that fails to account for the elements within liberalism that produce the conditions for a state of exception to emerge. In contextualizing the junta in the larger history of Argentina, it must be understood that the grounds for exclusion of beings from the political did not originate solely from right wing or reactionary forces, but in fact was enshrined in the earliest doctrines of liberalism. In understanding how a state of exception emerged in Argentina in 1976, it is also necessary to understand the historical contingencies and continuities that flowed not from Rosas, but from the 1853 revolution.

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Making the People.

An Interview with Paulina Ochoa Espejo, *Haverford College*.

Interviewers: David Cortés Ferrández and Sandra Nava Nieto, *University of Kentucky*

Paulina Ochoa Espejo is an Associate Professor of political science at Haverford College. She is the author of On Borders: Territories, Legitimacy and the Rights of Place (OUP, 2020), The Time of Popular Sovereignty: Process and the Democratic State (PSUP, 2011) and co-editor of the Oxford Handbook of Populism (2017).

Hi, nice to meet you. First of all, we would like to give you the opportunity to introduce yourself: what do you do, how did you end up here?

Paulina Ochoa Espejo (POE): Well, hi, I'm Paulina Ochoa-Espejo. I am a political science professor at Haverford College. I work on Political Philosophy and Political Theory, and most of the work that I do is normative and interpretive. So, I try to think of questions that have to do with how and why we legitimize government and power.

So, you write about populism and you basically have described it in a historical way or in a hypothetical way, but what is populism for you?

POE: This is something very interesting! I have to confess that I don't find the debate about what populism is so exciting. I think that defining populism has kept us from doing things that are more interesting; to figure out other things: what does populism do, how do populists recognize themselves, what does one do after recognizing populism... Definitions and concepts are very important, but when we are thinking about democracy, we don't spend all of our time defining democracy. We also think about other things about democracy. So, I'm not going to say that I don't think that is important, but it's just not the part of populism that interests me the most. For the most part, I've decided that I think I'll just go with the ones that are out there, so I've chosen to stick with what Cas Mudde has defined: it's an ideological or ideational definition. I don't think it's perfect, but I do not want to go out and give one myself. I do care a lot about concepts, but my concept—the one I care about—is The People, not populism.

I wanted to start talking about Podemos and this concept in Spain that says that Podemos is a populist party. My question is if this party would fit in the definition of populism?

POE: That is fascinating for two reasons. The first one is that Podemos is a self-conscious populist party. Most of them are not, right? So, most parties are whatever they are and then there is a critic or there is a commentator who says, 'that is a populist party.' But Podemos is a party that was crafted, that was self-consciously thought of as a populist party. And it was a populist party constituted in a very specific model, which is Laclau's model of populism. So, I would say that it is a populist party because they say so themselves, but I think that also for that reason I would consider them a populist party is that they are trying to create a People both by inclusion and by exclusion. And so, that is something that fits well with most definitions of populism including the one that I use, which is Mudde's. But also, I think that there is a second reason. So, first, self-consciously populist, according to him they are populist, and also, second, because it fits the model. How well it fits the model? Well, that is the historical part, right? I mean, do they manage to create a People? Have they managed to include and exclude those they wanted to include and exclude? Did the party itself generate the kind of movement that creates a People of the left? I am not sure. Actually, I don't know enough of Spanish politics. I mean, history can tell you whether it has succeeded, but it seems that at this point and time they are sort of at a point which it seems they are not succeeding. But, you know, these things are long term and they happen over time, so I guess part of what I bring into this debate is that the People is not something that happens at once. The People is an extended process in time. So, let's see. You know, it's still an open possibility.

You mention that populist parties and movements think of The People as a unified, non-changeable, homogeneous group that they target. That could be Trump with white American men, anti-muslims, etc. So, when I read one of your articles, it made me feel that this idea of The People may work because of fear — fear that The People is going to change and you're not going to belong to it. So, staying in the homogenous group led by a populist makes you feel safer. Why do you think that works?

POE: Well, I think that it's fascinating. The whole thing about the social psychology of group-making is that it's an empirical matter. It's something you need to go and figure out. What I've noticed from what I've known is that people like groups. People like to be in groups. And politics is about group-making. That's the truth. There are always groups, and I think it would be hard to avoid that that is the case.

Now, what are the psychological mechanisms that make you want it? I don't know exactly, but what I do know is that not everybody feels the same. Any political theorist would win if they could say, 'human beings are always like that.' So, for example, Hobbes had a moral psychology, so did Locke, and so did Saint-Thomas. They had a theory of moral psychology. But in the case of Hobbes, he wants to say, as an empirical matter, 'people are like this' — except when they are not! And that's the thing, right? If we could count on them to always be exactly the same, then we could have a theory that would say "it's always that way", but the problem is that people love to make groups... but not always. Sometimes, they dissolve the group. Sometimes, there are people who are completely individualistic, or there are people who feel safer when there's no one following them around, or there are people who go crazy to have followers. So, there are

tendencies, but I don't think that you can say this is a feature of the human mind. Maybe it is a feature of the human mind on most occasions, but there are some exceptions. So, I don't think you can rely on social psychology or on moral psychology to do a theory about populism.

You say in one of your articles that, more than biology or performance, group identities are formed by a common aesthetic judgement. So, what do you think are the aesthetic judgements shared by Podemos and the people that follow Podemos, and the right-wing party Vox? That is, what could be the difference between the aesthetic judgement that a person would draw to join Podemos rather than Vox?

POE: This is interesting. So, what I was trying to do in that article—I was criticizing Kennan Ferguson because he wanted to say: 'ok, what makes a group that we can call a People?' Right? Most people would think that is either shared genes or a biological link, and some think that what makes a People is like a shared performance. His proposal was like, 'no, what makes a People is a shared aesthetic judgement.' I think that I could agree with him. A group can be made by shared aesthetic judgements, and it is usually a group that is better defined than a group defined by the other two criteria, because people always behave in different ways at different times and because it is very, very hard to make a group follow anything that is biological. So I thought that was a good definition.

But notice that this is what makes a group that considers *itself* a People. I don't think a political party is that kind of a group. It is not a People. A political party is a group of citizens that want to fight for power. If those citizens want to characterize themselves as a People, then they are making a point about their right to be separate, to self-determine. The problem is that, when a party claims to be *a* People, they have a tendency to want to be *The* People—The People who then have a right to exclude others from their territory or from their institutions, and they think they have a claim to exclude others from their spaces. So, I think at that point when a party thinks that they are a People, then they tend to say, 'well, we are The People; we want a different country.' So, unless a party thinks that they want a different country or to exclude people, they shouldn't call themselves a People.

Podemos hasn't made that claim, but they do have this idea that the way you make politics is by excluding others. To what degree they want to exclude them? I don't know exactly how it has played out in practice. Do they consider themselves part of the Spanish People? I think they do—the new Spanish People. What makes them smart is that they are displacing the New People to the future, which is something I sort of agree with. But that is exactly what liberalism does: to displace People into the future, so in that respect, it is surprising, because they consider themselves a party that is not a liberal party.

The next question is about resistance. In one of your articles, you have written about how populism is created by political communities of resistance created by right-wing and left-wing populism. Is there any difference? Why? Is it a resistance to democracy?

POE: Did I think of them as a People? I hope I didn't. What I think is that you have communities and we tend to make groups. And those groups can be friends, or families, or political parties. And groups make power. Sometimes you want to resist oppression and injustice, so it is important to build groups to achieve purposes. One of the important purposes of group-making

is resisting injustice. So there needs to be certain kinds of solidarities to resist injustice, and those allow you to create groups against interests that want to perpetuate injustice. Are those The People? I don't think so. I hope they don't see themselves as a People.

Answering your question about if you wrote whether they were People or not, I think you wrote: "the populists make them feel as People, but they are not People."

POE: I mean, I guess they can become A People, but I hope they are not.

You mean they are not self-considered People, but the Populists use them?

POE: That's right. It's just so easy to use that kind of identification and say, 'let's create more power out of this.' Of course, if you identify the group with The People, it's so much easier to get more power, because there is a tendency to stick together in order to defend something that has a right for self-defense, a right for self-determination, a right of being a union. There is that tendency. However, I think those types of communities undermine democratic practices.

If democracy is supposed to be the best system, for being just and plural, then why would you want to create these groups of resistance? If democracy is so good that you want to live in it and you are part of The People, why create resistance to that system?

POE: If there would be an ideal democracy, I would not want to have resistance to it. I have not seen one yet. Most existing political systems aspire to be one thing or another, but they often foster a lot of injustices and oppression. So in those kinds of circumstances, I can see reason for communities of resistance.

What about the "mistake" that democracy makes? What are the drawbacks of democracy? What is the failure of democracy?

POE: In that article, one of the things that I have in mind is that those groups that want to become a political group around a national or cultural identity, normally I would say those groups are fantastic because they foster a sense of identity. It makes it clear, in terms of who you are and who you want to be. They foster your self-esteem and goals that you wouldn't be able to accomplish on your own. So collective aims and trust, reciprocity, solidarity... All of those things are good things on their own.

Now, my concern is that when you have subgroups like that within a state, they often have a tendency not to want to share with other groups, and so fostering those groups, they tend to break communities by exclusion. That may be a problem when those groups don't exist on their own as states, or when those groups do not exist homogeneously in one particular territory, which happens all the time. It is important to foster those groups if they have been oppressed as a People. But if they have not been oppressed as a People, sometimes it is not the best idea to have them to separate themselves from the rest, because you end up physically having to divide them. And that creates pain. So, I doubt whether you could have a world where you have territories for specific peoples, and it would not be able to exist even in the ideal world. Does that make sense?

So, there is not going to be an ideal democracy.

POE: I think an ideal democracy would be a plural democracy.

But you would need to have right-wing groups.

POE: Sure, but that would be *groups*. They wouldn't be The People. I would never imagine, nor want, a country where everyone thought the same. In my view, an ideal democracy would be a plural democracy where all sorts of groups existed and overlapped, groups that were different kind of groups. And one could belong to different groups without having to be exclusive to be a member of one of them. If that is too abstract, I think you should be able to root for a football team, and like certain colors. They are cross-cutting cleavages, as political science says.

And my final question is about the mottos that populists use: Take our country back, Make America Great Again. They are used by right- and left-wing parties alike. So what are the differences in the usage of these mottos and in which way would they differentiate?

POE: So that is where you wanted to get at when you were asking about a common aesthetic judgement. What would differentiate a populist among the right and the left? What makes them similar is that they both imagine themselves as being The People, which means that they have a particular understanding of popular sovereignty, they think that The People is sovereign and cannot be wrong, so that means that the leader cannot be wrong if they embody The People's will. How are they different? The right usually associates The People with a nation and the left with the poor, or even with the working class. So, you could have a populism like Pope Francis wants, the virtue of the poor, and a populism that is a Marxist populism, that imagines The People as a group made of the workers. But what differentiates the populist from the Marxist is that the populist is murkier; they tend to fall into the nation as well, so the extremes touch, the right and the left, in the murky part. The right emphasizes the hierarchical structure, the top-down aspects, something in common between populism and fascism, but they are not the same. Right wing populism tends to be xenophobic, but there are instances of the left being xenophobic as well, like keeping migrants away because they take the jobs away from the poor. There are differences and points in common. Moralistic ideas you can have in both sides. It seems to me that these differences are associated with the nation, mostly.

Finally, we talked about how the system is not fair. Does fair mean that it doesn't obey people's will, as politicians claim? How does, then, disobedience work in this system? Should we accept laws that are not made by us? Should we keep giving this system the power? Or, otherwise, should we just disagree and protest and change? Maybe even fight against it?

POE: This sounds interesting. Let me ask you one question: when you say the system is not fair, what do you mean by system?

The system as democracy. In your article, you claim that democracy is thought to be by the People, for the People, and right now democracy is probably neither by the People nor for the People. People don't decide

those who rule them, and people don't decide their rules, and then, as a consequence, they are not rewarded by those rules.

POE: Given that democracies are supposed to be legitimate because everybody has a chance to participate, and people have not had a chance to participate, maybe these democracies are not fully legitimate. I think that is the case, so the question is: given that democracies are not fully legitimate, should we reject them? Should we have a chance to overturn democracies? I think there are two types of considerations.

One is a pragmatic choice: maybe we have a right to overturn them, but is it convenient? Is it convenient to overturn a system that is not a very good political system but might be better than the alternatives? That's kind of the Churchill take on democracy. The democracy we have is not very good, but it's better than the alternatives. In these pragmatic terms, maybe you should try to change it from the inside, if you don't have anything better to substitute it for. The second one is: What if we could make it better? What if it would be possible to have more participation? Should we fight to make it better? I say yes!

The question is: how does one fight? I think it depends on the circumstances. In some cases, it seems that the best way to destroy oppression is to highlight the injustices by organizing in groups using the mechanisms that already exist in Constitutional democracy. That is the best way to do it. Sometimes you have to overturn the existing laws and there are different ways that are, from a pragmatic perspective, more efficient. I think a good example, because it worked relatively well, were the civil rights movements in the United States and in other places. From my perspective, I remember how people in Mexico managed to go from an authoritarian regime to something that is a bad-functioning democracy, but we can fairly say it's a democracy. It was hard to get there, and I admire those who turned Mexico from an authoritarian regime to a democracy, and I think we should not let go of it. So, yes, I think there has to be some organized movement in order to do it. Is that a populist movement? I don't think so. I think this all happens within democracy, and I don't think you need populism in order to do that. Appealing to The People in that sense actually pushes us further away from the democracy that we would like to have.

Social Solidarity and the Ontological Foundations of Exclusionary Nationalism: Durkheim and Levinas on the Historical Manifestations of Authoritarian Populism

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This paper seeks to explore the dynamics of contemporary authoritarian populism from a historical perspective, relying on the approaches of Durkheim's experimental sociology and Levinas's ethical phenomenology. By reading the works of these two thinkers in concert, a pathology is exposed within this particular form of politics in that the State must necessarily close itself off to the critique of exteriority. Our reading of Durkheim explores the social pathology of nationalism while our reading of Levinas demonstrates the philosophical dimension of this pathology as the inevitable outcome of any philosophical thinking which privileges ontology above all else. The way these thinkers address these themes can serve as a guide as we attempt to overcome the same pathology today in various forms of authoritarian populism that adopt the same mentalities and methods utilized by past forms of this corrupted idealism. Keywords: nationalism, ontology, populism, Durkheim, Levinas.

Introduction

One of the great social theorists of our time passed away in July of 2019. Ágnes Heller dedicated her life to shedding philosophical illumination on complex political and social phenomena and in her last years she deployed her considerable talents in direct opposition to the politics of Viktor Orbán, the current prime minister of Hungary. Heller's legacy is that of a political critic precisely because she refused to be drawn into philosophical dilemmas in which opposing capitalism necessarily meant dogmatically supporting Marxism. As a survivor of both the Nazi Holocaust and the Stalinist purges in occupied Hungary, Heller's primary political commitment was an opposition to totalitarianism in all its forms. Her first-hand experiences with the barbarism of both left and right totalitarian governments lead Heller to build a career as an outspoken critic of all forms of political totality.

One of the deep motivations of her work is the view that while philosophy has long engaged with conceptions of evil as it has been formulated by religious thought, in the contemporary world (beginning with Auschwitz) "demonic" evil manifests exclusively as political evil. Against Hannah Arendt's conception of the banality of evil, Heller argues that evils committed or enabled by "demonic" agents become radical only when married to practical political power. She notes that Nero, for example, "was a murderer on a grand scale because as

Emperor of Rome he had the power to murder” (Heller 2011, 24). As the technology of cruelty evolved from Nero’s flames to the furnaces of Auschwitz, the scale of atrocity within reach of demonic figures expanded exponentially. This leads to the current situation in which “modern demons are in full bloom only in the situation of power” (Heller 2011, 27). Heller’s approach shows that philosophy is uniquely suited to exposing the machinations of evil, and further, that in our time the evil most urgently vital to oppose is found in the political sphere of human life. This is why, even in her final philosophical pursuits, Heller remained firmly fixed on opposing and challenging the politics of Orbán.

Heller’s analysis of Orbán, which she offered in an interview on August of 2018, less than a year before her death, can help us orient our discussion of authoritarian populism here. When asked if she considered Orbán to be a “populist” she pronounced her diagnosis of his particular pathology as follows:

I do not like the term populist as it is used in the context of Viktor Orbán, because it does not say anything. Populists rely typically on poor people. Orbán uses nationalistic vocabulary and rhetoric, he mobilizes hatred against the stranger and the alien, but it has nothing to do with populism. It has to do with the right-wing, but this is also questionable, because Orbán is a man who is interested only in power... From the time he became the prime minister of Hungary, Orbán was always interested in concentrating all the power in his hands. I would describe him as a tyrant. He is a tyrant because nothing can happen in Hungary that he does not want, and everything that he wants is carried through in Hungary. This is a very tyrannical rule... Everyone who is under Orbán must serve him and must agree with him. No counter opinion is tolerated because this is a mass society, not a class society (Heller 2018).

This mentality of total concentration of power that Heller diagnoses in Orbán is certainly not limited to Hungarian politics nor is it only found within western countries. Rather, this same pathology can be seen as a worldwide movement that has encompassed China, Russia, Egypt, Turkey, Brazil, England and the United States. Heller remained committed throughout her life to the task of deploying the full force of philosophical rigor against this pathology and the kind of tyranny she denounced in figures such as Orbán.

But here we might take issue with Heller’s reluctance, in the passage cited above, to identify the populist element of what she calls Orbán’s mobilization of “hatred against the stranger and the alien,” which she argues “has nothing to do with populism”. In our view, Heller underestimates the way that contemporary authoritarian populism mobilizes and exploits contempt for those who are ethnically or culturally different from the hegemonic majority, not as an incidental route to power but as a formal definitive characteristic of the movement. As will be developed below, this exploitation is not as an incidental characteristic but rather is a necessary and defining methodology of the movement. Further, this appeal to the basest aspects within the human soul is inseparable from the particular kind of right-wing authoritarian populism that Orbán represents and goes to the heart of the entire tradition of exclusionary nationalist populism which can only comprehend social unity in terms of hegemonic cultural solidarity.

In discussing the kinds of solidarity which unite and divide the social order, we might

well begin with the work of Émile Durkheim. While Durkheim is mostly known for his formal experimental sociology, he was a politically active scholar who, like Heller, deployed the full force of his academic research against the most serious political challenge of his day. For Durkheim, that challenge was the rising force of nationalism in the early part of the twentieth century. In the first part of this paper we will explore Durkheim's very specific account of this particular pathology. In the second part we will attempt to orient how this pathology relies on an appeal to "elemental feelings" among the populace as an unmistakable component of past and present forms of exclusionary nationalist populism.

Durkheim Against Nationalism

As one of the founders of classical sociology, Durkheim was primarily preoccupied with the dynamic forms of social solidarity that rise and fall with historical and cultural changes. While his work rarely addresses the particular political manifestations or exploitation of these kinds of solidarity, we can see how these elements converge in his brief 1914 (republished in English in 1915) propaganda pamphlet "Germany above All," written against rising German Nationalism at the outset of the First World War and. There, Durkheim elaborates a view of a particular kind of nationalistic politics that persists today in contemporary forms of authoritarian populism. Dominick LaCapra explains the context of the pamphlet within Durkheim's thought:

One important problem which the propagandistic World War I pamphlet *Germany above All* emphasized was the crisis generated by a conflict between legal imperatives and the demands of a humanistic ethic. Although the severity of this conflict challenged his optimistic evolutionary assumptions about the non-authoritarian and democratic course of law and government in modern society, Durkheim's answer was unequivocal. In contrast to the school of juridical positivism in Germany, which had exercised some influence on his early thought, Durkheim without hesitation placed the humanistic *conscience collective* of modern society above legal duties to the state (LaCapra 2001, 87).

This interest in the conflict between legal obligation and ethical obligation is a vital theme that gets to the heart of the mentality of contemporary nationalism. This mentality harbors a deep belief that the ethical order of human life can and must be subordinated to a conception of legal accountability, which is more easily manageable by the State's legal apparatus. What this means is that ethics presents a threat to the authoritarian State as a realm that exists beyond its complete control, unlike the legislative and judicial realms which remain within the self-contained logic of the authoritarian State. Durkheim's rejection of this absolute conception of the State rests on an account of the primacy of collective moral consciousness, which he develops in great detail in the pamphlet. Durkheim advocates for an almost Kantian position of European cosmopolitanism against which Germany had rebelled. He emphatically accuses Germany of leaving the great family of civilized people that comprises European society:

It is beyond belief, they say, that Germany, which yesterday was a member of the great family of civilized peoples, which even played amongst them a part of the first importance, has been capable of giving so completely the lie to the principles of human civilization. It is not possible that those men, with whom we used to

consort, whom we held in high regard, who belonged without any reservation to the same moral community as we ourselves, have been capable of becoming those savage creatures, aggressive and unconscionable, whom we hold up to public indignation (Durkheim 1915, 3-4).

Durkheim goes on to examine the way in which this withdrawal from collective civilized morality can be understood through a particular German mentality embodied in the work of Heinrich Treitschke. Durkheim explains Treitschke's views of an exaggerated independence released from all limitation and reservation that culminates in the absolute State. Relying on this conception of exaggerated independence of the absolute State, Durkheim notes that for Treitschke, "the State is *autarkès* (self-sufficient), in the sense which the Greek philosophers gave to that word; it must be completely self-sufficient; it has, and ought to have, need only of itself, to exist and to maintain itself; it is an absolutism (8, translation modified). This definition of the State as absolute self-sufficiency, of the utter closing off to the critique of exteriority, is the foundation of Treitschke's political theory and serves as the forerunner to contemporary populist movements of radical exaggerated nationalist sovereignty.

Durkheim focuses on Treitschke's rejection of international law, or more specifically, his view that international law or treaties cannot be binding since a State cannot admit an authority superior to itself. Unlike contracts between individuals, who can and must yield to the superior authority of the State, contracts between States can have no such external force of law. Durkheim summarizes this point in Treitschke's view of the State:

Whilst in contracts between private persons there is at the base a moral power which controls the wills of the contracting parties, international contracts cannot be subject to this superior power, for there is nothing above the will of a State. This follows not only when the contract has been imposed by force, as the sequel of a war, but not less when it has been accepted by a free choice (Durkheim 1915, 10).

Durkheim's point is that while relations between individuals are guided or at least limited by ethical responsibility, no such mechanism exists in international relations. The Kantian cosmopolitanism of European morality, the great family which Germany has decided to leave behind, offered one way of solidifying a trans-national morality, which has subsequently been lost due to German aggression. Durkheim diagnoses the imminent threat to all of western civilization within Treitschke's doctrine of the absolute State as the inevitability and necessity of war which necessarily accompanies this mentality. Because competing interests and rivalry will undoubtedly arise between States that are equally unrestrained by the moral power which compels contracting parties, the inevitable result will be war since the States cannot yield to the arbitration of any external authority. Moreover, those nations incapable of imposing their collective will onto other nations cannot rightfully be called States, he continues:

Without war, the State is not even conceivable. Again the right of making war at its own will constitutes the essential quality of sovereignty. It is by this right that it is distinguished from all other human associations. When the State is no longer in a position to draw the sword at its will, it no longer deserves the name of State (Durkheim 1915, 12).

Thus, in Treitschke's view of the State, since there is no distinction between politics and war, the

essential quality of sovereignty is the power to make war. But Durkheim diagnoses the pathology of Treitschke's absolutism as not only the inevitability of war, but in the sanctity with which warfare becomes invested. Warfare itself becomes sacred in two ways: first as a necessary condition for the existence of the State, which is in turn necessary for the survival of its citizens, and second as the actual embodiment of moral virtues. Durkheim explains, quoting Treitschke at length:

War is not only inevitable, it is moral and sacred. It is sacred first because it represents a condition necessary to the existence of States, and without the State humanity cannot live. "Apart from the State, humanity cannot breathe". But it is sacred also, because it is the source of the highest moral virtues. It is war which compels men to master their natural egoism; it is war which raises them to the majesty of the supreme sacrifice, the sacrifice of self. By it, individual wills, instead of dissipating themselves in the pursuit of sordid ends, are concentrated on great causes, and "the petty personality of the individual is effaced and disappears before the vast perspective envisaged by the aspirations of the State". By war, "man tastes the joy of sharing with all his compatriots, learned or simple, in one and the same feeling, and whosoever has tasted that happiness never forgets all the sweetness and comfort that it yields". In a word, war connotes "a political idealism", which leads a man forward to surpass himself. Peace, on the contrary, is "the reign of materialism;" it is the triumph of personal interest over the spirit of devotion and sacrifice, of the mediocre and sordid over the noble life (Durkheim 1915, 12-3).

This inversion of morality functions in accord with the logic of Durkheim's account of the sacred in that it makes war itself sacred and selfless while peace is seen as profane and egoistic.

Durkheim could not have anticipated the degree to which war propaganda would be perfected during the twentieth century in order to ensure this moral inversion, although his work already explains the fundamental principles by which it will function. Following this "political idealism", the State itself becomes a personality, which Durkheim notes is necessarily "a personality, imperious and ambitious, impatient of all subjection, even of the appearance of subjection: it is only really itself in proportion to the measure in which it belongs completely to itself" (13). The State's inability to admit a power beyond itself, to close over into totality, forces the State to collapse all conception of power into the State itself. Weaker States are inevitably dominated as their dependence on others negates their absolute sovereignty. Durkheim continues: "A weak State naturally falls into dependence on another, and, in proportion as its sovereignty ceases to be complete, it ceases itself to be a State. Whence it follows that the element, which essentially constitutes a State, is Power. *Der Staat ist Macht* — this axiom, which constantly falls from the pen of Treitschke, dominates all his teaching" (14). This view that the State is Power is the underlying logic to all of Treitschke's politics and ultimately collapses the distinction between politics and war at a fundamental level. This necessarily implies that smaller countries who lack the physical strength to defend and maintain themselves in conflict against their stronger or more aggressive neighbors, cannot properly be understood as States. Thus, powerful States who are "true" States by virtue of that power, have no moral or legal obligation to respect the rights of weaker non-States who have no legitimate claim to their own sovereignty.

Durkheim is especially interested in the way the State subordinates and must subordinate all morality to its own immediate necessities. One of the central claims of Durkheim's pamphlet is that German nationalism in particular harbors a notable aversion to any morality which resides beyond the totality of the State. Any external or universal morality, such as Kantian cosmopolitanism, which could serve as a critique of the State, would be a threat to the absolute sovereignty which Treitschke insists is the essential characteristic of the State. Durkheim elaborates that the way that Treitschke responds to the potential challenge to the sovereignty of the State posed by morality is via a return to Machiavelli as a thinker who "did not hesitate to maintain that the State is not under the jurisdiction of the moral conscience, and should recognise no law but its own interest" (18). This view of the State as a closed totality, unbound by any external morality is rediscovered by Treitschke and other German nationalists seeking to solidify the absolute sovereignty of the State which is above all moral critique. Of course, acting in a moral way may well suit the interests of the State, to gain a reputation for trustworthiness might enhance the political power of the State, for example. But Durkheim makes clear that in this Treitschkean-Machiavellian conception of the relation of morality to the State, all morality serves the single purpose of reinforcing the State's authority, which is to say, to increase the Power of the State. Increasing the Power of the State becomes the Supreme Good, above all else within the moral schema dictated by the exaggerated independence of the absolute State. Durkheim notes:

Here we have a logical demonstration of the famous formula the German learns to repeat from his earliest childhood : *Deutschland über alles*; for the German there is nothing above the German State. The State has but one duty : to get as large a place in the sun as possible, trampling its rivals under foot in the process. The radical exclusion of all other ideals will rightly be regarded as monstrous (Durkheim 1915, 23).

Because the absolute self-sufficiency and autonomy of the State can admit no higher power, this would seem to necessarily enter into conflict with any claim of universal values, especially those of religion when not subordinated to the State. Monotheism presents an especially problematic challenge since the God of monotheistic religions does not refer to a particular God of a tribe or a city, but to the God of the entire human race, a universal lawgiver and guarantor of an absolute morality which applies to all of humanity. It is in respect to this monotheistic conception of the divine that Durkheim writes: "Now the very idea of this God is alien to the mentality which we are studying" (24). While nationalists like Treitschke often claim divine or religious moral grounding of their political ideology, Durkheim views any admission of a divinity beyond the State as merely a "formal reservation."

For Durkheim, this denotes the total inversion of the sacred dimension of human life, the interconnectedness of social solidarity, which is entirely supplanted by the political objectives of the State. But this is not a suspension of morality in a Kierkegaardian sense of obligations to the State forcing us to renounce or suspend conflicting beliefs that we know to be morally right. Rather, this "political idealism" represents a new morality taking the place of the old morality, which is then cast as weak and decadent since it contributes nothing to the one true duty of the State, which is to increase its power. This new morality does not only guide the actions of the State at the international level, but also in terms of the regulation of the internal life of society.

Thus, Treitschke represents not only the elevation of the State over morality, but more fundamentally over civil society itself. Durkheim makes clear the source of this antagonism:

To designate what we call the People as distinguished from the State, Treitschke and a number of other German theorists prefer the term Civil Society (*die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*). Civil Society includes everything in the nation which is not immediately connected with the State, the family, trade and industry, religion (when this is not a department of the State), science, art. All these forms of activity have this characteristic in common, that we embrace them voluntarily and spontaneously. They have their origin in the natural inclinations of man. Of our own free will we found a family, love our children, work to satisfy their material wants and our own, seek after truth, and enjoy aesthetic pleasures. Here we have a whole life which develops without the intervention of the State (Durkheim 1915, 27).

This voluntary spontaneity cannot be incorporated into the mechanism of the State, and thus presents a necessary antagonism. This civil society is what resists the pressure of the State's single-minded pursuit of its own totalization. This realm of civil life which is prior to the State, and thus exists outside the purview of its authority, Durkheim describes as:

... a mosaic of individuals and of separate groups pursuing divergent aims, and the whole formed by their agglomeration consequently lacks unity. The multiplicity of relations that connect individual with individual, or group with group do not constitute a naturally organised system. The resulting aggregate is not a personality; it is but an incoherent mass of dissimilar elements. [Treitschke] "Where is the common organ of Civil Society? There is none. It is obvious to everyone that Civil Society is not a precise and tangible thing like the State. A State has unity; we know it as such; it is not a mystic personality. Civil Society has no unity of will" (Durkheim 1915, 28, translation modified).

As an "incoherent mass of dissimilar elements", the diverse mosaic of civil society presents an antagonism with the absolute morality of the State, which demands unity, order and organization above all else. Because civil society lacks a kind of spontaneous harmony or the authoritarian imposed harmony enforced by the apparatus of the State, each of its competing interests will invariably enter into conflict, resulting in the chaos of disorder, which is anathema to the objectives of the State. The State, in turn, must inevitably resort to coercive action and commanding obedience to impose order, making obedience to the State the first civic duty. This does not require the coercion of belief, for Treitschke, merely the coercion of action, since the State has no interest in the private lives of citizens, only external obedience to the formal law. He quotes from Treitschke: "[The State] says: what you think is a matter of indifference to me; but you must obey. Progress has been made when the silent obedience of citizens is reinforced by internal and well considered acquiescence; but this acquiescence is not essential" (32). The silent obedience of the masses, yielding to the power of the State not out of agreement but out of coercion, supplants moral solidarity and fraternity. Since the first task of politics, in Treitschke's view, is to assert its own Power, this requires the overcoming of mere sentimentality and aversion to harshness on the part of the sovereign. Durkheim further quotes, with evident distaste, Treitschke's view that

“Politics cannot be carried on without harshness; that is why women understand nothing about them” (33).

It is this logic of Germany Above All, the logic of the State above morality, that allows for unrivaled levels of brutality, as Durkheim describes German conduct up to that point during the First World War. Durkheim notes:

... the individual atrocities committed by the soldiery are but the methodical application of these principles and rules. Thus the whole system is homogeneous and logical; a pre-determined concept of the State is expressed in rules of conduct laid down by the military authority, and these rules are, in their turn, translated into action by the individual (Durkheim 1915, 39).

At the level of individual action, atrocities are carried out not out of any particular malice or hatred, but out of a systematic and methodological application of the self-sufficient mentality of the State. Durkheim points to a connection between the State placing itself above both morality and civil society in such a way as the actions of its agents (specifically soldiers in this case) cannot be judged by any logic external to the State. Put another way, if the only good is the good of the State, moral agency must be oriented around the single goal the State can have, which is to increase its power. Thus, overthrowing weaker States, who are not “real” States in the sense they are incapable of exerting their own Power, is the inevitable outcome of this radical autonomy. By orienting all citizenship around the goal of increasing the power of the State, Treitschke opposes the very concept of nationality in terms of the collective of social groups living under a set of established laws. Powerful States, in pursuit of greater power, desire to impose order on these non-States, via coercion rather than their consent. This, for Durkheim, explains German aggression: “Hence the passion of Germany for conquest and annexation. She cares so little what men may feel or desire. All she asks is that they should submit to the law of the conqueror, and she herself will see to it that it is obeyed” (40).

Durkheim concludes the essay by making clear that the fundamental pathology of this mentality is not simply collective insanity or brutal sadism, but rather lies in defining the State via “a morbid hypertrophy of the will, a kind of will-mania” (44). For Durkheim, this idealism of exaggerated sovereignty leads to the inability of Germany to accept the legitimacy of international law, of the right of “lesser” States to exist, or even accept the existence of “equal” States which might serve as rivals. This produces a “frenzied race to power” (43) which will inevitably oblige Germany to attempt to outgrow any possible challenge which might come from any external forces. This is the task set forth by the political idealism that Durkheim describes, but remains impossible to realize for the individual. Rather, it is only achievable through the State, in Treitschke’s formulation, due to its unique ability to harness these disparate individual wills in order to direct them to the “supreme end” (45). Durkheim then pronounces the philosophical underpinnings of the German mentality:

The State is the sole concrete and historic form possible to the Superman of whom Nietzsche was the prophet and harbinger, and the German State must put forth all its strength to become this Superman. The German State must be “über Allés” (above all). Superior to all private wills, individual or collective, superior to the moral laws themselves, without any law save that imposed by itself, it will be able

to triumph over all resistance and rule by constraint, when it cannot secure voluntary acceptance (Durkheim 1915, 45).

This absolute superiority of the State, above all other individual or collective wills, admits no possibility of the critique which emanates from exteriority. By subordinating all wills, even morality itself, to the one task of increasing its power, the State not only becomes a personality characterized by its desire for unity, order and organization, but it becomes the only possible concrete personality.

The association of the German mentality of aggressive nationalism to the philosophy of Nietzsche is, at best, a highly selective reading of Nietzsche's concept of will to power, and must necessarily ignore Nietzsche's critique of mass culture and the herd mentality that would subordinate individual wills to any kind of collective will, including the State. Clearly Durkheim is not offering a particularly nuanced reading of Nietzsche as a social theorist, but this does reveal an important dimension of Durkheim's reading of Treitschke as the culmination not only of a particular political ideology but more fundamentally as the conclusion of a particular line of philosophical thinking. This mentality, which Durkheim associates with both Nietzsche and Machiavelli, rests on the subordination of all individual wills to a general will for the sake of increasing the power of the State.

Ultimately, Durkheim concludes his essay optimistically, noting: "When all the nations whose existence it threatens or disturbs — and they are legion — combine against it, it will be unable to resist them, and the world will be set free" (47) That optimistic view, in 1915, could not have anticipated the events of the next three years of the First World War, let alone the horrors that played out over the rest of the first half of the twentieth century and still persist in similar forms of "political idealism" well into the twenty-first century.

"Elementary Feelings" and the Degenerate Germanic Ideal of Man

Durkheim's analysis of Treitschke's nationalism takes on renewed relevance when we observe that contemporary forms of authoritarian populism have merely substituted Donald Trump's "America First" for Oswald Mosley's "Britain First" or Jair Bolsonaro's "Brazil Above All, God Above Everyone" for the "Germany Above All" embodied by Treitschke. But in order to understand the deep pathology at play within the xenophobic and jingoistic rhetoric deployed by these authoritarian figures, which has historically been deployed with extraordinary success by nationalistic populist movements, we can turn to the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas, like Heller, lost much of his family in the Holocaust and his work bares the mark of his own internment in a Nazi prison camp. Levinas's work is especially important for this task because he addresses politics at the level of underlying philosophical commitments, specifically focusing on the way philosophy has come to be singularly consumed with questions of ontology, which has left it vulnerable to this particular pathology. Levinas's work also emphasizes, as did Durkheim's analysis of Treitschke, that political manifestations of this ideology cannot be addressed purely at the level of political rationality but must rather engage it as a matter of social metaphysics.

The influence of Durkheim's thought on Levinas's phenomenological project has been thoroughly documented by Howard Caygill in his 2002 book *Levinas and the Political*, which stresses the role of Durkheim's conception of the sacred on Levinas's later phenomenology.

Caygill relies largely on the widely circulated interviews with Philippe Nemo from 1981, in which Levinas addresses not only his mature philosophical positions but the range of influences which contributed to his unique approach to philosophical questions. These interviews represent an especially important moment in Levinas's reflection on his own thought and are an indispensable resource for interpreting the political and social context of the pluralism evoked in the conclusion of *Totality and Infinity*.

One of the important characteristics of the largely informal interviews, which were subsequently collected and republished as *Ethics and Infinity*, is that Levinas makes a clear connection between his metaphysical project and the broader social context to which that project attempts to respond. This brings him to address the social dimension of his philosophical thought in much greater detail than in his more formal philosophical writings. It is in this context that in response to Nemo's question "Do you put the sociological thought of a Durkheim on the same level as the properly philosophical thought of a Bergson?," Levinas offers effusive praise for the famed sociologist:

Apparently, Durkheim was inaugurating an experimental sociology. But his work also appeared as a 'rational sociology,' as an elaboration of the fundamental categories of the social, as what one would call today an 'eidetic of society,' beginning with the leading idea that the social does not reduce to the sum of individual psychologies. Durkheim, a metaphysician! The idea that the social is the very order of the spiritual, a new plot in being above the animal and human psychism; the level of 'collective representations' defined with vigor and which opens up the dimension of spirit in the individual life itself, where the individual alone comes to be recognized and even redeemed. In Durkheim there is, in a sense, a theory of 'levels of being,' of the irreducibility of these levels to one another, an idea which acquires its full meaning within the Husserlian and Heideggerian context (Levinas 1985, 26-27).

That Levinas considers Durkheim to be a great philosophical thinker on par with the titans of the philosophical canon can help us understand how to deploy his work practically in the context of populist exclusionary nationalism that occupies us here. Levinas even seems to suggest that he remained skeptical as to whether the phenomenological approach of his mentors could function without the import of concepts more accessible via Durkheim's experimental sociology. For Levinas, Durkheim provides the foundation for a critique of phenomenology itself by insisting on the irreducibility of levels of sociality, that is, on the irreducibility of social life to the actions or consciousness of individual subjects. It is exactly this irreducibility, the radical alterity which cannot be accounted for within the frameworks of Husserlian or Heideggerian phenomenology, that Durkheim's work lays bare. This helps clarify the context in which Levinas evokes Durkheim against Heidegger in *Totality and Infinity*, when he utilizes Durkheim's social metaphysics as a way to escape from Heidegger's solipsism. Levinas notes:

... for Heidegger intersubjectivity is a coexistence, a we prior to the I and the other, a neutral intersubjectivity. The face to face both announces a society, and permits the maintaining of a separated I. Durkheim already in one respect went beyond this optical interpretation of the relation with the other in characterizing society

by religion. I relate to the Other only across Society, which is not simply a multiplicity of individuals or objects ; I relate to the Other who is not simply a part of a Whole, nor a singular instance of a concept. To reach the Other through the social is to reach him through the religious. Durkheim thus gives an indication of a transcendence other than that of the objective (Levinas 1979, 68).

Levinas will go on to oppose Durkheim's reduction of religion to observable and quantifiable practices and rituals, which is necessitated by the positivistic methodology of his experimental sociology. But Durkheim's central insight which Levinas identifies and praises in *Totality and Infinity*, and again 20 years later in the Nemo interviews, is that this social metaphysics avoids the solipsistic trappings of existential phenomenology by viewing the social as beyond the scope of ontology.

As such, it might not be surprising that when faced with Heidegger's embrace of National Socialism in 1933, Levinas evoked terminology drawn directly from Durkheim's conception of "elementary forms" in accounting for "elementary feelings" which had been awakened by populist discourse directed at the German people. As one of Heidegger's most thoroughly devoted disciples, Levinas was especially shaken by his mentor's political commitment. But while his work never addresses Heidegger's politics commitment directly, his entire philosophical project can be read as an attempt to rehabilitate thinking itself in such a way as to avoid its vulnerability to the particular pathology that engulfed the German people and even Heidegger himself. To this end, the crucial text that provides the key context to Levinas' later formal work is his 1934 "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism." This text is especially relevant for our purposes here as it draws out the crucial connection between the pathology diagnosed by Durkheim in Treitschke's nationalism and the particular manifestation of that nationalism two decades later under the banner of National Socialism, which has emerged again in our time under various terms for authoritarian populism.

The short text of Levinas's reflections is remarkable for a number of reasons. With the benefit of historical hindsight, it is easy to underestimate the penetrating nature of Levinas' perception of the pathology of Hitlerism early in its development. At a point in history in which western democracies were unsure what to make of the emerging politics of fascism, and a full decade before the full extent of the horrors of the Holocaust began to come to light, Hitler was widely seen to be a somewhat aggressive politician fighting against the political and economic woes of the Weimar Republic, not unlike many aspiring tyrants of our own contemporary political climate such as Orbán. In the same sense as current movements in nationalist or authoritarian populism are commonly perceived, at the time there was no general sense of urgency as the horrors that would come to light after the war were unprecedented and unimaginable. Even as the nation-States of western Europe pursued a doomed strategy of appeasement, naively hoping for the "Peace for our time" which would be prematurely declared by Neville Chamberlain in 1938, Levinas immediately perceived the threat and underlying pathology within the rise of Hitlerism.

Still drawing heavily on Heidegger's language from *Being and Time*, Levinas writes in his *Reflections on Hitlerism*: "Time, which is a condition of human existence, is above all a condition that is irreparable. The fait accompli, swept along by a fleeing present, forever evades man's

control, but weighs heavily on his destiny” (Levinas 1990, 65). Levinas emphatically opposes the subordination of individual freedom within the logic of Hitlerism, but also outlines the problematic conception of freedom within liberal politics as placing “the human spirit on a plane that is superior to reality, and so creates a gulf between man and the world” (66). This radical division of man and world is at the heart of what Levinas will go on to denounce as “the Germanic ideal of man” which is the necessary framework of Hitlerism’s false promise of sincerity and authenticity (70). Levinas’s denunciation of this degenerate Germanic ideal is undertaken in the name of defending civilization itself. He notes that under the spell of this degenerate Germanic ideal, “Civilization is invaded by everything that is not authentic, by a substitute that is put at the service of fashion and of various interests... Such a society loses living contact with its true ideal of freedom and accepts degenerate forms of the ideal” (70).

At the core of the short essay we find a compelling case against not only the politics and philosophy of Hitlerism, but Levinas’s attempt to describe a conception of the social which opposes this degenerate Germanic ideal. Skepticism and nihilism are attributed to this same mentality and are seen as the awakening of elementary feelings and “secret nostalgia” within the German soul. Levinas would later write, in a 1990 prefatory note to the article, that his interest in writing these reflections in 1934 was to oppose the tendency of understanding the rise of Hitlerism as some sort of collective madness or anomaly within human reason, but rather to expose the “*elemental Evil* into which we can be led by logic and against which Western philosophy had not sufficiently insured itself” (63). Clearly in 1934 Levinas could not have anticipated the scale this elemental Evil would reach over the next decade, but his early account of Hitlerism already anticipated the way in which the degenerate Germanic ideal necessarily undermines “the very humanity of man” (71). The fundamental core of Hitlerian racist ideology is not primarily anti-Semitism, but rather a skepticism towards “[a]ny rational assimilation or mystical communion between spirits that is not based on a community of blood...” (70). For Levinas, the core of racism lies in accepting the principle that “[u]niversality must give way to the idea of expansion...” (Levinas 1990, 70) If we are to read Levinas’ work as an attempt to create an ethical response to the problem of evil, as suggested by Richard Bernstein (2004), it is important to understand that the specific kind of evil that Levinas opposes is exactly what he refers to here as the degenerate Germanic ideal. While his earlier work did not elaborate this critique in the context of opposition to Heideggerian ontology, there is a clear overlap in the way he views this Germanic ideal as the negation of social pluralism and Heidegger’s ontology as the negation of metaphysical pluralism.

Levinas’s article on Hitlerism, which we should remember was written only 19 years after Durkheim’s pamphlet on Treitschke, offers both condemnation of the rise of fascism as well as a lamentation of liberalism’s failure to resist the pathological Germany mentality. Levinas demonstrates a remarkable interest in the political reaction to the fundamental social changes which accompany the shift from pre-modern to modern society, or to use Durkheim’s technical vocabulary, in the shift from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. Levinas does not approach this question as a strictly sociological or political problem, but rather something which is pervasive in the philosophical foundations of all modern society. Liberalism and fascism are addressed as political movements derived from the modern conception of the human subject, which is to say they both seek to understand the human condition strictly in terms of separation,

or more specifically, in terms of their separateness from one another. Levinas notes:

The whole philosophical and political thought of modern times tends to place the human spirit on a plane that is superior to reality, and so creates a gulf between man and the world. It makes it impossible to apply the categories of the physical world to the spirituality of reason, and so locates the ultimate foundation of the spirit outside the brutal world and the implacable history of concrete existence (Levinas 1990, 66).

For Levinas, Hitlerism signifies a rediscovering of a primal aspect of human existence that he calls, in terms that echo Durkheim's analysis of Treitschke, "the secret nostalgia within the German soul" and represents "an awakening of elementary feelings [*sentiments élémentaires*]" which "questions the very principles of a civilization" (64). This stirring of primal drives, however, is not simply a matter of a return to a more primitive human nature as Freud would have it, but rather is itself a product of social forces. Again, it is crucial to understand Levinas's philosophical analysis of Hitlerism in light of his affirmation in the 1990 prefatory note that western ontological philosophy has left us unequipped to respond to the barbarism of this elemental evil, especially in regards to Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology.

This interest in "elemental forms", both in the prefatory note and the original article, indicate profound connection to Durkheim at the core of Levinas's understanding of the political sphere. Levinas repeatedly evokes Durkheim's phraseology in referring to the elementary force [*force élémentaire*] of the simplistic [*primaire*] philosophy of Hitler, and the way it awakened these elementary feelings [*sentiments élémentaires*] within the German people. The way in which these repeated references derive their terminology from Durkheim's examination of "elementary forms" has been extensively explored by Caygill, emphasizing Levinas's insistence on the paganistic religiosity at the core of social life within Germany. Levinas notes: "For these elementary feelings harbor a philosophy. They express a soul's principal attitude towards the whole of reality and its own destiny. They predetermine or prefigure the meaning of the adventure that the soul will face in the world" (64). By returning to the language of Durkheim's social metaphysics which he had encountered prior to studying under Husserl and Heidegger, Levinas attempts to pronounce a fundamental conflict of modern society of which Hitlerism is merely one instantiation. The philosophy of Hitlerism, he is clear to point out, cannot be reduced to the philosophy of Hitlerians alone, but necessarily draws on the entire western philosophical tradition leading up to that point. While Levinas required another 30 years to develop his critique of ontology in *Totality and Infinity*, it is clear that he was already engaging at a fundamental level with the themes that would go on to motivate his work throughout the rest of his life.

Conclusion

One of the defining features of contemporary forms of populism is a distinct attempt to appeal to nationalist sentiment. Nationalism, as the antithesis of globalism or universalism, rests on a conception of the state as inherently self-contained and isolated from its neighbors in a radical way. The most recent rise of authoritarian populism is fundamentally inseparable from the constant appeals to national heritage or cultural identity that are declared to be under siege by nefarious forces of globalist hegemony. It is unsurprising that this global hegemony is often presented in anti-Semitic tones, often focusing specifically on the role of George Soros in global

politics. This paper has argued that we can understand the dynamics at play in this emergence of nationalist identity politics by examining the way this pathology has been diagnosed and addressed in the sociological tradition by Durkheim and in the philosophical tradition by Levinas.

Heller's observation on the difficulty in identifying Orbán as a populist, with which we began this investigation, rests on a conception of populism which distances its philosophical meaning from its historical manifestations. In illustrating that while Orbán uses nationalistic vocabulary and rhetoric, to mobilize hatred against foreigners, Heller remains clearly aware that these are traditional methods that authoritarian populists have long used to gain and maintain power. But, continuing her analysis, Heller notes that it is difficult even to describe Orbán as "right-wing" because his naked pursuit of power is not beholden to any political ideology beyond his own ambition and lust for increased power. But this is crucial to understanding the populist mechanism at play in the work of an aristocrat like Treitschke, who deploys anti-Semitic nationalist rhetoric instrumentally to achieve a particular end, which is increasing the power of the State. Levinas' work helps us understand not only how this rhetoric is deployed in a specific attempt to manifest resentment by drawing on the "elementary feelings" of tribalistic nationalism, but also how this degenerate mentality is deeply rooted within western philosophy itself.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Durkheim's analysis of Treitschke, at least for the context of contemporary questions of populism, is the necessary union of social solidarity and consequent political forms of exclusionary nationalism. To be clear, Durkheim's interest in Treitschke is not limited to a strictly political conception of the State, but rather addresses the interplay between social hegemony and the concrete political incarnation of this phenomenon as the unrestrained sovereignty of nationalism. While it might be tempting to exclude this social order and draw a direct connection between the State's lust for power and the fascist movements of the twentieth century, that would necessarily risk ignoring work of nationalists like Treitschke whose work predates fascism by decades. This is precisely why Durkheim's sociological analysis of pre-fascist nationalism is so vital to the current historical moment as contemporary populist movements demand their disparate nation-states abandon international accords and reject all forms of solidarity other than "blood and soil."

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Reflections From a Lifetime of Activism.

An Interview with Chip Berlet

Interviewers: Kendell Sewell, Matthew Wentz, and Austin Zinkle, *University of Kentucky*

Chip Berlet is a widely published independent scholar who studies right-wing movements in the United States and Europe, as well as the global spread of conspiracy theories. He is an award-winning investigative journalist and photographer. Since the 1995 Oklahoma bombing, Berlet has appeared frequently in the media to discuss these issues. For over twenty years, Berlet was a senior analyst at Political Research Associates (PRA), a non-profit think tank in the United States that tracks right-wing networks. Berlet is co-author (with Matthew N. Lyons) of Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort (Guilford 2000) and more recently editor of Trumping Democracy: From Reagan to the Alt-Right (Routledge 2019).

Despite a lack of a college degree, Berlet has served on the advisory board of the Journal of Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions (now Politics, Religion & Ideology); and the advisory board for the Center of Millennial Studies at Boston University. He also served for over twenty years on the board of predecessor groups of what is now the Defending Dissent Foundation. He is active in the American Sociological Association in the sections on Collective Behavior and Social Movements and Marxism. Berlet's main website is at <http://www.researchforprogress.us/>.

Chip, could you talk a bit about how you found yourself interested in activism? How did you come to involve yourself with this type of work?

CB: I started out really wanting to be a sociologist and a journalist. It was my hope when I entered college at the University of Denver that I was going to be a journalist and use sociology to report on social movements. When I was in school, I took a position on the school newspaper, which pulled me out of classes probably more than my professors would have liked. While the balance between the appreciation of sociology and journalism was a conflict, I really enjoyed reading sociology and being in sociology courses. I was one of the people promoting student strikes with the school newspaper, the Denver Clarion. It was messy looking back. I ended up still hanging onto the sociology/mass media major, but I found myself getting more and more involved with the national radical student press, called College Press Services, based in Washington D.C. Some of us in Denver were interested in helping it from going under.

I tried to stay in sociology, but I also felt compelled to continue with my activist work. The final nail was when I took a class, the Black Experience in America, taught by Dean John Rice. This reframed my understanding of activism during this period, especially when [Rice] brought in guest speakers to speak on issues related to black civil rights. He was a veteran of the Korean War and came to speak about his indictment of American warfare. In the speech by Rice, there was a line that I will never forget—"What are you going to tell your children when they ask what you did to stop this immoral war?" This blew me away. My brother is fighting in Vietnam, and he knows what I am doing as a peace activist. But as student editor for the school newspaper, I felt like I had to do something more. Then, an instructor in the Speech Department turned in his Korean War medals, writing in a letter that he no longer valued them. So, I dropped out of school, but I stayed in touch with Dean Rice, especially since [Rice] loved my work with the student newspaper. So at least with some folks, I left on good terms. Dean Rice, I can say, had a significant impact on my life even though I did not continue at the University of Denver. Both Dean Rice and Chancellor Maurice Mitchell later wrote me letters urging me to return to finish my degree.

Can you go into detail on how you got involved in studying the far-right? When did you first encounter these groups during your reporting?

CB: [After I left the University of Denver] I entered the world of alternative journalism. I kept reading sociology, as well as some political science. I moved to Washington to be the Washington correspondent for College Press Service. I moved into a small apartment with three other people that were all Washington correspondents for some obscure and penniless news outlet or another.

So, I began to do some writing about far-right movements that were in the area. There was a Nazi group that had their headquarters in the area, and I decided to confront them. They were the sort that very much enjoyed putting on the uniforms and marching on members of the mixed-race community, getting them [beaten up], and then going back home to celebrate their manhood. I thought this was pretty pathetic, but I wanted to investigate further.

At the same time, there was a group called the National Caucus of Labor Committees that was bothering these far-right people. Counter Spy magazine sent a group of writers down to investigate for a story. They were interested in calling this group the new Brown shirts of the 1970s. They did not want to say that this group was openly fascist, but they were going around and beating up leftists. So Counter Spy wanted to find someone to look into this group, and they chose me. They were worried of being sued if they were not using the term "brown shirts" fairly. So, I said that I knew someone that could help answer this. I contacted Gabriella Simon-Edgecombe, a poet and Holocaust survivor, who worked as an academic activist. I knew she had a large knowledge of the Nazi movement during the early stages of Germany. So, I asked her if she could help me work on this story, and she said that I had to let her tutor me. She had books on the early Nazi movement, and she assigned things for me to read, including books in English and books in German written in Germany during that time. We did a significant amount of excavation into the history of the Nazi party to learn about the historical origins of these movements. I eventually went back to Counter Spy and said that I, as well as Gabriella Simon-Edgecombe, would be happy to call these people the brown shirts of the 70s. We felt that we

would be able to put together a pretty good defense, even if we could have been sued to oblivion [laughs]! It was after that event that I became known as an intellectual for the activist left.

How did you put this information to use? Can you talk a little about your early work investigating right-wing groups?

CB: I began working with people that did undercover work within right-wing groups. There were lawyers, private eyes, and other investigators. We were trying to unravel how the FBI was tracking some of these right-wing groups, as well as why the FBI thought it was worth their time, outside of the obvious overlap with the John Birch Society. Some of their files were appearing in the congressional record, so I began working on this to unravel the undercover operations within right-wing groups. Together with another group of people around the country, we were able to crack this right-wing spy network that was working with the FBI and working through the John Birch Society. There was an information flow that was going from the Birch Society to undercover right-wing agents, the Church League of America, and other evangelical groups. We discovered that there was this whole network and that these groups were connected to a spy network in San Francisco, so it just kept unraveling.

So, my wife and I decided to move to Chicago, Illinois. There we decided to buy a house in an integrating neighborhood. It was a predominantly white working-class neighborhood with a few black neighbors, but most had been chased out by those in the area. This was the neighborhood where Martin Luther King led an open housing march and had something [thrown by right-wing protestors] bounce off his head. This was a famous neighborhood that was determined to stay all-white, but we moved in, bought a house, and began working with an existing anti-racist, multiracial community organization. The goal of the Southwest Community Congress was to prevent attacks against black people moving into the neighborhood. I had stereotypes about how all of this worked from following social movements and right-wing movements, like how people in the community related to [neo-Nazis]. So, we began organizing, and for the first three years we were completely outorganized by Nazis in uniform, and it was embarrassing. We just were not getting any leverage, and it became frustrating. We knew there were people in the neighborhood that worked in integrated businesses and jobs, but they would come home and work during the weekend to keep black people out. Well it turns out that there was an economic aspect to this. These people owned all these bungalows on the southwest side of Chicago, and they put all of their investments into them. So, their entire retirement is based around selling their house for more than they paid for it, so they can then go fishing in the Ozarks (laughs). And everyone was telling them, 'If the blacks come into the neighborhood then the housing prices will go down, and you will not be able to retire after all of these decades of hard work.' This was not a narrative I heard from just ten, fifteen, or twenty people, but everyone who was white was familiar with this narrative. So, one of the things the blockbusters did was to sell the homes to families they knew would not be able to make the mortgage payments, thus the local bank was stuck with all of these mortgages. So, this was a scam that was designed to put money in the pockets of real estate developers. They would sell a house two to three times the

rate to a black family than they would a white family, watch that family fail, and then be happy knowing that the black family would have to go back to a black neighborhood.

Sociologically, this came as a major shock to me. I had no idea this dynamic was going on. But more importantly, these white people in the neighborhood also did not like the Nazis. As a multiethnic neighborhood, plenty of them were disgusted with the Nazis that came through in the area. Many of them came from nations in Europe that were run by Nazi collaborationist governments during WWII.

What was one of your earliest examples of organizing in Chicago?

CB: There was the Southwest Community Congress, which was organized by progressive social movement standards, and the Southwest Parish and Neighborhood Federation, organized by more left-center groups like the Alinskyists. The Alinskyists and the Southwest Parish and Neighborhood federation wanted to create an “ethnic village” with all of these four and five story apartments. But they specifically blocked off a road that would keep black people in the area from driving through to get to a good grocery store in the area. So, my wife and I ran into some young people that were trying to advertise the ethnic village to us. We confronted them and asked if black, Mexican, or middle eastern families were allowed in the ethnic village. And it became obvious to us that this “ethnic village” was only designed to be “ethnic” enough to include versions of white ethnicities, such as Latvian, Lithuanian, and German.

A friend of mine, Curt Koehler, decided that we should endorse the ethnic village. We thought we should endorse it with a press conference with a black woman who owned a sewing store, a Mexican butcher shop owner, and a Middle Eastern restaurant owner. Anyway, these are not white people in the eyes of our neighbors. And so, we staged this event, and the press comes, and some people from the Southwest Parish and Neighborhood Federation came, because they had to. And this woman gets up—this black African-American intellectual—and announces it is so important in America to have a respect for different ethnicities and to have them tell you their stories. And she introduced these three people, and each one is in on it, and they come up on stage and say things like, “I came here to get my family into a place where we can make a living,” and one of them—a black speaker—says “the only store I could find that really had what I needed was here, just a block from Western Avenue and the patrons have been wonderful.” And two weeks later there is no “ethnic village.” It is gone. It evaporates, there is no statement, it is gone. So that’s good organizing!

In your past, whether in your work as a journalist or as a scholar, were there experiences with subjects or interviewees that really stand out?

CB: A guy pulling a gun on me was very memorable. I thought it was a “manhood” test, which I did not want to fail... He was someone I had met because I was writing about the militia movement, and he was in the militia movement. He knew that I am writing about them, and it got back to me that in a bar somewhere he threatened to kill me.

Later, the leader of the New Hampshire militia movement and I are on a television program together, and in our conversation, I happen to say, “one of your guys threatened to kill me in a bar!” And he says, “Ah, he does that every week!” I go, “really?” He says, “yeah. I will set you up with a meeting. He’ll apologize.” And he set up the meeting and they gave me a militia hat.

I met another man who was the leader of the militia movement in New Hampshire a couple of times, and he introduced me to one of his militia members who had threatened me in public. The man apologized and said he threatened to kill people all the time when he was in taverns. I interviewed him a couple of times, and I wrote about him in the book *Right-Wing Populism in America*. And I talked about him critically, but, I thought, fairly. Journalism being what it is, I thought I now have an obligation to tell him that I am going to put this in print. Because he is going to be hurt. He knows who I am, but he will still be hurt. So, I make an appointment to go up and have lunch with him in [Dartmouth] New Hampshire. And at the lunch he is all nice, saying, “we’re going to have to agree to disagree. But I have some stuff back at the house I want to show you.” Well, stupid me. I have been trained by these private eye women who say, “never do that!” All these shows where people walk alone into a warehouse. “Never do that!” So, I go back to his house, we go upstairs, and he is sitting at his desk and I am on the other side of the desk. And we are talking, and he says, “I have thousands of pages of files on you as an agent of a Jewish group. You can’t fool me anymore.” And then he begins to rail at me, and he opens his desk drawer, and then he puts a handgun on the desk in between us. What do I do now? I thought, okay. First thing: do not reach for the gun. He will be faster. Second thing: do not provoke him. Talk slowly, calmly. I say, “I’m not really who you seem to think I am, but that’s a *great* gun.” So, I get him diverted by talking about the gun and how it is small but powerful and well-made, and he seems to forget that he wants to off me. I get up, and I walk out. He unfortunately never paid income tax and is now in prison for many years.

I always felt bad. If you really believe there is a conspiracy against America, what is your obligation as a citizen? These people think they are on to this conspiracy, and now President Trump tells them that it is real. It cannot get worse than that. And that is why I am so worried about what could happen.

In 2015, I interviewed Professor Paul Bookbinder, who studies the German Weimar period. I interview him, and I think he’s going to say there are some vague parallels between the United States now and Weimar Germany, but I get him on the phone and he says, “things are really bad here—there’s a crisis! I’m so glad you called!”

That ruined my whole week. I wanted him to be the guy who says, ‘well, there are some similarities....’ But no. He says that the United States in 2019 is so similar to the German Weimar period it’s scary. He says, “I’m glad you’re writing about it, and I hope we get through this.” That was not what I wanted to hear at all.

So that is what I have been doing. Running around, telling people that there is some really good social science that says things *are* much worse than the Democrats or the Republicans want to say. And what the Democrats are saying is so *not* based on social science. It is just demonizing an other. I know Richard Hofstadter did some great social science work, but these people in right

wing movements—whom I have interviewed hundreds of—are not stupid, and they are not crazy. They are well-meaning people who believe a narrative. A narrative that they think requires them to act in certain ways. And, yes, it is white nationalism, and, yes, it is anti-Semitism. But that is not *all* it is. And this is what Arlie Hochschild wrote about in *Strangers in Their Own Land*—these are people who feel they’ve been disrespected on a massive scale, who thought they did everything they had to do for the America dream—they worked hard, raised kids, went to church, and thought they would go retire to go fishing in the Ozarks. But it is not going to happen. Their kids will not be able to go to college, they will be lucky if they can save their house, and some have already lost it. So, of course, they are pissed off. Who in American culture, history, or society can they blame?—black people, gay people, immigrants, Mexicans, Muslims. It is the other. The Democrats do not understand that they could reach these people if they would stop saying that they are stupid or crazy, and instead started talking about jobs. These are not disposable people. They can change their minds if they have a good organizer talking to them. There are alternatives to a collapse. But neither political party wants it.

It sounds like there is something hopeful in that theory you described just now, as opposed to the idea that people who buy into these extremist ideas are deluded or ignorant or whatever else. If people are ultimately rational, feeling human beings who have bought into a narrative, then there is hope for a successful counternarrative. Could you talk more about how we could work to reach across the aisle, so to speak, and talk with people in a way that would, hopefully, transform their views to something more positive?

CB: You can do it on a small level, in a community, a workplace, a church. There are small, defined places where a skilled person can go in and acknowledge their pain, which is real, but say that their solution currently is not going to work. But there is a way they can find a solution that will make them feel better about themselves [and their problems]. It could be religious or secular. There are all kinds of community leaders who can talk to people and say, “We can’t let this community be torn apart.” The biggest impediment to turning this around is the Democratic party, under their current leadership. They are surrounded by people who cite Hofstadter and treat these people like dirt. I used to go on MSNBC, but now I will not go on there anymore. They are part of the problem. Nor have they asked me since I started saying they are! The system is so broken that the democratic party is part of the problem and the liberal national media is, too.

I find allies in conservative evangelicals who say, “My flock is going down the tubes financially, and I cannot pull them away from this blame game. I need to find a way to talk to them.” I know religious people, union leaders, scholars, activists, all of whom have been able to reach into small settings and turn these problems around over time. But there is no magic fix. You have to be a part of a community to change it: if you’re going to work with a church, you have to join the church; if you’re going to work with a union, you have to be in the union; if you’re going to organize in an industry, you have to work in that industry. You have to have skin in the game. This is especially important in dealing with racism and antisemitism.

Another thing is to call people out, or to own your mistake if you are called out. Legendary Civil Rights activist Ruby Sales keeps me in line. For example, if I say on Facebook, “Trump is having a childish temper tantrum,” she will respond, “Chip, you know that’s just not true. He is a full-grown man who is using his power to crush us. So don’t you go calling him a child.” I will

think, “Wow, she’s right.” I always respond to these criticisms publicly. I’ll say, “I hadn’t thought about that. It was a bad use of terms. You are right. Sorry.” For me that is a teaching moment, to say to people, “No. You get called out for making a mistake. Own it.” That is how I continue to grow. People on my Facebook page, no matter what identity they have, will challenge me based on their knowledge of their own selves and say, “I don’t agree with that.”

Of course, we have a rule on my Facebook page that if you are impolite you get thrown off after three times that you degrade somebody on any level. You are out, and you do not come back. The discourse is really powerful. There are a lot of different people who interact on that page. As long as I keep throwing off people who are rude, it works. Of course, I go back and delete any rude things.

It sounds like that aspect of hopefulness is very community-focused, intersectional.

CB: It has to be! It has to be, by nature. If you go to do work in a community, no one gets left behind. If you’re in a white community organizing so black people can live there, and someone says something antisemitic, you point out, “You know, in our organization, there are a lot of Jews that have been working really hard on this project.” You do not have to be a genius just to stare at someone and say, “That was over the edge.” However, that kind of criticism requires the distance of having made many mistakes in the past.

Right, it is not antagonistically calling people out, but letting them know that what they have said is highly inappropriate and offensive.

CB: For me, anyways, if you want my respect, then you cannot say those kinds of things—you have lost my respect at that point.

During an organizing effort in Oregon, Loretta Ross, Suzanne Farr, and I developed a list of things to do when you go into a state. Do not build a narrative that is going to put another group at risk. It was really an operational strategy for organizers of intersectionality. You do not do any campaign that does not look at who is on the ground there, and you hold them in your hands. You are to respect them, but you hold them in your hands—this is very rural kind of talk, right?—you don’t let them drop. It is that simple, and it works. There were multiple, very complex coalitions that were built after that to stop some of these problems. A lot of people who were at that meeting went on to major positions in foundations and professional organizations, because they understood that intersectionality is not a tactic—it is a necessity.

Do you feel that more scholars need to be more involved with the methodologies of journalists and activists? You are talking a lot about this discrepancy between the top and the bottom—do you think there is a more effective way of approaching academic work?

CB: Go back to *Street Corner Society*, one of the foundational books about looking at small communities—there are all of these books by scholars who went into a community and merged into it as observers, but who were eventually welcomed as a part of that community. Rafael Ezequiel—*The Racist Mind*—studies racist skinheads in Boston. He starts out just sitting there

until someone asks, “What are you doing here?” He says, “Well, I’m a scholar. I’m working for a health study of what it’s like to be on the street in the group you’re in, how you survive, and get through this and that.” And they say, “Ah, fuck off.” But, little by little, they become part of the community. All good street-level sociologists become a part of the community, but, of course, knowing that they are not integral to it. Still, they become part of the communal furniture!—and eventually, because they treat the community with respect, which a lot of these marginal communities long for, they begin to talk to them, and at some point, there are honest conversations between a scholar and the person being studied. Everyone knows what the dynamic is, that this is a scholar, a person who studies XYZ, but they feel that the scholar has granted them the opportunity to say what they think and not be judged badly, that their persona, ideas, presentation of self in everyday society are acknowledged as being important to them—and the scholar recognizes that and records it.

I have had that experience repeatedly, talking to people who know fully who I am. I can call up leaders in various extreme, right, racist, antisemitic movements and check a quote with them on the phone or over the internet. They’ll say something like, “Chip, you fucking commie!” I will say, “Look, I need to know this.” They will say, “Okay, well, this is what I think.”

One good example, Art Jones, strategist for the Nazis, and I, a strategist for the anti-Nazis, got to know each other. One time, we were both at a demonstration, which completely fell apart. I got run over by mounted cops saving a group of Communists from 500 screaming white youth at one of these rallies in Market Park. I got run over. I am a city boy. I am there with my Nikon, waiting to get the best picture, and a horse rump twists me around on my knee. There was a very loud sound. I no longer can walk. So this Communist group I know comes over and says, “You look like you’re in bad shape. We’ll drive you over to your car,” which they did. So later, I’m in this knee cast, and both Art Jones and I were standing in line for a program with several leaders of White Nationalist and neo-Fascist and neo-Nazi groups. We had been invited on an Oprah Winfrey show about white supremacists in the Midwest, and I’m an audience plant. On the stage are all these people I have organized against, some of whom know me. I certainly know them. As we are waiting to go in, Art Jones sidles up to me, and I know he is not a threat. He looks at me and says, “Chip, what happened?” I say, “Oh, you remember that demonstration we were at, I had my camera up, and a horse rump hit me and twisted me around, and I’ve been in a cast for months.” He says, very seriously, “Chip, how’s the horse?” How can I not laugh? It was so deadpan! I know he is a Nazi, but it was funny! What can I tell you? He is a funny guy.

As you think about your long career as an organizer, why do you do what you do? As in, do you enjoy working with these extremist individuals? What gets you up in the morning when you are working with such upsetting ideas? I imagine it can be depressing, bring you down. Do you see yourself stopping any time soon?

CB: Yeah, I will probably die at some point! But I do not think I am going to stop any time. I find it much too interesting. I keep getting asked to write things. I get up in the morning and I think, “I can do a little bit to make the world a better place by treating everyone as having a basic humanity, and it is my skill level that will determine whether or not I can move them an inch

toward human rights." I have moved some people really far toward human rights. But I think my greatest efforts have been in communities to help people learn how to create a peaceful environment even in a group of people who will never get along.

Can you reach a kind of peace treaty in the neighborhood? Is there a way to explain to people that they are never going to get everything they want? That they are right that the American government has treated them badly, but their solution is not going to help? I think it helps to be someone who can say, "Yes, you've been screwed. But other people have been, too. So why would you turn on them?" It is partly that I am a Christian. I think we are put on this planet to do good. I have found a way to do good, and that satisfies me as an intellectual, a scholar, a journalist, an activist, but also as a person. I think I've done some good, and I hope I can do some more good. And I will still say I know a Nazi who can crack me up with a good joke. That does not mean I think he is doing good stuff. I just recognize that, somewhere in him, is a spark that can tell a funny joke. That means that someday, maybe someone will reach him.

Nationalpopulism, Right and Left: The Social-National Synthesis Today.

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For most of the postwar period the idea of merging socialist (or popular) and nationalist elements was marginal in Europe. But in the last two decades we have been witnessing a new form of social-national synthesis: nationalpopulism. This article examines this resurgence by comparing right-wing nationalpopulism and left-wing nationalpopulism. In order to do so, it focuses on four European countries: France, Italy, Greece and Spain. While there are both policy and discursive similarities between these two forms of nationalpopulism, this article argues that they are fundamentally different and belong to antagonistic ideological factions. Keywords: populism, nationalism, Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini, Syriza, Podemos.

Introduction

'Populism' is undoubtedly one of today's most disputed political terms. The proliferation of literature on the topic has led to a semantic inflation that threatens the possibility of reaching an operative definition. Its overuse in the mass media, as well as the fact that it is generally employed in an illocutionary, rather than descriptive, way only adds to the problem. Moreover, the different forms of populism are often mistaken for one another, causing a problematic assumption of homogeneity.

This paper does not intend to contribute to the blossoming literature on generic populism. It will instead examine a variant of populism, nationalpopulism, in its two main forms, by focusing on the European context. Analyzing the differences between right-wing nationalpopulism (RWNP) and left-wing nationalpopulism (LWNP) requires a concrete framework, one that allows an understanding of these phenomena in depth instead of simply analyzing their surface features. In order to conduct such examination, this work will employ the theory of populism developed by the Essex School of Discourse Analysis (ESDA) in the last four decades.

Populism will thus be understood as "a way of constructing the political" (Laclau 2005), rather than as a political style (Moffitt 2016), a thin-centered ideology (Stanley 2008; Mudde 2014) or a political tactic (Weyland 2001). In order to examine the different faces of nationalpopulism, this work will thus go beyond ideational and functionalist approaches by engaging in a discourse analysis as understood by David Howarth (2013) and other members of the ESDA. Of course, the commitment to associate nationalism and left-wing, or social demands, is far from being a historical novelty. What is here referred to as the first social-national synthesis took place between the end of the nineteenth century and the second half of the twentieth century, when both left-wing and right-wing forces sought either to use the

power of nationalism for social purposes or to add social and popular elements to their nationalist projects (Sternhell 1994, 6). What we have been witnessing in the last two decades, in a context of neoliberal globalization, is the emergence of a second social-national synthesis in Europe, although this time in the form of an amalgamation of post-1945 nationalism with a non-revolutionary type of populism.

Nationalpopulist discourses will be considered as contemporary phenomena, rather than as the return of any concrete political tendency. Yet referring to past attempts to creating a social-national or popular-national synthesis can be valuable. This paper will regard them as proof of a recurrent practice within modern societies that now takes new historical forms. Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès or Enrico Corradini therefore play the same role here that Joseph de Maistre could have in an essay on fascism or François-Noël Babeuf in an account of communism, that is, not as part of the object of study but as historical precedents that can help us to understand it.

Both RWNP and LWNP are here considered forms of nationalism. It is certainly not the first time that nationalism emerges as a product of the hybridization between national consciousness and a concrete political tendency (Álvarez Junco 2017). After all, nationalism has been combined with ideals of liberty against absolute monarchs both in America and Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the democratic struggles during the 1848 revolutions, with reactionary and imperialist goals between the nineteenth century and the fascist era, with socialism in the USSR under Stalin's regime, as well as in Cuba, Yugoslavia, and China, with anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa, and with religious affiliations in countries like Iran and Israel. This is why Anthony D. Smith describes nationalism as a movement "with chameleon-like adaptability" (Smith 1998, 44).

This paper is divided in two sections following the section on methodological clarifications. The first explores RWNP by analyzing a series of contemporary political discourses. It will mainly focus on two European countries that have been witness to the rise of right-wing populist parties in the last decade: Italy and France. The second part examines LWNP by focusing on two European nations which are at the origin of the two most successful left-wing populist parties of the continent: Spain and Greece. This case selection allows for an exploration of the differences between the two forms of European nationalpopulism in heterogeneous contexts.

Methodology: the Essex School of Discourse Analysis

This article employs the theory of populism formulated by the Essex School of Discourse Analysis since the eighties as its framework. Its key constituents are Ernesto Laclau (the author of *On Populist Reason*), Chantal Mouffe (co-author of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*), David Howarth, Aletta J. Norval, Yannis Stavrakakis (editors of *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change*) and Jason Glynos (co-author of *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*).

Their framework questions the division between linguistic and extralinguistic realities by formulating a notion of 'discourse' influenced both by post-structuralist authors such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and by linguistic pragmatists such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 105-108). It starts from the premise that "every object is constituted as an object of discourse," which in no case implies questioning the existence of social or material reality (108-110). It is thus a rejection of epistemological formalism that emphasizes the importance of political and social aspects of

the production of knowledge.

Using this theoretical frame, Ernesto Laclau analyzed the way collective political identities are formed in his seminal work *On Populist Reason* (2005). He did so through an examination of populism, a way of constructing the political that he, as an Argentinean who witnessed the rise and fall of Peronism, knew well. According to Laclau, the unit of analysis when scrutinizing political groups should not be the class or the individual, but rather the different demands which, once articulated, compose a collective identity (Laclau 2005, IX). The process of articulation is defined as “any practice establishing a relationship among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 105). Laclau designates two types of demands: democratic and popular. Democratic demands are those which remain isolated, while popular demands are those which are part of a populist formation (Laclau 2005, 74).

The result of the articulatory practices is the emergence of a discursive formation (Laclau 2005, 87). Here, Laclau refers to the populist movement or party (but more broadly to any political identity) by using a linguistic metaphor, following David Howarth’s definition of discourses as “concrete systems of social relations and practices that are intrinsically political, as their formation is an act of radical institution which involves the construction of antagonisms and the drawing of political frontiers between insiders and outsiders” (Howarth 2000, 9). The content of any particular element (for example, a demand, a word, a stance...) depends on the discursive formation in which it is inscribed. In other words, the signifiers ‘our nation’ or ‘the people’ can only be understood as parts of the political structure they are part of. This approach avoids the misconception that right-wing and left-wing populist movements must be similar since their discourses sometimes semantically overlap.

The construction of equivalential links between the demands, essential for the cohesion of the movement, depends on the production of empty signifiers. This is a concept borrowed from Jacques Lacan’s work. Laclau (2005) defines the empty signifier as “a particularity embodying an unachievable fullness” (71). In this context, ‘signifier’ is understood in its widest sense. It can be a symbol, such as a word, a flag, an icon, or a leader, and in any case it will have to be the product of a “radical investment,” which means that there will be an important affective relation between ‘the people’ and that empty signifier (97).

The operation whereby a particularity takes an “incommensurable universal connotation” is what Laclau calls ‘hegemony’ (70), an important term with several meanings in the history of Marxist thought (Anderson 2017). Therefore, “in a hegemonic relation, one particular difference [for example, a national symbol] assumes the representation of a totality that exceeds it,” which leads us to the notion of synecdoche, a rhetorical device whereby the part of something represents its totality. According to Laclau (2005), the synecdoche “is not simply one more rhetorical device, simply to be taxonomically added to other figures such as metaphor and metonymy, but has a different ontological function” (72). In populist movements ‘the people’, although it logically cannot represent the totality of the population, presents itself as the *populus*, that is, as the entirety of the polity.

According to this approach, populism will thus be defined as a political movement that: 1) articulates heterogeneous unsatisfied demands, thereby creating an original discursive formation and a new ‘collective will’; 2) is based on the construction of equivalential links and dichotomic frontiers as well as on the universalistic pretension of representing the totality of the *populus*; and, 3) has an antagonistic and metapolitical approach, inasmuch as it seeks to

question and transform the political landscape, both in terms of who is the hegemon and how the political map looks like.

Thus, we shall define nationalpopulism as a type of populist movement in which the nation acts as the key empty signifier, and in which hegemony is achieved thanks to a nationalist stance which serves as a bonding agent for several, heterogeneous demands. Nationalpopulism stems from a fusion of popular and national elements and sees the 'national people' as the main political actor, a collective identity threatened by its generally foreign antagonists and linked thanks to national symbols and common historical traits.

Inasmuch as nationalpopulism promotes "a sentiment or consciousness of belonging to the nation" and it can be considered as "a social and political movement on behalf of the nation," it can be defined as a form of nationalism according to Anthony D. Smith's classical characterization (Smith 2001, 5). It also fits Alberto Martinelli's definition of nationalism as an ideology that "fosters specific collective movements and policies promoting the sovereignty, unity, and autonomy of the people gathered in a single territory" (Martinelli 2018, 14).

Right-wing Nationalpopulism: the Plebeian Nation

This section seeks to dispel the myth that right-wing nationalism has always been either related to socially conservative stances, or simply indifferent to any kind of social policy. This perception is probably linked to the idea that nationalism is an 'outward-looking' ideology concerned with international affairs rather than with public policies, but also to a general lack of knowledge about the several historical attempts by right-wing nationalist movements to integrate social, economically illiberal concerns.

The most important examples of this social-national synthesis can be found in France, Germany, and Italy during the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1898 Maurice Barrès, a French novelist and politician, coined the term 'national-socialism' and called to fight against an alleged political alliance between the Jewish people, bankers, leftists, Germans, liberals, and cosmopolitans of any kind. Barrès was a fierce supporter of Boulangism, a movement with both nationalist, revolutionary, populist and Jacobin roots (Sternhell 1973, 1). A decade later, Oswald Spengler—one of the main exponents of the *Konservative Revolution*—published "Prussianism and Socialism," in which he offered his idea of socialism as "a way of life" inseparable from authoritarianism, communitarianism, and nationalism (Spengler 1908, 32). Around the same time, one of the most influential thinkers of Nazism, although not a Nazi himself, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, defended his idea of a "German socialism" based on social corporatism and revolutionary conservatism (O'Sullivan 1983, 144-147).

In terms of political praxis, Charles Maurras, the leader of radical right party Action Française, was one of the most ardent proponents of "embracing socialism after extricating it from its cosmopolitan and democratic elements" (Sternhell 1994, 119). In Germany, a worker-based branch of Nazism called Strasserism, along with the hybrid movement of the National-Bolsheviks created by the former socialist militant Ernst Niekisch were the most prominent expressions of the national-social blend during the interwar period.

But the climax of the social-national synthesis took place in Italy during and after the Great War (1914-1918). As Massulli (2014) explains, the Italian revolutionary syndicalists had an enormous influence in the advent of fascism. Both nationalists (such as Gabriele d'Annunzio and Enrico Corradini) and former socialists (such as Michele Bianchi and Benito Mussolini) understood the necessity of somehow associating both worldviews. The Italian

socialist Arturo Labriola argued in 1910 that there were two types of nationalism: the nationalism of the workers—popular and equalitarian—and the nationalism of the elites—dishonest and imperialist (Sternhell 1994, 250). In the aftermath of the war the *fasci di combattimento* and Associazione Nazionale Italiana, the embryos of the Partito Nazionale Fascista (1921), were the main proponents of this form of national socialism whereby the *ethnos* is a plebeian political subject opposed to unpatriotic elites.

Apart from Alceste de Ambris, the majority of Italian revolutionary syndicalists (Agostino Lanzillo, Angelo Olivetti, Sergio Panunzio, Alfredo Rocco among others) reached important positions within the fascist regime by promoting a plebeian, social and revolutionary variety of nationalism that had also succeeded on the other side of the Alps, although by taking a different form. The core idea running through this ideological articulation can be summed up by Ramiro Ledesma's famous statement (today surprisingly parroted by the Spanish far-right party Vox): "Only the rich can permit themselves the luxury of not having a homeland" (Jones 2019). There are thus two key elements: the articulation of the social and the national and the idea that the motherland is a protection against anti-social and alien disruptive forces.

This historical period, from the late nineteenth century to 1945, 'the first social-national synthesis' ended up calamitously with the defeat of the Axis in 1945. It is not until the last decade (with the exception of the surprisingly popular Movimento Sociale Italiano) that we can find a serious attempt to articulate social and nationalist stances from the right in Europe. Instead of a corporatist, revolutionary nationalist, or national-syndicalist force, it has emerged as right-wing national populism (RWNP).

Here again it is necessary to start in France. In 2012 the Front National (rebranded as Rassemblement National in 2018) became a party that rejected the left-right classification and promoted a distinction between 'the people' (sometimes referred to as "the forgotten" who "suffer in silence") and 'the elites' (both French, European and global). Both elements were part of Jean-Marie Le Pen's discourse as well, especially during his last years as president of the party when he flirted with populist strategies, but the difference is that in his case those were rhetorical devices that didn't represent the ethos of his Front National (Eltchaninoff 2017). In Marine Le Pen's genuine populist project, however, the commitment to build a dichotomic frontier between 'the people' and 'the elites,' and the preference for an ambiguous discourse that ventures into traditionally liberal and leftist semantic domains, is of paramount importance. This nationalpopulist stance, which includes many social elements, was mainly envisioned by Florian Philippot, her former right-hand man (Fernández-Vázquez 2019).

Marine Le Pen often engages in RWNP discourses, and she does so in two ways. First, she and her populist party seek to articulate a plurality of democratic demands that are social, territorial, and cultural, and which are then presented as national problems from which the 'French people' is suffering. Second, the now popular demands are often deemed to be solvable only by confronting an international, rather than national, antagonist. This international antagonist has many faces—immigrants, Muslims, 'global elites,' European bureaucrats and its French allies—but because populist discourses not only create equivalences between demands but also between their opponents (that is, 'the people' and the 'elite' are both the product of discursive bricolage), the antagonist appears as an alliance between different groups with shared interests. The idea at the heart of RWNP discourses is that the nation and its people, who are here one and the same, are oppressed by non-national

actors. Marine Le Pen provided good evidence of this when she accused the then French president François Hollande of being “the vice-chancellor of the province of France for Germany” and imposing austerity measures that only benefit Berlin (Bogani 2015).

Italy, probably the most important nation when it comes to social-national syntheses, has also witnessed the emergence of RWNP stances. In reality, the social-national position did not abruptly end in Italy in 1945, for it was to some extent defended by the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) until decades after. But Matteo Salvini’s Lega is far from being a fascist movement, unlike the MSI or CasaPound, which are contemporary genuine examples of such current (Gentile 2019). After all, it is clear that this former Padanian secessionist, who has shifted his party from regionalism to Italian nationalism (and from 4% to more than 34% of the vote), has espoused stances that are closer to Marine Le Pen than to Giorgio Almirante.

Although at the moment Salvini seems to have opted for an alliance with other right-wing forces (mainly Forza Italia and Fratelli d’Italia) due to the incentives derived from the architecture of the electoral system of his country, between June 2018 and September 2019 he was Minister of the Interior in a coalition government with the Movimento 5 Stelle. It was during that period that he adopted a RWNP discourse. In December 2018 he claimed that he preferred “a government trusted by the people rather than one trusted by the international markets” (Il Fato 2018). The problem of Europe, according to him, is that it is ruled “by the finance oligarchy and those who permit mass immigration” (L’US 2019). After the European Union rejected the 2018 Italian budget, which sought to introduce a universal basic income and lower the retirement age, the so-called “people’s budget,” he urged EU leaders to “respect the Italian people” (France24 2018). In October 2019, shortly after the end of the coalition government, Salvini said he represented “the people against the elite, the squares against the palaces” (*popolo contro elite, piazza contro Palazzo*) (ReggioSera, 2019).

Mirroring his ally Marine Le Pen, Salvini stated in 2018 that the power of banks, the EU, austerity, mass immigration and economic precariousness are part of the same ‘regime’: “the next elections [the European elections of 2019] are a referendum between the Europe of the elites, of banks, of precariousness, of immigration, of austerity and the Europe of the people and the workers” (Valenti 2018). Political elites, immigrants (and NGOs), banks, the Left, EU bureaucrats... all conspire against ‘the (national) people,’ victims who just want good jobs and a sovereign state that can protect them from the dangers of globalization. In a rally in Milan with Le Pen and other leaders of the Western European radical right, Salvini cried out against “this immigration which has submerged our nations, putting our people at risk” (CGTN 2019).

Those who serve foreign elites are thus ‘traitors against the motherland,’ which is exactly what Salvini accused Giuseppe Conte of being, because according to him he used Italian money to rescue German and French banks (Salvini 2019). It is important to highlight that the problem does not consist in using taxpayer’s money to rescue a bank, but to do so to rescue a non-Italian bank. It is interesting to note that this nationalist momentum has prepared the ground for the emergence of LWNP forces as well, such as Patria e Costituzione or VOX Italia (created by the self-declared Marxist thinker Diego Fusaro).

Salvini and Le Pen claim to confront both mass immigration, Islamism, and the economic and political elites. This is why the idea of RWNP as a discourse that focuses on the construction of vertical frontiers instead of horizontal, ‘people versus elites,’ held by

Hameleers (2018, 6) and by Gilles Gressani (2019, 77) is a misconception. If anything, it could be said that it promotes a diagonal frontier, including both ‘the establishment’ and non-nationals, who are somehow part of the same group of interest (this is why the conspiracy theory of *le grand remplacement*, formulated by Rénaud Camus, is so appealing for RWNP militants). The idea that there is an alliance between the economic and political elites and ethnic minorities might seem extravagant, but it is certainly not an innovative view in the history of the radical right (Hanebrink 2018; Baker 2006).

Therefore, the basic idea is that ‘the people’ has been left behind and its social and cultural demands are not satisfied by a political system that would rather serve the interests of immigrants, Muslims, and foreign elites. This inevitably reminds us of nationalist or far-right movements. Yet RWNP is different from these at least in two ways. First of all, it is not just a reactive and xenophobic movement, and contrary to other radical right forces, neither Rassemblement National nor La Lega are niche parties. As a populist movement, RWNP formulates “a certain historical horizon” (Laclau 2005, 116), that is, it presents a socio-political alternative and promises to bring a new state of things into existence. And secondly, it links popular discontent not only with an ‘unpatriotic elite’ (co-opted by foreign actors) but also with the need of reinforcing or at least defending the social assistance that was built during the *trente glorieuses*, thereby fueling the so-called Welfare chauvinism (Ennsner-Jedenastik 2017).

RWNP is certainly popular and plebeian but, so to speak, in a *völkisch* way. It offers a vision of its country as an underdog in the international arena while including social concerns, which inevitably reminds us of Enrico Corradini’s idea of Italy being a “proletarian nation” both morally and materially (Corner 2012). It bases its vision on the idea that both international relations and the distribution of social resources are highly competitive, and that the nation and its people must be protected from such a hostile world. This had led politicians like Salvini or Le Pen to subscribe to realist positions, flirting both with China and Russia while at the same time acknowledging the economic importance of the EU (Lafont 2017).

Today’s proponents of the right-wing social-national synthesis are inspired by economists such as Maurice Allais (a fierce critic of globalization and ‘the free-trade ideology’), Bruno Lemaire and Louis Alliot (who consider that sovereignty and social expenditure are interconnected), and Bernard Monot (who praises state intervention and seeks to find a third way between liberalism and anticapitalism). In Italy, Alberto Bagnai (who defines himself as a Eurosceptic post-Keynesian left-wing populist despite being La Lega’s main economist) claims that only the nation-state can guarantee social dignity to workers (Petti 2013). Bagnai declared himself nationalist, populist, and socialist (Bagnai, 2013). His colleague Claudio Borghi, who shares Bagnai’s hard Euroscepticism, associates monetary sovereignty with social well-being (Carli 2018).

All of them are critics of the current economic state of affairs and are clearly concerned with social welfare. They oppose neoliberal arrangements and the ‘end of politics’, two key factors of the emergence of populist forces, as Chantal Mouffe noted (Mouffe 2004, 48). Yet their anti-globalization stance must be nuanced: as was the case with interwar fascists (Paxton, 2004, 10), their rhetoric against the markets, the finance and international treaties is always selective. RWNP forces do not pretend to replace the current economic system, but rather to reinforce the possibilities of their nations to compete in it. In a highly competitive world, only by protecting their economies from immigration and globalization, they think,

they can also protect ‘their people’.

Left-wing Nationalpopulism: the Nationalization of the People

The idea of associating social and nationalist elements as a leftist strategy was much less popular than the opposite during the first social-national synthesis. It can be considered as a punctual and calculated strategy rather than as a genuine and enduring political articulation. For example, in the context of the rise of fascism in Germany the KPD understood during a brief period of time the utility of being at the forefront of the national opposition against the “imperialist Versailles Treaty” (Moreau, 2018, 161). Leon Trotsky, referring to the same country in 1930, encouraged the German proletariat to strategically “put itself at the head of the nation as its leader” (Beetham, 2019, 205).

Yet there are historical examples of left-wing social-national syntheses, especially at the beginning of the 20th century, a period marked by a profound crisis of Marxism and the resulting frustration of some socialist militants (Sternhell 1994, 15). The French philosopher Georges Sorel, author of *Réflexions sur la violence* (published in 1908), paved the way for the idea that the Left had to find new mobilizing myths instead of focusing on rationalist and economist discourses. The already mentioned Italian revolutionary syndicalists, deeply influenced by Sorel, saw in national consciousness and war mobilization the opportunity to appropriate powerful myths and symbols. “The motherland shouldn’t be rejected, but seized” (*La patria non se contesta, ma se conquista*), were the famous words of Edmondo Rossoni, leader of the Unione Italiana del Lavoro in 1918, a sentence later repeated by a still socialist Benito Mussolini.

But the post-colonial world was and remains certainly a much more appropriate context for this type of social nationalism. In Latin America, Africa, and Asia, the national-building process took place at the same time as the anti-colonial struggle. It was also impacted by Marxism and by Soviet support, both before and after the Second World War (Young 2001, 161-167). Ernesto Laclau himself took an active part in a LWNP Argentinean party, the Partido Socialista de la Izquierda Nacional, during the sixties. Today, in the majority of Latin-American countries (Bolivia, Argentina and Venezuela are probably the best-known examples), it is possible to find left-wing political parties which advocate nationalist positions, both against their national adversaries and against Washington. The case of Europe is exactly the opposite, inasmuch as since the end of nineteenth century nationalism in this continent has conservative, authoritarian and xenophobic connotations (Hobsbawm 1990, 101-107).

This is why the rise of the Greek party Syriza at the beginning of this decade was such a surprising phenomenon. Syriza was created in 2004 as a coalition of different radical left groups (with Synaspismos, a Eurocommunist organization, as its major member), but around 2010 it shifted toward a populist strategy (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014). The populist turn proved successful; Syriza climbed from 4% of the votes in 2009 to 16% in 2012 and 28% in 2015. Alexis Tsipras, the leader of the coalition since 2009, was inspired by the 2010-2012 anti-austerity movement (the so-called *Aganaktisménon- Politón*, ‘movement of the outraged’) and by the several work-based mobilizations of the period, which included several general strikes. He then realized that there was a possibility to articulate a plurality of demands that neither PASOK (the socialist party, in government between 2009 and 2011) nor, of course, the conservatives could satisfy. Syriza never became a nationalpopulist party, nor can it be compared with Salvini’s Lega or Le Pen’s Rassemblement National. However, it did engage in LWNP discourses, although only in certain circumstances. It is significant that both during

the first and the second Tsipras governments (2015-2019), Syriza's junior coalition partner was Independent Greeks, a Greek nationalist right-wing party.

This unnatural alliance took place in a context in which austerity and economic crisis were associated by many Greeks with foreign interference. After all, the European Union, led by Germany, was perceived as the political actor behind the public spending cuts and the several tax increases. A wave of Euroscepticism swept through the country, to the point that in January 2014 Nigel Farage became highly popular among many anti-austerity Greeks (Smith 2014). Still, today Greece maintains a less favorable view of the EU (Pew Research Center, 2018) and of Germany (Pew Research Center, 2019). The narrative supported both by the German government and by some German media only worsened the situation (Kutter 2014). Moreover, Greece was continuously discredited by the three main rating agencies (Moody's Investors Service, Standard & Poor's and Fitch Ratings), all of them American.

This was obviously a favorable environment for Greek ultranationalism. The neo-fascist party Golden Dawn won 7% of the votes in 2015 and became the country's third political force, whereas the Independent Greeks (Syriza's partners) won almost the 5%. During the strikes and the anti-austerity marches, both European and German flags were burned on several occasions. However, Tsipras was always careful not to fall into the trap of xenophobic discourses, and Syriza's relationship with nationalism from 2012 to 2015 is very different than that of its far-right partner. Analyzing it will provide us with valuable information to understand LWNP.

First of all, it is important to analyze the role of nationalism and of national consciousness in shaping the political identity formed from the links between the different social demands. Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014, 10) draw attention to how Tsipras and Syriza continuously employed the word 'people' in order to identify their supporters and create the idea of a homogenous and united group, ready to oppose 'the establishment.' Yet it is important to note that, at least since the January 2015 Greek legislative election, Tsipras started to refer to 'the people' as 'the Greek people,' 'our people,' and 'our country'. The nation, and not the leader or the signifier 'people,' became the empty signifier of Syriza's discursive formation. But here the nation is not an ethnic entity, but a popular one. Because both RWNP and LWNP discourses employ the signifier 'the people' we can be lead to confusion, but in Syriza's case it is clear that he refers to the people as *plebs* (as a subaltern, popular group) and not as *ethnos* (an ethnic or racial group). Therefore, instead of the nation being 'popularized,' the people, meaning here the economically subaltern, are 'nationalized.' And so here the nation and the *plebs* are one.

This ephemeral nationalist turn was probably inevitable, since the Greek government's main adversaries were at that moment international, or foreign, actors. A few days after Syriza's victory, Tsipras and other members of his government paid homage to the Greek communists who fought against the Nazis during the war. In a moment of increased tensions with Angela Merkel's government, Panos Skourletis, spokesman of Syriza, declared that the symbolic act "represents national resistance to occupation, but also the natural desire of Greeks for freedom, for liberty from German occupation" (Smith 2015). It is therefore hardly surprising that the Syntagma Square was filled with national flags during the June 25, 2015 referendum, when Greek voters rejected austerity proposals from the country's creditors.

Secondly, during this brief period from 2014-2015 the antagonist was no longer the national elite or establishment, but foreign powers. Certainly both PASOK and New

Democracy, the two main parties prior to Syriza's dramatic ascendancy, were denounced as the culprits of the malaise of the people, but the Greek elite were now presented as allies of European and German actors. Yanis Varoufakis, the Minister of Finance from January to July 2015, claimed in August of that same year that "the European leaders" act collusively with "Greek oligarchs" in order to allow them "to maintain their stranglehold on Greek society while punishing ordinary people" (Inman 2015). The tension between Varoufakis and the German government only increased when 2013 footage of him saying that Greece "should simply default on its debts and stick the finger to Germany" became viral (The Economist, 2015).

Syriza undoubtedly embraced a nationalist discourse that emphasized national-popular resistance against foreign, and powerful, enemies, with a focus on Germany and, to a lesser extent, the European Union. The movement had no problems with making problematic historical analogies. Is there really any difference with Salvini's or Le Pen's approach? In fact, and despite what some media commentators may think, there are at least three. First of all, Syriza's LWNP discourses were always internationalist, or at least regionalist. Tsipras and Varoufakis always underlined that their struggle was a European one, inasmuch as they genuinely intended to "free Europe" from austerity (Konstantinidis 2015). Secondly, Syriza, understanding the importance of the European project beyond its economic aspects, was always reluctant to fall into hard Euroscepticism. Its critique of the EU was always self-limited and hardly survived the year 2015. Finally, and this might be the key difference between European and Latin-American LWNP, Syriza's nationalist stance was only situational and, contrary to RWNP forces, it was never part of the party's discursive essence.

Instead of being the product of the union of different pre-existing left-wing parties, the Spanish party Podemos was created in 2014 as a self-conscious populist force opposed both to the socialists and to the far left. Pablo Iglesias' party abandoned to some extent its populist strategy during the year 2016, when the Spanish political system began to rearticulate and he decided to form an alliance with the far-left party Izquierda Unida, thereby changing its name to Unidas Podemos (United We Can). Prior to that, Podemos was a very particular example of populism, for it consciously operated by using Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's works as its strategic guideline (Errejón and Mouffe 2015, 7; Alcántara 2015), so much so that it could be described as a 'Laclauian party'. The main founders of Podemos, including Iglesias, also drew inspiration from several Latin-American nationalpopulist movements. This prepared the ground for a political force eager to articulate all kind of heterogeneous demands and very calculating when it came to language and discourse. Its capacity to transcend the discursive milieu from which it comes from (the Spanish Left) is probably only comparable to Marine Le Pen's.

Podemos' LWNP momentum overlapped with that of Syriza (2014-2015) with the creation of the party in January 2014, although as we shall see, some nationalpopulist elements persist today within the party and surface from time to time. Pablo Iglesias and Alexis Tsipras were close allies during this period. Iglesias travelled to Athens the day before the Greek legislative election and claimed that "the Greeks won't bow the knee before Germany, they don't want to go back to the past [a reference to the Nazi occupation of Greece], they know Tsipras is a lion (sic) that will defend its people despite everything" (Velasco 2015). A few months before, he stated that Greece deserved "to have a patriotic president who can protect the interests of the people" (Gil 2015). After Syriza's victory, he basically paraphrased Marine Le Pen's abovementioned remark on François Hollande being Merkel's vice chancellor by

saying he was happy that Greece “will have a Greek president and not a representative of Merkel” (Carvajal 2015).

Iglesias, always willing to flirt with positions unfamiliar to the Spanish left, went as far as to declare that he didn’t want Spain to be “the country that serves beers and *tapas* to rich people from northern Europe” and that “it is clear that Angela Merkel wants us to be a colony” (Berlunes 2014). This eagerness to engage in LWNP discourses cannot but seem strange in a European context and it is probably due to the enormous influence that some Latin-American political experiences exerted on Podemos.

But Brussels is not Washington, and Spain is not Argentina or Venezuela. Even if Spain is, along with Greece, the only European country in which people on the ideological left are more likely to give the EU negative marks (Pew Research Center 2018), Podemos hasn’t been able to successfully articulate a nationalpopulist discourse, among other things because, like Syriza, it has been reluctant to fall into Euroscepticism. Not to mention the fact that for historical reasons in Spain the national symbols are associated to the Right. This is actually far from being anomalous: it is also the case, for example, in countries such as Japan and England, whose national symbols have problematic connotations. In fact, the whole approach seemed somewhat artificial and, to some extent, the result of the lack of alternatives. For as Errejón himself declared: “there are only three great political aggregators in modernity: religion, class and nation” and only the third is available today (Neyra 2017).

Be that as it may, Podemos’ nationalpopulist discourse is a good example of the two traits that have been here identified as the core of LWNP—the merging of the *plebs* and the nation and the construction of a dichotomic frontier against foreign powers. The first is an attempt to ‘nationalize the people,’ which consists of associating popular demands with a defense of the nation. In February 2015, Iglesias said that “the fatherland is having a good public healthcare system, the fatherland is having the possibility of sending your son to a good school, the fatherland is having a good economy so you don’t have to emigrate” (Jiménez 2015). His then right-hand man, Iñigo Errejón, accused the Spanish socialists of being “false patriots” when they organized a rally with an enormous national flag: “you are traitors, because you gave Spain’s sovereignty to Merkel...if you really want to be patriots, that has nothing to do with flags, it has to do with defending the hospitals, the schools, the workers” (Aroca 2015). This very calculated nationalpopulist approach began to fade after 2016 (although Iñigo Errejón tried to refloat it recently with his new party, Más País), but LWNP stances are still present in Podemos, especially since it has now to face a far-right adversary, Vox.

The second key characteristic of LWNP discourse, the shift from a national to an international dichotomic frontier, was only possible during the height of the Greek government-debt crisis (2014-2016), when Syriza opposed Germany and the European Union even though Greece ultimately accepted their conditions. Thus, Podemos’ nationalist attitude (which went further than Syriza’s) necessarily overlapped with that of its Greek ally. After that brief moment of European division and apparent north/south confrontation, the ‘nationalpopulist moment’ was over for left-wing European parties. Their right-wing counterparts did not have to face that issue because the type of nationalpopulism that they formulated did not depend on economic crisis or regional clashes. European LWNP, on the other hand, remains a rare and occasional type of political stance. It was probably only possible in a very particular context in which a huge economic crisis coexisted with austerity

measures, economic international interference, and Angela Merkel playing the role of an arrogant northern ruler against southern subaltern countries.

In order to draw a parallel between today's national-social synthesis and the several experiments carried out by right-wing nationalist forces, we mentioned political figures such as Enrico Corradini and Charles Maurras. This section will end with the words of Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, whose 1789 reflections on the people and the nation fit with such accuracy with this section that it is impossible not to quote him. The *abbé* unwittingly describes two staples of LWNP as it has been analyzed here: its consideration that only the *plebs* is part of the nation and its aspirations to represent the totality of it.

The nobility, however, is also a foreigner in our midst because of its civil and political prerogatives. (...) The Third Estate then contains everything that pertains to the nation while nobody outside the Third Estate can be considered as part of the nation. What is the Third Estate? Everything.

Conclusions

RWNP can be defined as a sort of plebeian nationalism, while LWNP is a form of nationalization of the people. In the first, the nation is victimized, and the *ethnos* is popularized. In the second, there is an isomorphism between the *plebs* and the nation. Whereas RWNP is one of the contemporary forms that the radical right can take, European LWNP is a punctual strategy embraced by political forces that are part of the democratic socialist and post-communist sphere. Podemos and Syriza were eager to criticize the EU and the German government at a certain point, but they were reluctant to support Eurosceptic postulates. On the other hand, both Rassemblement National and La Lega have Euroscepticism as one of their main ideological traits.

In Europe, RWNP is less an anomaly than LWNP, a political stance more common in the third world, especially in Latin America, for historical reasons. While the synthesis between nationalism and popular or social positions has been historically successful in Europe when it was carried by right-wing movements, the opposite is generally not the case. However, the example of Greece and Spain during the Eurozone debt crisis shows that the possibility of articulating a LWNP discourse exists in our continent.

The points of departure of RWNP and LWNP are thus different, and so are their intentions and their ideological forebears. It is important, both for political scientists and for citizens, to be able to distinguish between these two tendencies. We are already witnessing the spread of the misleading idea that left-wing and right-wing populism are pretty similar phenomena. Insofar as nationalpopulist forces employ a similar vocabulary and propose similar policies, there will always be a risk of confusion. Only an in-depth discourse analysis can avoid it.

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Populism as a Logic of Coincidences.

An Interview with María Pía Lara, *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Mexico*.

Interviewers: Katie Henning, Aimee Imlay and Lilia Malavé Gómez, *University of Kentucky*.

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How did you come to study populism?

Dr. María Pía Lara (PL): As you know, many people think that in Latin America populism is the big thing. I mean especially since the governments of Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela (with Chávez first and then Nicolás Maduro). Chávez from Venezuela as the worst that can happen to any country, and he and Maduro are supposed to be the populists. Yet Chávez always said that he was a socialist and look to Cuba as his most admired model. And this can be thought of as a conceptual mistake while I actually think now that it is a well-crafted distortion. If you take the example of Bolivia, when Evo Morales was its president, you could find that his government helped to build up a constitution that responded to the specific needs and rights of many different ethnic groups. Bolivia has a very diverse and majoritarian ethnic groups, and there is a minority of white people there, but they belong mostly to the upper class and they were the ones who now orchestrated the coup against Morales. And Brazil is another different example. First with Ignacio Lula, who was one of the most beloved presidents of all times. He was accused of corruption on charges that were never proved, by the same judge Sergio Moro who instructed the prosecutor on the legal procedure to accuse Lula of corruption. We know about these exchanges of emails because they were leaked. Moro is now a Minister of Jair Bolsonaro. But before that, Dilma Rousseff had to be impeached, and she ended up not finishing her term. The strategy then turned to impede Lula to become again a candidate as president and it was all orchestrated by the oligarchy with much support from the United States.

Argentina is also a different case. As Fernando de la Rúa, the then President resigned, Néstor Kirchner (a famous lawyer well-bred in the Peronista party) won the next election. While being president he finally concluded with all the trials of the murderous militaries involved in the bloody coup of 1976, where around 30,000 Argentinians disappeared. His was a democratic government and it invested heavily not only in social programs of health, education, culture, but also in backing the efforts of organizations like the mothers and grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo to do justice to those whose families whose children were abducted and placed in military families. When he decided not to run for the second time, Cristina Fernández succeeded him as she won the next election. She pursued many good policies as well, but her attitude was certainly described as authoritarian. However, both Kirchner and his wife finished for the first time in the recent history of democracy their terms as presidents. Now Cristina Fernández is back again as a Vice-President after the economic collapse brought by the neo-liberal policies of Mauricio Macri. So my interest in South American politics was connected with the idea of trying to focus on how the general distortions on the describing all these different people and experiences, by putting them on the same level with a pejorative concept such as populism, will actually never allow other people to understand what happened there in recent years with what was called the Pink Tide. It is called the pink not because of anything regarding something “feminine” but because these different political leaders came to government through democracy by winning the elections, through democracy. Pink is a different color from red and red was the color used to describe socialists. See how subtle changes on the uses of our expressions can impact directly to connections to the past?

So, I think that part of my interest in the topic was also to create some sort of conceptual separation from what is happening in Europe. I think there are a lot of theorists today who are trying to just say, well these phenomena are all just populism, right or left do not exist anymore. Latin America’s experiences are not only not well understood, people tend to underestimate some of these new experiences. So, I just wanted in the paper that you have read - I wanted to be especially provocative in the sense I have explained above, by saying that if they think it is possible to put all different experiences and ways of doing politics as the same, they are plainly wrong. These examples that I just describe dealt with issues about social justice, better redistribution, judicial and material justice and they built up new ways of constructing constitutional changes that were so powerful that it would be unfair to them just to brand them with a pejorative label. I did not mention José Mujica, the former president of Uruguay, who had been imprisoned for decades because of his earlier activism, but he was one of the most interesting politicians of today too. So, this is the main point: using the concept of “populism” erases any specificity in terms of understanding what happened in each one of these countries. So, my main point first is to signal that there must be a separation between what is going on in Europe with nationalism, chauvinism, xenophobia, and what happened recently in South America. And I am not even including now the United States. That said, there is something else happening in the United States and now in Mexico. Each deserves careful examination and historical basis. So, all I want to say is that by this concept indiscriminately one describes all which is nothing at all. It is a barrier on our understanding and lead us into many mistakes. I want to have the kind of very careful, sort of analysis of each one of the countries and to focus on their specific problems.

The word populism is an umbrella term and it can potentially overlook the very specific social, economic and political circumstances of each country in which a populist regime come to power. When we use the term populism as kind of catchall umbrella term, it could be considered a paradigmatic insult. Do you think we are painting populism with a broad brush and could we consider it, on either the right or left, a critique of liberalism?

PL: Yes. That is a very good point. I think that what we have to focus on is: the ultra-right critiques use the weapons of the problems that have become routinely presented such as the loss of jobs, the post-industrial global world, the lack of sovereignty, the loss of jobs to promote their own white supremacist views. While the progressive left has understood that the agenda of neo-liberal has only brought poverty, the precarious ways of losing social rights, and only the 1% has gotten richer. So, we must ask what the problem is with the neoliberal policies and why have they lost hegemony, while the critique runs the danger of being used for very opportunistic reasons. Caution with this. Yes. Yes. It's a very good point.

With that, when I think of what has been considered either neo-populism or right wing populism, it is a bit ambiguous that this style of populism is a critique of neo-liberalism because I see it as advancing the neo-liberal agenda.

PL: Well, one of the interesting question for us is to focus on how the logics of contingencies that Ernesto Laclau observed in his book when right-wing social movements learn to use and adopt some of the claims from the progressive critique and with the purposes of expropriating the present unrest of many people. A good example of that is how Marine Le Pen claims that they are the ones who actually worry about the how the middle class has lost ground in economic terms and how climate change has become now part of their own agenda. Even these radical right movements are against neo-liberalism, but their goals are the opposite of those progressive movements who questioned the status quo of neo-liberalism. First of all, they hate globalization. All of them hate globalization. That is because they hate immigrants and refugees and mostly this argument of recovering sovereignty has been used in Europe in Hungary with Victor Orbán, and in Italy with Matteo Salvini, in England with the Brexit and Johnson, and then in the United States with Donald Trump. I think that when Trump realized at the very beginning how when he talked about the wall his followers multiplied, a strategy he learned from Steve Bannon and his advisers, he has followed it through and through in an even more radical fashion (white supremacist). So, in the end, it's all about how the precarious ways in which middle classes have been thrown into poverty where people want to blame the immigrants. But in fact, this is how neo-liberalism works. The opened discussion about state sovereignty can be framed as "Make America Great Again" or as the Brexiteers say "Take Back Control". It is true, with globalization sovereignty has lost ground, but neo-liberals discarded long ago that the state's main goal is to protect the people, these social policies are costly and therefore the economic institutions do not want state intervention. The global financial institutions are the ones who are really making the policies for the states. One of the things about neo-liberalism, the primary agenda of neo-liberalism, is to cut out all social programs and their agenda is to make the state as thin as possible. State spending was all about austerity in Europe. And when Obama helped the recovery of the economy from its crisis, they took the people's taxes to pay and bailed out banks and financial institutions but

failed to demand accountability from them. It helped the economy, but mainly those institutions went back to their vicious practices. This has been experienced in all these societies like Europe, especially, but also in the United States because they did not create regulations against financial gains. We cannot take this decision too lightly because, every decision let us say in Europe, every decision of the economy lacks a political connection and when a government like the Greeks wanted to improve social spending, and it was sanctioned by the European Union. But the European Union is not a political identity, it is only an economic identity. So, when you consider Greece, they had spent a lot of money (with the advice of Global financial institutions) and they were in great debt. When Syriza won the elections, they wanted to recover social programs: to have social healthcare, to restore the pensions for all people which had been drastically cut. And when Tsipras won the elections, he won because people wanted to recover some sense of sovereignty, with good social programs for their society. So, on the one hand, the global institutions allow people to perceive a loss of political sovereignty. On the other hand, the so called "populists"-- like the Syriza government in Greece --wanted to recover their possibility of social spending but were forced to comply to the demands of the rescue by financial institutions. And most of the European right-wing social movements have emerged or have appeared as making the demand to recover what they think they have lost due to immigrants and mobility. Especially working people, who for them, globalization meant that most of the so called, well developed countries de-industrialized themselves resulting in job loss because it was cheaper to move industries to poor countries with less social rights for the workers. To have these big industries, these maquilas in Mexico, in Tijuana, in India, and in China, meant that the people from these countries could work in very poor conditions, with very low salaries, and in the places where the enforcement of workers' rights is almost inexistent, like my country or in India, etc. People are working under horrible conditions. For very low salaries. So, the money goes all the way back to, not to the country where the workers are situated, but back to the person who owns the industry, to the so called elite who are the real owners of businesses like Ford, Chrysler, etc. So, what has happened in places like Detroit is that many white workers became unemployed. So, the workers were left with nothing. For them it seemed like the immigrants are getting their jobs, their claim was "oh, they're, they're stealing our jobs!" A lot of this kind of reactions happened in England where English workers thought that the Polish workers were stealing their jobs because of the European Union mobility. So the Brexit was a movement fed by ultra conservative right wing organizers like Nigel Farage or Boris Johnson (the actual Prime Minister) who thought Europe had eroded United Kingdom's sovereignty and they wanted their "control back" (that was the slogan invented for the Brexit). The English workers were all also against neo-liberalism, they want something different than what has been their sense of loss in their precarious lives. Instead of making claims that have to do with justice and inclusion, they are easily manipulated, and their claims appeared as wanting to exclude the foreigners. I mean, they feel excluded, but they also want to get rid of immigrants, get rid of refugees, and think that they can get back some sovereignty with the Brexit. And in their view, women have taken a lot of power also - they felt that they should do something about this. These expressions just tell you how the ultra-right has learned to use some of the grievances to procure the worst kind of exclusionary claims. Just look at how Donald Trump incited people in a meeting to scream when

he asked: “What should we do with the immigrants who are rapists and drug dealers?” and the people replied “killed them” (sic).

Would it be fair to say that populism on the left is about social justice and equality and populism on the right is a social and economic agenda focusing on restrictionism as far as restrictionist economic policies?

PL: You know, going back to the past with – “Make America Great Again”, or “Take back Control” as Brexiteers claimed that England needed – are expressions that belong to a mythical tale of greatness from the past in the case of the USA, and in the case of England, it was inspired by a long history of thinking that The United Kingdom is not really Europe but something else, nobody knows what that is anymore. That is one of the problems. The question is trying to figure out how the shadows of manipulation from the “populism on the right” expresses hatred and sees itself as a closed entity. Populism is better thought of as a logic of coincidences on what is not working, but then, the goals begin to clarify themselves to us as people are easily manipulated when their situations have worsened. As a concept, populism loses density when it is applied to all social movements from the right and the left. Understanding means something like making distinctions in the sense of how Hannah Arendt thought that historical analysis is one key element to our contextual understanding. We must follow the trail of experiences and structural changes that lead these different social movements here, because sometimes as they have made alliances with other groups that are right wing we learn to see that something horrible can happen. The left side of movements must be careful to make alliances because of these same goals. A good idea is to see how they conceive the state’s policies: either as right wing with the claim of “law and order” or the state spends on social programs of social inclusion and craft policies to help the redistribution of wealth. The state has to be involved in social health care, in public education, and all of these kinds of problems relate to how the budget of the state is organized with a public view of needs. I think that the young people in the United States see these problems more clearly than ever, especially, after Bernie Sanders has run for a second time for the primary elections of the Democratic Party. He retired from the candidacy, but his agenda is clearly now less questioned even among some of the people in the Democratic Party. So, I think that the left in the past was very suspicious of the state. Again, there was a lot of anti-statism mainly dealing with how Marx was interpreted. So, one part of what is happening today is that the social movements that are progressive want to be elected, to have the power to enact agendas of social justice. The only way to gain power is through elections. So, the state has gained track among those who were first suspicious about it because without structural and systemic change there is nothing that we can do to alleviate our present needs.

In your article you mentioned how the use of populism as a concept has deterred theorists from really analyzing the difference between progressive and regressive groups. I was wondering if you had any predictions or ideas about the upcoming US election, what route it might take. So will populism become a topic of discussion this election cycle?

PL: The Americans have one interesting tradition that is different from other countries and Americans and so do the Argentinians and the Russians. By the way, Americans have a past of progressive populism with Roosevelt. And it was a very important experience for the health of

that society then. So, it was not something reactionary. It was not something to be scared of. Michael Kazin, who is an active historian, has written very good books on the subject. He said something like, you should not be surprised that in the United States there is this big legacy of populism. In the previous election, I thought that the progressive people were disappointed because Bernie Sanders did not win the nomination to become the candidate. And when Hillary Clinton won nobody understood why Mexicans were so scared that Trump was going to win. Hilary Clinton was not the good candidate to beat Trump, but the progressives thought that she would win because she was a woman. But that was not the point. She was a declared neo-liberal and the younger generations did not see real change with her candidacy. For many people there was no reason to worry, some of them even voted for an independent candidate or did not vote at all. Right now, I think that what is happening in the United States could have been a very interesting moment. I think that the word populism now appears with Trump. A scarier word appeared behind Bernie Sanders since they all said that “he is a Socialist”!!! Trump had big possibilities because the economy was well and he made sure to take a great deal of protective measures against the mobility of capital outside of the United States. But he has helped the elites in terms of what Andrea Bernstein’s new book calls them “oligarchs”. He has also stirred and supported the ultra-right claims of White Supremacy. Trump has not really been a populist in every way, he is an authoritarian who lacks any interest other than his own agenda. And this is something that confuses people but it should not. As I have explained before, the grievances from people make them very manipulative so feeding their sense of victims allows him to stand behind horribly cruel causes. He is an authoritarian, vindictive oligarch, corrupted to the bone, and willing to destroy each and every possible institution that impedes him to do as he wishes. It is not only Charlottesville, it is his selection of the judges appointed to the Supreme Court, it is William Barr interfering with prosecutions on the charges of corruption, his staff, and the way he corrupted the entire Republican Party by erasing any trace of decency in them. It is scary. We are now entering a site of unprecedented experience with the crisis of the coronavirus. So now that Biden is the clear candidate of the Democratic Party, but it will be interesting to see how much of Bernie Sanders’ agenda will become the visible claims against the debacle in public health and education now that the United States is living one of the worst crisis of its history. It is very difficult to make any sort of prognosis as things stand now. Trump has tried to manage the crisis to help his campaign, but that does not mean that all people can see themselves as before the crisis started. Again, we are now in a logic of possible contingent choices and it is difficult to see what Americans can learn from this horrible time.

During the 2016 election in the United States, we saw a push on the Bernie side for economic redistribution and social equality and then we saw on the right, Trump’s campaign. The election in 2016 was, arguably, a situation in which the political center was shaken. Do you think this a symptom of capitalism in crisis?

PL: Yes, very good. I gave a plenary lecture on the concept of crisis in August 2019. Today we are confronting the full face of how countries have been challenged because of their poor spending on social health programs, but this is fundamentally linked to the problem of an unprecedented crisis of capitalism.

So, what do you think are the long-term implications for world as a result of both politics and capitalism being in crisis?

PL: First of all, I think that Marx already thought that crisis of capitalism was going to go one after the other and that is why in his theory, he thought capitalism would be self-destructive. But his prognosis of it being self-destroying was that something else was going to emerge. And that is as far as he got in predicting what a post-capitalist society would look like. But with Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* we see something much more complex because he understood a different moment of history that Marx had not seen at all. Marx lived in the industrialization of England, but he was right: capitalism lives through new contingent historical crisis. The concept of crisis means, in the Greek, to decide, to make a separation, to have a previous collective deliberation between two different choices or possibilities. That is how the Greeks used the conception of *krisis*. So, Marx was right in the sense that it is self-destructive, but Polanyi then thought that there always come social movements fostering upheavals, demanding social rights, and demanding better salaries. These are social rights as we know them, or social entitlements if you want to call them that. Marx never talked about the development of rights, rather he focused on better conditions for workers in every way, better conditions for life. Capitalism has been so incredibly malleable that it has integrated some of those criticisms in order to reproduce itself. You introduce measures and reforms and according to Polanyi, the Great Transformation is the development of what we call now the welfare state. Which means the state had the task of making possible a redistribution of wealth, but also to force enterprises, companies, etc., to give workers some social entitlements or social rights. So, what happened was that in Europe and in other countries such as the United States, Australia, etc. workers were having better lives, so they did not want to create a revolution. Why? Because they all had their apartments, their cars, all these things that capitalism got involved in creating and making for consumer's society. Karl Polanyi was right by arguing that without any social upheaval and struggles by different actors, capitalism would have remained the same. But, when capitalism reacts, it accommodates some of the criticisms to keep going. So, we are now in a moment where we are leading an unprecedented crisis and at this point, what will come of it is not very clear. We do not have any assurance of anything. But if anything needs to be learned is what have been the priorities of countries who did not want to spend on ample social health care for all and we are now seeing how vulnerable their people are because of those very bad decisions. It is also important to reconsider that many of the consumers' choices now seem so irrelevant when you realized that hospitals do not have enough resources to cope with this terrible pandemic. Health care for all now seems something very different from how people saw it before. And the people in hospitals have also began to be regarded as more important than we ever thought. So, what you're seeing in the United States depended on the things that Bernie Sanders' brought with his agenda and people might not be seeing him anymore as scary "socialist", but as making health care a necessity and the only proper thing to do after this global experience. We might learn to consider care not only as a given and women as being the primary responsible for doing this very badly paid job. A policy about care should not be a private possibility, but a public right for all.

In thinking about capitalism in crisis. How would a crisis affect Venezuela or Nicaragua?

PL: Nicaragua is a country where its leader has lost its track. Their authoritarian past (Somoza was the famous dictator for many years) has returned with a different political actor. We need to contextualize how each country deals with their past and to understand how their particular experiences are opened or not by the way they handle their past experiences. In the case of Venezuela, like in the case of Cuba, because they bare some similarities, in the very beginning it was the problem of the sanctions from the United States and Europe which were imposed on these countries and has led them to face very difficult conditions. Cuba was almost strangled economically, but their social health care system worked well and they have education free for all. Venezuela is a very poor country and compared to Cuba is bigger and more complex. Chávez declared himself socialist and immediately George W. Bush imposed sanctions and worked to get rid of Chávez. He was beloved and daring, but he also had to deal with difficult decisions. Chávez was confrontational and in very open terms as I remember one of his speeches at the United Nations when he came right after Bush and exclaimed in public: “The air smells like sulfur”. The reference is a mirror image of how the United States portrayed Chávez’s regime as evil. After his death, Nicolás Maduro had a difficult task to continue fighting not only against sanctions but with open help from the United States to organize a coup with Juan Guaidó. I know that Pompeo has worked very hard to make the life of Venezuelans impossible and they say that Maduro is trying to set a deal for a peaceful transition with the United States (sic). So, my experience is that the United States has always intervened in the affairs of Latin America, protecting themselves by making sure that those other countries remain governed by puppets rather than independent progressive leaders.

I was 13 years old when Allende was elected in Chile and before he had to endure a coup led by his General Pinochet, he committed suicide. The middle classes and the elites were very active in saying “take this government away from us” and the Americans fought all the way to help Pinochet’s accomplished his coup and accepted the bloody years of his dictatorship. Previously, they worked hard with many people and organizations to have all the goods of consumption taken away so that the people would be very desperate and when the coup came, of course, with a lot of help and organization from the United States, it was a massacre. Years after Pinochet still had tea with Margaret Thatcher until he was indicted for his crimes against humanity led by the Spanish Judge Baltazar Garzón. Chile became the first experiment of the policies created by the neo-liberal intelligence working in the universities. So, I have seen this tragedy happened.

The question with Cuba, is that even with all the sanctions they have never been able to take away the revolution for the Cubans. John F. Kennedy organized an invasion that failed but it was known as the invasion of The *Bahia de Cochinos*. So that is the point, if the involvement of the United States in Latin America had ceased for a moment, maybe things could have been different. United States involvement has returned now and my objection to Juan Guaidó in Venezuela is that he has been completely financed by the United States and this is a terrible alliance. So, to finish the point, yes, I think Maduro has inherited a legacy of difficulties and he has not been capable of reacting better, but who could under his circumstances? In spite of that, he is still in power and that can only mean that there are many people who still back them. He is

also a very confrontational figure, and this kind of attitude does not help. This is why I am very much against Chantal Mouffe's work on confrontational politics. Mouffe says that "agonism" means regarding your enemies as political adversaries framed in the conflictive political realm where some limits can be established. But the opposite is the case, confrontational attitudes like Trump's behavior towards his opponents, for example, have made political life in the United States terrible, vicious, and plagued with perils. Trump has given voice to those who did not dare to say what they thought and now they can say it, like the previous example where Trump asked his followers-- "What do we do with immigrants?"—and the people replied "kill them". I think it is obvious that Donald Trump's strategy constructs enemies as a way to bolster his image with his followers. It is not so obvious that the same strategy is done by Nicolás Maduro since he always relates his enemies to the strategies that the United States are doing to remove him from power. But in Nicaragua's persecution of the opposition by Daniel Ortega is something else. He and his wife Rosario Murillo, who is the Vice-president, betrayed the spirit of the Sandinista Revolution.

And now, my understanding is that Ortega is a neoliberal representing a complete shift.

PL: Ortega is getting much worse than Maduro in many ways. The openly spectacular question with regards to Maduro is that anything that helps us to visualize Venezuela as the rottenest place in the world, will help the United States to accomplish the end of that failed experiment. The recent power outages in Venezuela have been organized and financed by the United States and this is going to explode in the news soon. And all the military who left Venezuela are left out, they are abandoned in Colombia. Now they do not know what to do, and they don't receive any help from the U.S. or from Colombia. They were just used. Europe had Africa and the United States has South America. I think that we should recover here a critique of neocolonialism. I think that it is time for Americans and Europeans to realize how intertwined the fate of the political failures of Latin America or Africa are related to having been colonies. Of course, there were many mistakes made by Chávez, but we need time and space to criticize how and what happened there. He also had the charisma which Maduro lacks. And of course, politics is not always the realm of rationality that we could wish, it is a complex world because people who love their leaders can follow them blindly. And leaders can make big mistakes too and be pernicious, malevolent, authoritarian, etc. In a way that is a legacy that Maduro burned completely because if Chávez had not had cancer, he might have lasted longer and perhaps might have had a better chance to succeed in his project. And a lot of people would still be fascinated by him.

The problem with Maduro is not only that he lacks charisma, his mistakes piled up with living on dire conditions due to the secret war organized by the USA. When he speaks, he sounds so cliché. So, the perseverance of the leaders depends a lot on their charisma. And this is one of the things that we have now to learn to consider a better understanding because I think that everybody thought we do not need the Hitler-like charisma anymore. Of course, we see all these movies and documentaries and we do not understand how so many people supported him, but he was able to capture the worst on people and he was regarded as a charismatic leader.

Of course, sometimes Trump has been said to have some sort of charisma when he speaks to the people, that is why he loves speaking because he manipulates the needed reaction from the

people. Nobody wanted to consider studying the charisma of leaders except for Max Weber, of course, because charisma has nothing to do with something that we cannot control or that we can learn rationally to set limits to it. But in politics we need to consider charisma as an important element and take it seriously. It is a very important element in populism as it is also demagogues. So, we should not close the door on how people react to the charisma of leaders and how people are manipulated by means that are not rational at all.

So, I am going to talk about it today because I am going to propose a concept of the social imaginary. Because if we do not consider that we're completely closing ourselves to the most predominant element of political activism of a leader or leaders. Working with the emotions, make populists a special kind of leaders who employ emotions to surround their claims with a theatrical sort of performance. So, I think that understanding what charisma is should be important and we should learn from how it has been used in the past. People who feel victims can be easily manipulated. Nothing is more hurtful than when you have been left out of the dignity of having a job or meaningful participation in society, especially for aging people. This is an important problem. Programs of social inclusion and justice are very different from those exclusionary ways in which victimization led to horrible outcomes. So, the main question is how do we discriminate among different claims and why? Consider, for example, how old people should be able to have some sense of meaningfulness and purpose in life. And when they do not have it if these things hurt. Claims about care and health should be the frame so that justice is what prevails. So yes, it is a moment that has a lot of things to do with justice, not hatred. We just have to be very careful on how we want to consider all these elements and carefully craft distinctions and contexts. I prefer being very delicate by separating conflicts and histories and then being able to learn something about these differences.

The 2016 Bernie Sanders Campaign: American Socialist Populism

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Some socialists criticize Bernie Sanders's 2016 presidential campaign, taking issue with the senator's nationalism, vague presentation of socialism and revolution, and seeming preoccupation with class at the expense of attention to racism. This article draws from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theorization of populism to depict Sanders's campaign as a legitimately socialist project. Laclau and Mouffe claim that left populism may evolve into socialism under certain conditions. One may expect Sanders's populism to empower previously uncommitted people to make socialist demands. Keywords: populism, democratic socialism, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Bernie Sanders.

Although the Vermont senator and democratic socialist Bernie Sanders energized scores of American progressives with his 2016 campaign for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, leftist commentators frequently criticized Sanders's presidential bid. At the time, some socialists accused Sanders of appealing to shallow nationalism with his patriotic rhetoric and protectionist trade policies, presenting an economic reductionist explanation of racism, and failing to advocate genuine revolutionary socialism. This paper draws from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theorization of left populism to explain how the 2016 Sanders campaign's democratic socialism, despite its conceptual vagueness, was quite relevant to contemporary progressives' most far-reaching aspirations. First, I argue that the senator's rhetorical nationalism and conflation of economic inequality and racial injustice, which Sanders's left-wing detractors found distasteful, correspond to a kind of socialism – socialist populism. Secondly, I argue that Sanders's populist language about democratic socialism may advance longstanding left-wing goals by opening more Americans to economic policy that breaks with conventional property relations. With Laclau and Mouffe's insights, one may understand how Sanders's vagueness about democratic socialism served a constructive purpose: the candidate was using populist rhetoric in an experimental way in hopes of developing a culturally appropriate socialist politics for the U.S.

Borrowing from Laclau and Mouffe, I explain that socialist populism does two things: it redraws political identities and revives democracy. Populism redraws political identities by framing politics as an ongoing conflict between the people and the elite and equating the struggles of diverse subsets of the population. Populism revives democracy by provoking

robust confrontation between well-defined, oppositional political projects and multiplying the issues open to democratic intervention. Socialist populism forges social solidarity and invigorates democratic participation to such a grand extent that people independently begin to agitate for social control of production. Sanders's 2016 populist campaign broached socialist populism because it sought to inspire democratic agitation for increasingly radical social control. As I explain how the candidate's rhetoric dovetailed with socialist populism, I will question accusations that the senator's 2016 campaign expressed uncritical nationalism, shallow class reductionism, and opportunistic faux socialism. Sanders's populist presentation of American politics as a struggle between the people and the elite appealed to progressive nationalism by reclaiming the international socialist tradition and egalitarianism as part of the American identity. His discursive construction of the people drew a chain of equivalence between class issues and racial issues, which, rather than reducing race to class, illustrated how democratic citizenship mutually advances both racial and class struggles. Although Sanders has not called for the direct overthrow of capitalism or government seizure of key industries, his invocations of economic democracy paralleled Laclau and Mouffe's conception of socialism as radical democracy. His appeals to economic democratization aimed to open the public's imagination to economic policies that challenge managerial prerogatives.

Socialist Criticisms of the Sanders Campaign

Socialists accused Sanders's 2016 campaign of espousing nationalistic trade policy, patriotic rhetoric, class reductionism, and vague definitions of revolution and socialism. Several leftist writers insisted that Sanders's trade policies replicate the narrow nationalism of conservative isolationists by failing to back the foreign workers most harmed by free trade agreements like NAFTA. These critics claimed that Sanders seldom expresses support for strikes or higher wages in the developing world (McKean 2016; Yates 2016) and seems instead to have "abandoned [Eugene] Debs's internationalism for a nationalist focus on U.S. workers" (Smith, A., 2015, 143). Other socialists suggested that Sanders's nationalist viewpoint prevents him from adequately supporting the victims of U.S. militarism. Sanders's anti-war messages have often revolved around bread and butter issues without thoughtfully addressing the nature of U.S. imperialism or calling for class internationalism (Martin 2016). The anti-war historian Rick Perlstein (2015) accused Sanders of appealing to nationalistic militarism by tweeting an image of the POW/MIA flag. It is unfair to suggest that Sanders never conveys internationalism: he praised a minimum wage increase in Bangladesh (Sanders 2011, 180), protested NAFTA by visiting Mexican labor organizers, and supported the Sandinista Revolution (Sanders and Gutman 2015, 80-85 and 225). With that being said, the critics did have a point. The Vermonter's 2016 campaign did not lay out a comprehensive plan for opposing free trade without harming foreign workers (see Gilbert 2016) and Sanders has an unfortunate history of disappointing anti-war activists (Jaffe 2015, 158).

The 2016 Sanders campaign's language about the economic roots of racism failed to impress every socialist. Some left intellectuals claimed the Sanders campaign failed to foreground racial injustice. Critics say the campaign's proposals to address problems facing black communities with job creation programs presented racial injustice as a direct outcome of economic inequality (e.g. Fletcher 2016). Angela Davis was among the most prominent

and eloquent critics of Sanders on this score. In an interview with Amy Goodman, Davis said that Sanders:

engages in a kind of economic reductionism that prevents him from speaking...in ways that enlighten us about the persistence of racism, racist violence, state violence...It seems that he does not have the vocabulary that allows him to acknowledge the role and the influence that racism has played historically. He thinks that economic justice will automatically lead us to racial justice (2016a).

There is truth to Davis's critique. James Baldwin's critique of the Henry Wallace campaign reveals that white American social democrats sometimes overlook the specificity of black struggles and their own racial blind spots while incorrectly assuming that their plans for entitlement expansion will resolve racism (1955, 73-84). Unfortunately for Sanders and the left in general, the Clinton campaign seized upon elements of this argument in a ham-fisted and cynical fashion (see Weigel 2016) that may obscure more nuanced interpretations of Sanders's racial politics.

Along these lines, the candidate's decision to describe his campaign activity as part of a "political revolution" (Sanders 2016) peeved some socialists. Opinion pieces in *Socialist Worker* argued that Sanders distorts the very meaning of revolution, reducing it to opportunistic and "bogus rhetoric" (Katch 2016). Sanders has conceptualized his "political revolution" as a call for a broad-based coalition of average citizens to enter electoral politics, gain progressive control over public offices at every level throughout the country, and push American politics to the left (Nichols 2015). To Sanders's critics, this depiction of revolution was at best narrow localism and at worst a cynical public relations campaign for the Democratic Party, doing little to serve mass movements oriented toward direct action or promote popular control of the economy. It goes without saying that Sanders's presentation of revolution was quite different from historical violent revolutions like the French, Hattian, and Russian revolutions (Nichols 2015).

Finally, Sanders's critics said he diluted the concept of socialism by presenting left-liberalism and/or social democracy as socialism. Sanders disavows seizure of the means of production as a goal for his revolution and has hazily defined his socialism as a belief "that the middle class and the working families who produce the wealth of America deserve a decent standard of living and that their incomes should go up, not down" (qtd. Jaffe 2015, 173). Yates (2016) writes that Sanders has said little about standard socialist demands like a proletarian revolution, the end of capitalist property relations, democratic control of production, social ownership of wealth, or a guaranteed minimum income. Even Sanders's sympathizer Harry Jaffe claimed that Sanders is not a socialist at all, but rather a populist or just a very progressive liberal (2015, 173-174).

But what if socialism and populism are not separate categories? Ernesto Laclau argues that all successful socialist projects require populist mobilization and that even populist projects that do not appear at first glance to resemble socialism may come to advance socialism. Laclau believes that all socialism requires deep rootedness in national political culture and that political relations vary dramatically from country to country.

Sophisticated socialists use populism as a tool to integrate their politics with local conditions and values. Mature socialist projects will look dramatically different in different places. It is thus useless to apply a cookie-cutter definition of socialism across various countries and historical moments. Movements that appear, from the outside, as anti-intellectual, ideologically incoherent, or opportunistic often contain a radically egalitarian energy and evolve in socialist directions over time. Populism draws people into radical politics and, even if many populists do not begin by espousing recognizably socialist politics, all populist mobilizations will eventually snowball into socialist demands for popular control of the economy *unless* right-wing populists co-opt them. The only things that make populism turn right-wing are racism and/or technocracy (Laclau 1979, 158, 165, 173-174, and 196-198). In what follows, I argue that the 2016 campaign used populism in an experimental attempt to develop a form of socialism most appropriate for contemporary, American political culture and open Americans' minds to robust, interventionist economic policies that challenge conventional property relations.

Laclau and Mouffe on Left Populism

Laclau and Mouffe say populism has two main functions. Populism is, first, a way for political actors to redraw the frontiers of political relations by uniting as many people as possible against the elite establishment and, second, a way to reenergize and deepen democracy. Populist political projects redraw political frontiers by establishing hegemony over many diverse actors throughout complex societies. This process involves reclaiming popular issues and political symbolism and associating them with the demands of many different subjects and interest groups at once. In so doing, populists establish a new revolutionary subjectivity by forging equivalence chains linking many different groups together as one people. Populism regenerates democracy by inciting political passion and extending the reach of democratic politics beyond the public sphere's traditional boundaries. Populist political projects become increasingly necessary as leftists respond to the social complexity of advanced capitalism.

Before covering how and why populism redraws political frontlines and resuscitates democracy, I must briefly touch upon Laclau and Mouffe's thoughts on capitalism and the revolutionary subject. Orthodox Marxism presents capitalism as a mode of production marked by wage labor and industrial production. This orthodoxy holds that capitalism will inevitably develop to the point in which an industrial working class is large and geographically concentrated enough to have immediately shared, recognizable political and economic interests. This mature, homogenized proletariat will have the ability to act as an independent, revolutionary subject to seize political power and recreate society (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 72-75). Laclau and Mouffe reject the orthodox view because advanced capitalism spreads social complexity, not social standardization. Laclau thinks that capitalism is not strictly a mode of production, but rather a complex, global array of interlocking economic, military, and political strategies. Capitalism, especially as it exists in the post-industrial West, does not rely on masses of factory workers with shared economic and political interests. It requires many different kinds of people, with many conflicting interests, to do its bidding (Laclau 2005a, 230-231; Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 159-160).

Some politicians, activists, and intellectuals respond to the increasing complexity of capitalism by abandoning long-standing left formations, such as mass left-wing political parties embedded in the labor movement, on the basis that traditional left practices and ideology are irrelevant for countries without a clearly defined working class and a homogenous manufacturing base (Laclau 2005a, 85). Center-left democrats abandon old-fashioned left parties and discourses in favor of milquetoast “third way” centrism. Anarchists may abandon left parties in favor of a politics based exclusively in civil society activism (Mouffe 2013, 119 and 135). Laclau and Mouffe respond to the fragmentation of class identities in the opposite fashion. Although there can be no singular revolutionary actor based in production, Laclau and Mouffe say that the left must retain centralized, long-standing, stable institutions like mass parties to engage in the long-term process of discursively constructing a new left-wing identity.¹ People will not immediately imagine themselves as part of a new revolutionary subject; they need to learn how to think of themselves this way by interacting with stable political institutions over the long term. This new revolutionary subject is the people. Populism is the process of uniting a very diverse set of groups displaced by globalized capitalism with contradictory interests under a common identity as the people (Laclau 2005a, 223-232).

The people is not a preexisting force that politicians may awaken at will. The people is an imaginary category that political actors recreate in new contexts. Populists use floating signifiers, empty signifiers, and equivalence chains to establish the people. Floating signifiers are symbols and/or issues with no inherent ideological meaning that people vaguely associate with rebellion. These issues and symbols appeal to a broad cross-section of the public, including many people who identify as left-wing and others who identify as right-wing. Empty signifiers (which often overlap with floating signifiers) are singular issues and/or symbols that can represent many other issues and causes at once. Empty signifiers are the “tip of the iceberg.” Equivalence chains are broad coalitions of people who imagine their struggles as immediately linked, such that the victory of one struggle advances several other struggles at once. Left populists form expansive equivalence chains that unite a broad section of people by appealing to empty signifiers and floating signifiers to give popular causes a leftist connotation (see Laclau 2005b). This process redraws political divisions in society around new fault lines. Although left populism maintains and reinforces the division between the left and the right, it transforms what one associates with the left and the right: a “vibrant democratic politics can no longer be conceived in terms of the traditional left-right axis” (Mouffe 2016).

Although left populism reinterprets popular symbols and issues to appeal to people who are otherwise right-wing, it is not non-partisan. Populism is a deeply partisan process that forms a people in opposition to an elite. Forging broad equivalence chains requires uniting as many people as possible in opposition to a narrowly defined enemy. Politics

¹ Laclau and Mouffe do not reject civil society activity and they have enthusiastically supported Occupy and the alter-globalization movement. Mouffe wants these movements to act synergistically with left parties, much as Syriza and Podemos have drawn energy from the Syntagma Square and *Indignados* protest movements.

involves “we vs. they” thinking and passionate, angry denunciations of opponents. In healthy, pluralist democracies, political parties compete for votes by developing well-defined, oppositional platforms and identities. However, in contemporary society, mainstream left and right-wing parties have forged a consensus around neoliberal economic projects. The left and right are now indistinguishable in the eyes of many disaffected voters. It is up to populists to restore passionate, polarizing conflict to democracy by appealing to the people in opposition to the corrupt elite (Mouffe 2005b). Doing so will encourage the public to reimagine themselves as the people and, in so doing, begin to create a new left-wing subjectivity to replace the international proletariat as the revolutionary subject (see Laclau 2014, 172-176).

The project of congealing a new identity of the people around a set of popular empty and floating signifiers does not happen overnight and does not require reinventing the wheel. It involves long-term work within the state and appeals to existing political traditions. Left populism involves radical democracy, which entails the constant expansion of the democratic state into more areas of social life, the proliferation of platforms for democratic decision making, and the creation of a new equivalential identity based on a shared identity of citizenship. Laclau and Mouffe embrace the welfare state and want to extend it, deepen it, and democratize it. They want to redraw the old division between the public and private spheres so that democratic decision-making and issue-formation may occur in so-called private realms like the family and the economy (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 140-141 and 160-168). This extension of democracy into new territory need not require invasive state or party absorption of these fields. It may involve heightened synergy between political parties and protest movements focusing on economic and social issues (Mouffe, interviewed by Hackl 2014). Under radical democracy, various social groups relate to each other through the political tradition of democratic citizenship, which allows them to maintain a healthy degree of tension between solidarity and autonomy without sacrificing solidarity to autonomy. If left populists draw from the tradition of citizenship to equate the demands of racial minorities, feminists, environmentalists, and labor movements (despite the fact that these demands may not always harmonize), then people will consider all of these groups’ struggles relevant to democracy. Thus, a victory for each of these social groups will be a victory for all of them because each demand will advance the shared cause of democracy (Mouffe 1993, 18-20 and 70-72). Finally, Mouffe (2009) stresses that radical democracy occurs within and around the democratic state through a drawn-out process of identity formation and state consolidation comparable to Gramsci’s war of position. We have thus seen that left populism responds to advanced capitalism’s fragmentation and dispersion of social identities to form a new unified identity of “the people” by working within the state to polarize society, deepen and expand democracy, and forge a new equivalence that redraws the left around popular issues and symbols.

Sanders’s Nationalism as Left Populism

Political actors establish populist discourses to forge unity among broad swaths of society that cannot necessarily connect through any shared relationship to the means of production. In order to establish this broad unity and construct the people, populists frequently highlight popular issues and national symbolism with cross-class appeal. In *Politics*

and Ideology in Marxist Theory, Laclau explains that the inter-war German left failed to stem the rise of Nazism because both communists and social democrats refused to reach out to the middle class in any meaningful way. The left rejected patriotism as bourgeois, which led some socialists to do asinine things like express support for the Treaty of Versailles. The German left's class analysis was so rigid that many of them refused to take up popular issues, such as the declining living standards of white-collar professionals, because these were not strictly working class issues.

Laclau uses this history to suggest that the best way to fight the far right and gain left-wing institutional power is to forge cross-class alliances through a left populist embrace of national dignity and attractive cultural symbolism. He objects to the idea that certain issues or symbols have an inherent class nature. The political meaning of an issue depends not on its content, but rather on which class hegemonizes the struggle over the issue's implementation (Laclau 1979, 92-100; 113-114; 124-129; 162). If the bourgeoisie imbues national symbolism and popular issues with a bourgeois connotation, then nationalism will be conservative. If the proletariat imbues national symbolism and popular issues with a working class connotation, then nationalism will be progressive.

Hence, it is entirely possible and even necessary for left populists to draw from nationalist symbolism and lay claim to issues with broad national appeal, even if these same issues resonate with people who do not consistently identify with the left. Take Sanders's decision to tweet an image of the POW/MIA flag, which Perlstein found distasteful. Sanders embraces national symbolism because it unifies a broad group of people, including military veterans, whose interests the left cannot afford to abandon to the right. Sanders strives to bestow patriotism with a left-wing connotation. Sanders appeals to historical figures like Eugene V. Debs, Emma Goldman, and Mother Jones to show that his socialism is part of a grand American radical tradition. His left nationalism depicts economic justice as compatible with the inherent egalitarianism of the American spirit and the voting public's true wishes (Foster 2016; Sanders and Gutman 2015, 20 and 27). His decision to embrace certain nationalistic themes, such as the middle class's wellbeing, veterans' issues, and the symbolism that accompanies these issues is a left populism compatible with socialist politics.

Much like his appeals to military symbols, Sanders's statements about globalization irked a few internationalists. Reflecting on Sanders's critiques of global trade during the 2016 campaign cycle, Tobita Chow (2018) regrets that Sanders usually fell "short of full-throated solidarity with Chinese workers" and did not advocate for a global minimum wage and technology transfers. While I share Chow's frustration with American political discourse's tendency to oversimplify trade policy, I find that Mouffe's work lends itself to a more charitable reading of the senator's rhetoric. Mouffe sympathizes with alter-globalist development policies like those Chow advocates. However, she is wary of cosmopolitanism and urges activists to ground global justice in efforts to build the democratic capacities of the nation state. Mouffe claims that left parties will have to expand popular identification with the democratic state and attain hegemony through the state's institutions before they can successfully retool multilateral institutions to reconcile labor standards across borders (Mouffe 2005a, 100-110). Much as Mouffe would have it, the 2016 Sanders campaign provided renewed

focus to the alter-globalization cause by demonstrating that once-marginal progressive critics of neoliberalism can and should attain state power (Denvir 2019). Sanders's anti-austerity messaging linked together popular sovereignty, progressive nationalism, and internationalism. As undemocratic, neocolonial austerians failed to treat Puerto Ricans as full American citizens, Sanders explained that expanding elected Puerto Rican politicians' abilities to negotiate debt restructuring with their creditors would serve as a blow to the same financiers who impoverished Greece (Sanders, interviewed by Goodman, 2015; Nichols 2016). Sanders thus implies that the way forward for alter-globalization is for activists to find concrete ways to connect their global concerns to the enhancement of democratic citizenship at home.

Race, Equivalence, and Left Populism

In addition to redrawing political fault lines by appealing to popular national issues and symbols, left populism forges new political solidarities by equating multiple social struggles. During political crises, populists can do more than form cross-class alliances. They may establish entirely new identities of people who believe their diverse struggles are inherently linked and think the progress of one group's struggle advances the struggles of several other groups at once. According to Laclau and Mouffe, under normal circumstances, systems of differences frame social identities. When social identities have differential links, people understand their identities based on who they are different from (e.g. one knows that he is a man because he is not a woman; one knows that he is a worker because he is not unemployed). However, during periods of crisis, logics of equivalence may displace logics of difference. In these instances, one issue or symbol may gain such emotional appeal that people who embrace it feel as though they all share the same identity. Even if one group is not immediately impacted by the struggles of another group, they will equate their identities in such a way as to feel an instinctual, immediate connection to distant struggles (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 126-128 and 164).

Equivalential logics only replace differential logics during political crises. Equivalential identities form in times of instability in which people realize how their social identities are areas of political conflict. Differential identities (e.g. women's traditional roles in family institutions and blue-collar workers' roles in corporate economic hierarchies) appear apolitical and neutral— they are just part of a natural order of difference. Differential identities become equivalential when social orders degenerate and the illusion of their neutrality disappears. When every social identity becomes a platform for political struggle, social movement actors are both more likely to reclaim their identities as autonomous groups with distinct political interests *and* more likely to equate themselves to other movements (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 135-136).

Consider two of Laclau and Mouffe's hypothetical examples of equivalence overtaking difference during crises. They say feminist identities based on the supposed unity of women around their shared biological sex are differential, assuming sisterhood to stem from a natural, apolitical difference. However, during crises, feminists may come to recognize the political construction of the category of women and see themselves as divided by class and race. Crisis pushes feminists to better appreciate their connections to the struggles of other social movements, such as anti-racist and union movements. Crisis sparks partisanship and division

in previously apolitical social spaces and, in so doing, inspires more and more social identities to organize autonomously. In another hypothetical example, Laclau and Mouffe say black workers are more likely to organize autonomously as blacks when they gain experience and political connections by organizing as workers in labor organizations. These workers may come to equate conflicts between workers and capitalists with conflicts between racists and people of color while recognizing such conflicts' autonomy. Crisis generates equivalence by uncovering the divisions within social groups, thereby foregrounding their connections to other social groups. Crisis encourages autonomy by pushing some social groups to organize, which in turn creates a ripple effect and causes other social groups to organize independently (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 130-134 and 140-141).

Left populist projects are uniquely capable of responding to crises by articulating equivalence between broad, diverse struggles without threatening various social movements' autonomy. Left populists use statism and partisanship to maintain very broad equivalential identities and autonomy. Left populists mark each social identity in their equivalence chains as political by relating them to citizenship and the democratic state. Left populists interpret the political conflicts shaping class, racial, and gender identities through the lens of citizenship and democracy, thereby marking these identities as spaces for the exercise of democratic participation. Populists cultivate the polarization and intense political conflict of crisis periods long after the crisis's resolution by rhetorically projecting an ongoing conflict between the people and the elite and building lasting movements of the people within representative institutions. Shared commitments to defending and expanding political and economic democracy unite various social movements through the left populist discourse, allowing groups with conflicting interests to view themselves as sharing a momentous struggle (Laclau 1990, 148- 153). Left populist discourse's emphasis on citizenship encourages people to hold split identities that are simultaneously equivalential and autonomous. A white left populist feminist, for example, may relate to union workers and racial minorities as a citizen while relating to other women as a woman (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 62-63).

Sanders is a left populist who fosters equivalencies between diverse groups of people. During his 2016 campaign, he constantly referred to economic inequality even while he was talking about racism. Sanders stressed democracy and civic engagement as unifying principles establishing an equivalential subjectivity. His language linked class and race through an active defense of democracy:

We are facing a two-pronged attack on our democracy — unlimited money poured into the political process, paired with the systematic suppression of the vote. These are two sides of the same coin. Make no mistake: the billionaire class does not want Americans to vote...The fight for minority voting rights is a fight for justice. It is also inseparable from the struggle for democracy itself. When the votes of minorities are suppressed, it becomes easier for politicians who represent billionaires and corporations to win and hold elected office (Sanders 2015).

Sanders attempted to hold this equivalence chain together through a politically charged and divisive rhetoric of citizenship and democracy. The citizens in this chain have split identities.

They share an identity as citizens, but they maintain autonomous identities as racial subjects and workers. This autonomy does not preclude solidarity. For example, Killer Mike (2016) is a black separatist who advocates for black autonomy and self-sufficiency and his first tweet endorsing Sanders specifically appealed to the senator's support for defending and expanding the Voting Rights Act (Holpuch 2015). Recall that Angela Davis accused Sanders of ignoring the specificity of black concerns. To understand how the 2016 Sanders campaign was relevant to black issues in their specificity, it is necessary to consider how black activists are responding to a political crisis – the legitimacy crisis of mainstream black leadership – and forming new equivalential identities in the process.

Black Lives Matter (BLM) draws energy from the black community's internal divisions. BLM activists are exhausted with the black political class's hesitancy and moderation. They join with labor and left groups to work on issues long ignored and belittled by mainstream black political operatives and, in the process, establish a new political identity that is both autonomous and equivalential (Petersen-Smith 2015). Ferguson protestors developed their radicalism and militancy in part by joining the Fight for Fifteen in the months before Michael Brown's death and view their work for racial justice as intertwined with their labor activism (Smith, B. 2015). Angela Davis has explained how BLM breaks with mainstream, pro-Israel Democrats to foster sympathy for Palestine as a central element of the struggle for racial justice. Moreover, Davis has shown that this sympathy is equivalential: many black activists do not just appeal to workers and Palestinians as potential allies for specific causes, but rather emotionally and instinctually interpret their struggles as inherently linked (see Davis, interviewed by Goodman 2016b). As BLM drew closer to Palestine and labor militancy, the divisions between the black activist left and black neoliberal Democrats became more visible and bitter (see Khalek 2016).

The crisis of the black leadership class's legitimacy welds together this equivalence chain between Palestinians, low-wage workers, and black victims of police brutality. The Sanders campaign's left populism may have encouraged the long-term maintenance and expansion of this equivalence chain. Left populism is polarizing and spreads anger and political conflict throughout many layers of society. The 2016 Sanders campaign magnified divisions within the black community over the drug war, Palestine, support for centrists, and other issues. The campaign reverberated with black activists' autonomous efforts to highlight these divisions, spurn a political realignment of the black community, and affirm solidarity with other oppressed groups. Sanders's left populism gave an institutional voice to this anger with centrist liberals and sought to sustain this anger through long-term electoral politics, which might reinforce these equivalential identities over time. Cornel West's statement endorsing Sanders illustrates how the campaign's left populism enabled equivalence and autonomy through long-term, partisan organizing. West appealed to a state of crisis, anger with mainstream Democrats, solidarity with Palestine, and Sanders's focus on long-term movement building all in one short statement:

My endorsement of Brother Bernie in the primaries is not an affirmation of the neo-liberal Democratic Party or a downplaying of the immorality of the ugly Israeli occupation of Palestinians. I do so because he is a long-distance runner

with integrity in the struggle for justice for over 50 years. Now is the time for his prophetic voice to be heard across our crisis-ridden country, even as we push him with integrity toward a more comprehensive vision of freedom for all (qtd. Tesfaye 2016)

West likewise lambasted mainstream black Democrats like John Lewis and Jim Clyburn for their opposition to Sanders and called them out for their neoliberalism (Mims 2016). Black Democrats' exasperation with Sanders and West (see Kopan and Labott 2016) suggests that Sanders's political revolution helped keep the political divisions BLM fomented on people's minds for an extended period. From this perspective, Sanders's appeals to the middle and working classes were not attempts to sidestep the issue of race, but rather statements of equivalence. Left populism's statism, appeals to citizenship, and vigorous partisanship allow crisis to continue long enough for equivalential political realignment. Fighting, politicized equivalence reconciles tensions between autonomy and solidarity.

One may argue that Sanders's 2016 campaign experimented with populist rhetoric in an attempt to create an equivalence chain linking people of color facing police brutality and voter suppression, Palestinians and others disadvantaged by U.S. foreign policy, and organized labor. Although Sanders failed to secure most black primary voters in 2016, he did win over young black voters by a respectable margin (Bacon 2016). Laclau and Mouffe's thoughts on populism lend themselves to an analysis of Sanders's populism because the theorists stress how internal divisions within identity communities facilitate solidarity among oppositional groups seeking access to power. The Sanders campaign spoke to political divisions between young black critics of American policing and a more complacent older generation, black labor activists and neoliberal Democratic Party leaders, and defenders of America's relationship with Israel and international solidarity activists.² Sanders and his supporters within the black community appealed to citizenship and voting rights in an attempt to subsume and synthesize many issues related to the misuse of state authority at home and abroad. The experiment did not yield a political victory, but it did expose generational, class, and ideological rifts in black politics that will be of interest to political scientists and campaigners in future elections.

Sanders on Revolution and Socialism

In the 2016 election cycle, some socialists criticized Sanders for failing to define and apply the terms revolution and socialism clearly and consistently. Laclau and Mouffe's work allows for a more generous interpretation of Sanders's appeals to socialism and revolution. Sanders is a specific type of socialist, a left populist socialist. As a socialist populist, Sanders seeks to resolve advanced capitalism's problems by extending democracy throughout many layers of society, both public and private. Sanders has called himself a "leftist populist" and sees his populism as a means to bring together broad and surprising coalitions, such as movements of "low-income people, hard-pressed working class homeowners,

² Jesse Jackson's bid for the Democratic Party nomination similarly exposed deep rifts within the black community over U.S. support for Israel (see Marable 1984).

environmentalists, renters, trade unionists, college students, and now the police” (Sanders and Gutman 2015, 40). Laclau and Mouffe write that spreading democratic control over all sectors of public life provokes the masses to establish a type of socialism appropriate for their historical and political context. Even if the people do not consciously conceive of extending democracy as socialism, democratizing social spaces eventually encourages people to fight for decision-making power over the economy. Left populists do not rely on the strictures of Marxist theory for a predetermined blueprint of what this democratic oversight of the economy will look like. Left populist approaches to revolution and socialist politics need not resemble violent socialist revolutions and actually existing socialisms of the twentieth century. Democratic agitation that leads people to seek decision-making power over the economy, even if it does not overtly call for recognizably socialist endpoints, amounts to a contextually appropriate revolutionary politics.

Socialists have long aspired to gain working class control of the means of production. Laclau and Mouffe adjust this conception of socialism for contemporary realities of advanced capitalism. Socialism is not only government or union ownership of the means of production, but also the extension of democratic input into economic decision making for many social groups, including environmentalists, local communities, workers, and consumer advocates. Under complicated, contemporary conditions, handing complete control of production to the direct producers would amount to privileging special interest groups over many other social groups whose work maintains a diversified, globalized economic system. The specific mechanisms for democratically coordinating these complex interests will vary from country to country and sector to sector; people must learn which methods of economic decision-making are appropriate for their social spaces through grassroots struggles in contact with broader political movements and parties. Nationalizing all major industries can hardly serve as a standard goal for contemporary socialism. Laclau insists that one cannot judge how left-wing a government is by how many industries it nationalizes. Instead, the task is to reformulate socialism as broad-based participation in economic production along with government support for the well-being of all kinds of people. This includes policies geared toward supporting the underemployed precariat, such as a universal basic income, a shortened workweek, and government support for workers cooperatives and workers in the informal economy (Mouffe 2000, 126; Laclau 1990, xii-xv; Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 178). Recall that Laclau says left populism, as it continually integrates more and more social groups into the democratic process, may evolve into socialism because these groups will eventually come to demand democratic influence over economic decisions.

For Laclau and Mouffe, the revolutionary process is the process by which populists catalyze mass interest in radical democracy among extremely diverse sections of the population. Revolution entails long-term social change that transforms the identity of all social groups involved in production. They define revolution as “the overdetermination of a set of struggles in a point of political rupture, from which there follow a variety of effects spread across the whole fabric of society” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 177). In other words, revolutionary actions are those that ripple across the whole of society, polarizing and politicizing more and more social identities over time. Laclau and Mouffe conceive of their revolution as a continual, ongoing strengthening and deepening of historical democratic

revolutions, such as the French and American Revolutions. Just as the initial stages of the French and American Revolutions spread democracy to one social group, white men, these revolutions continue over many years as more and more people gain access to the democratic rights associated with these revolutions. The ripple effect not only broadens, but also deepens democracy as the areas of social life in which democratic participation is possible multiply. As the democratic revolutions culminate, citizen participants will no longer merely vote for representatives, but also engage in political decision making in so-called private spheres, such as the workplace and the family (Laclau 1990, 187- 188; 227-229).

It is crucial to note that Laclau and Mouffe do not see this revolutionary process as a subordination of all social spaces and identities to formal state institutions. Rather, democracy spreads throughout all layers of the social as social movements proliferate across social life and generate democratic demands for their political representatives to fulfill. Centralized parties must not prioritize one democratic struggle over others or smother their development with preconceived conceptions of socialism (Mouffe 2013, 75-76). Populist parties should rather discursively equate variegated struggles. In short, revolution involves spreading democratic participation by more and more people into more and more spaces that society previously considered off limits for politics. Independent social movements work alongside and within representative institutions to push forward the democratic revolution that generates socialism.

Laclau and Mouffe's definition of revolution resonates with Sanders's calls for a political revolution. He sees revolution as increased democratic participation among many, regular people from very different backgrounds. Sanders does not only intend for his campaigns to win him offices. The senator says that the purpose of his electoral bids are to get various underdogs who have been discouraged from political participation (e.g. minorities, the poor) to assert themselves. He frames his campaigns as attempts to get more working people involved in government, make political participation fun and interesting, and get more people thinking about the important issues (like classism and trade) that big news networks and mainstream Democrats typically ignore (Sanders and Gutman 2015, 32, 76, and 207). Sanders intended for his 2016 presidential campaign not only to advance his career but also to galvanize many people to run for office and participate in progressive social movements throughout the country. The campaign was a "political revolution" because it recognized that fundamental change does not come from one struggle on one platform at a time; many different movements (both electoral and non- electoral) must work in tandem to further deep structural changes (Jaffe 2015, 166-167). Echoing Mouffe, the Sanders campaign recognized that extending democratic participation throughout society must not only involve popular engagement with representative government. Revolutionary change entails active social movements. In his words:

Real change – whether it is the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the gay movement, or the environmental movement – real change never comes because some guy sitting in the Oval Office says: 'Oh gee, I think that's a good idea.' Real change only happens when millions of people stand up and demand their civil rights (qtd. Roberts 2015).

Sanders therefore understood his 2016 campaign as a way to respond to democratic social movements without coopting or controlling them. He considered running for president only after witnessing how the Occupy movement had opened Americans' minds to radical economic policy and insurgent leftist campaigns (Jaffe 2015, 162-163). Sanders's decision to allow disruptive BLM demonstrators to take his microphone (see Hains 2015) also revealed his simultaneous closeness to and independence from radical social movements. Much like Laclau and Mouffe's notion of the democratic revolution, Sanders's political revolution has aimed at drawing more social groups into the democratic process by inspiring both grassroots electoral campaigns and active participation in left social movements.

In 2016, Sanders's conception of democratic socialism, much like his depiction of revolution, appeared rather vague. However, Sanders's presentation of democratic socialism nonetheless parallels Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist understanding of contemporary socialism. Much like Laclau and Mouffe's insistence upon spreading economic decision-making power to more people with various relationships to the means of production, Sanders calls for more layers of democratic participation over economic policy-making. Sanders expresses a vision of "economic democracy" that involves the participation of the poor in setting economic policy. Under economic democracy, the poor will not only thwart right-wing attempts to block their participation, but also be considered key voices and consultants in the crafting of economic policy. Sanders believes that the U.S. can only address major economic problems, such as inadequate health services and unemployment, by involving more people in the democratic process. The poor have the solutions; politicians need to listen (Sanders and Gutman 2015, 20-26 and 272). Like Laclau and Mouffe, Sanders has responded to the decline of the classical proletariat by proposing policies aimed at assisting the precariat. Sanders is deeply concerned with overwork, contingent labor, and low-wage labor in the post-Fordist economy. While his solutions are not exactly the same as Mouffe's, he does say that the government should guarantee a job to any unemployed person who wants one, promote workers cooperatives, and advocate for policies like a fifteen dollar minimum wage to assist low-income people (Sanders and Gutman 2015, 289-291; Johnson 2015). This approach to socialism hardly fits with classical Marxism, but it does work with Laclau and Mouffe's idea of contemporary socialism as a radicalization and extension of democracy.

Thinking alongside Laclau and Mouffe, one may generously interpret the Sanders campaign's vague language about socialism and revolution as a rhetorical experiment aimed at opening Americans' minds to broader conceptions of democratic participation than mere representative democracy. Sanders sees democracy as a broader category than just competitive elections for representative office. His 2016 campaign associated democracy with a renewed labor movement and vibrant social movements setting the national agenda. His campaign was thus attempting to overcome problems that have long hindered the American left. Gar Alperovitz, a prominent defender of worker ownership, argues that the U.S. middle class is too large and complacent to respond to a left politics that appeals to violent revolution. However, Alperovitz suggests that deep reforms at the level of American political economy may well be possible if political leaders manage to funnel Americans' anger with corporate consolidation and wealth inequality into well-coordinated, practical, grassroots political initiatives and alternative workplace experiments (2011, xxv-xxvi and 226-228). Uniting the suburban middle

class with less privileged groups is an enormous difficulty facing efforts to cohere scattered, progressive, grassroots activists across the U.S. into a focused, effective political force capable of making a dent in economic inequality (Alperovitz 2011, 170-179). Building cross-class alliances for unorthodox economic proposals is tricky because the framers designed the U.S. constitution to prevent popular forces from coming together across geographic boundaries and deification of the founding documents often prevents Americans from looking beyond representative politics to embrace more participatory, expansive forms of democracy (Dahl 2003, 1-10 and 50-53).

There are some indications that the 2016 Sanders campaign achieved marginal success in reaching unlikely groups and opening their minds to the possibility of more democratic participation in economic decision-making, more active cooperation between radical social movements and major political parties, and farther-reaching state interventions to support the underclasses. Some young people testify that the Sanders phenomenon has pushed them away from despairing apathy or mainline liberalism and toward a social democratic standpoint focused squarely on increasing the social wage (see McGreal 2017). Shortly after the 2016 elections, many of Sanders's backers challenged both the far right and the center left by mobilizing around a militant resistance movement inspired in part by the senator's critiques of the Democratic Party leadership and mainstream liberal nonprofits (see Young 2018, 8-9; Knight 2016). Some expect the Sanders-influenced resistance movement to advance economic democracy:

The work of making a pivot to a twenty-first-century Democratic Party...will fall to the generation of Sanders activists who are clearly the Democrats' future. Causes that go beyond those that Sanders have articulated—giving workers equal power on corporate boards; requiring employers to provide decent pay and benefits to all their workers, whether in traditional employer-employee relationships or not; greatly increasing the level of public provision for healthcare, child care, senior care and education; changing tax policy so that the share of income going to work increases and that going to investment decreases—these will be the kinds of issues that the young people activated by the Sanders campaign will raise, if they're to go forward in the same spirit that led them to Sanders in the first place (Meyerson 2016).

Given that Sanders's attempt to bring the Democratic party closer to militant social movements may nudge forward far-reaching progressive economic reforms, those seeking to expand democratic participation beyond traditional representative democracy would do well to study Sanders's 2016 attempt to use populist rhetoric to retool concepts of revolution and socialism for present conditions.

Conclusion

This article has responded to Sanders's socialist critics by presenting Sanders's 2016 campaign as an experiment with left populism. Viewing Sanders as a left populist suggests a more generous interpretation of certain elements of the 2016 campaign that some leftists find disquieting, such as Sanders's nationalist rhetoric, tendency to conflate race and class oppressions, and seemingly inappropriate uses of the terms revolution and socialism. I find that maintaining a focus on Sanders's 2016 efforts helps highlight the senator's populism: the

candidate's 2020 campaign presented more specific, detailed explanations of democratic socialism (see Sanders 2019) and progressive internationalism (see Sanders 2018), so his reliance on populist speech to convey his socialist politics was even more apparent in 2016. Sanders used populism in 2016 to introduce international solidarity to American audiences unprepared for a clean break with patriotic nationalism. Sanders stressed citizenship to appeal to people of color by forging equivalential associations between opposition to neoliberalism and opposition to racism. Sanders spoke of revolution and democratic socialism to inspire popular interest in economic democracy and encourage Democratic Party leaders to be more responsive to progressive social movements. For socialism to become a mainstream political force in the U.S., socialists may first have to build on Sanders's experiment by carefully constructing appeals that speak to American political and cultural divides. Doing so will require an openness to forms of socialist thought that speak to the possibilities open within the existing political system at the present moment.

This article has not tried to claim that Sanders, or any other charismatic socialist, can overcome the longstanding obstacles to left politics under advanced capitalism with populist speeches alone. European left populist parties have had enormous difficulty holding together coalitions of educated, cosmopolitan young people and older blue-collar workers (see Jäger 2019). A Sanders presidency would likely meet similar challenges maintaining unity among the democratic socialist's base. Even as president, Sanders would have a rough time implementing his most ambitious policy proposals. Given that gridlock is a feature of the U.S. constitution, Sanders's goal of amending the constitution to overturn the *Citizens United* (see Prokop 2015) decision may be unfeasible for even the most skilled of populists. Nonetheless, I find that paying attention to the Vermonter's populism helps identify the Sanders phenomenon's potentials. Observers who look beyond orthodox Marxism to appreciate Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist outlook will have an easier time grasping the purpose and possibilities of Sanders's populist rhetoric.

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Understanding Populism Through Difference: The Significance of Economic and Social Axes.

An Interview with Kenneth Roberts, *Cornell University*

Interviewers: Kayla Bohannon and Alina Hechler, *University of Kentucky*

Kenneth M. Roberts is the Richard J. Schwartz Professor of Government and Binenkorb Director of Latin American Studies at Cornell University. His research and teaching interests focus on party systems, populism, social movements, and the politics of inequality in Latin America and beyond. He is the author of Changing Course in Latin America: Party Systems in the Neoliberal Era (Cambridge University Press) and Deepening Democracy? The Modern Left and Social Movements in Chile and Peru (Stanford University Press). He is also the co-editor of The Resurgence of the Latin American Left (Johns Hopkins University Press), The Diffusion of Social Movements (Cambridge University Press), and Beyond Neoliberalism? Patterns, Responses, and New Directions in Latin America and the Caribbean (Palgrave-MacMillan).

So how did you first become interested in studying populism?

Ken Roberts (KR): (laughs) I did not set out to do that when I was in graduate school. It came shortly after I finished my dissertation research and had begun as an assistant professor. I was having lunch with a colleague, Kurt Weyland, from the university of Texas. We were in Chile at a little cafe talking about recent fieldwork that we had been doing. I had been in Peru, under Fujimori, and he had been in Brazil. We were both talking about the rise of these new political leaders on the right side of the spectrum that were implementing free market or neoliberal reforms, but they were very much anti-establishment kinds of figures who ran against traditional political parties and against the political establishment, and made explicit appeals to the people for their support, and tried to articulate a closeness to the common people. So Kurt and I were talking about this, and we were kind of struck by some of the similarities in their political appeals to traditional kinds of populist leaders in Latin America, but they were doing so in a context where they supported different kinds of economic policies. And so Kurt ended up organizing an APSA panel, the American Political Science Association, on new forms of populism in Latin America. He and I ended up writing and publishing some things that talked about the rise of new kinds of populist political leadership that were embedded in a different historical era in Latin America and adopted different kinds of economic policies, and yet it was a certain political logic that they shared in terms of challenging traditional elites and appealing to the people. So that was

for me the starting point. My core research at that time, I was working mostly on the reincorporation of the parties on the left into the new democratic arena in Chile. This was the early 1990s after the democratic transition in Chile. So, I was not really working on populism per se, but I was doing some comparative work with Peru, and I was quite struck by the Fujimori phenomenon. It was in response to that and to this dialogue that I had with a colleague around the anomalies of this new kind of populist political leadership that we thought we were seeing within the region.

We have seen a strong global surge in support for right-wing populist parties and actors. What do you attribute this to? Why now, and not ten years ago?

KR: Certainly, some of the antecedents for this rise were underway ten years ago. You could see it, obviously some of these movements had a presence and were slowly gaining some strength. Why you see it now, I would argue it is probably a confluence of different events that are factoring in. It is long term, erosion of the ability of the traditional parties to align and represent different sectors of society. In some ways I think it is reflecting the detachment of traditional political parties from the grassroots. I think part of it is also a response to the progressive convergence of traditional political parties around a common set of economic issues. And in some ways it is a response to the larger rubric of European integration around common sets of policies on a fairly wide range of issues. And I think what that tends to do is open the doors to some sort of populist challengers who politicize issues that the mainstream political parties are neglecting. So, I think for the parties, the far right ethnonationalist kinds of populist parties, they're clearly responding to the challenges of immigration and the social, political, and economic integration of immigrant communities, in particular the 2015 crisis. In some ways I think that surge in 2015 drew public attention to the issues in ways that allowed those political parties to try to make strong appeals on the basis of anti-immigrant kinds of platforms. But at the same time, you also see in southern Europe for example, the rise of what many people would argue are new platforms on the left flank, politicizing not the cultural issues of immigration, but more economic discontent coming out of the 2009 financial crisis. In particular, in southern European countries, the main debtor countries that were having to go through very difficult austerity and adjustment policies, where you saw traditional socialist parties implementing what are essentially very neoliberal kinds of economic adjustment platforms. So in that way, similar to what we saw in Latin America, in the earlier decades, where in the aftermath of neoliberal reforms, where all the mainstream political parties converged around some version of neoliberal orthodoxy, you saw the rise of new left populisms challenging that. So, I think that sort of depending on what part of Europe or part of the world you're looking at, you see different kinds of populist challenges emerging. But in all cases, they tend to be politicizing issue dimensions or issue positions that mainstream political parties have not been giving much attention to, or that mainstream political parties really don't effectively differentiate themselves on.

Do you also see a connection there because the refugee crisis in Europe has also been effective in mobilizing right wing movements in the United States even though the US was not as impacted by that? Would you say something about the transnational character of populist sentiments?

KR: Yes, I think there is certainly a transnational dimension to this. I think there was an element

of that in terms of left-wing populism as well in Latin America and even southern Europe where you saw some of the new left alternatives in Spain and in Greece that looked quite explicitly to the so-called Bolivarian cases in Latin America: Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador. So, some sort of political learning or transnational influence is there. And I think there is some version of that on the right too. In this day and age, it's easy to stay in touch with what's happening in other parts of the world, and there's sort of a demonstration effect. To the extent that you see one populist figure using certain kinds of discontents or prejudices and politicizing those, then that tends to spill over into other places. And so Bolsonaro in Brazil was clearly picking up on some of the politics and the same kind of resentments and prejudices that Donald Trump was picking up on in the United States. I think you see Salvini or other figures in Europe in some ways playing off of the same script. Even though different countries are obviously different and these movements and political parties and leaders come from rather different places, there's a certain script that they're able to play out according to the particularities of their own national situation, and I think some of them are doing that fairly effectively.

We have spent a good deal of time this semester discussing a distinction between left-wing populism in Latin America, versus right-wing populism in Europe and the United States. Do you think there is a significant distinction between these two types of populism? Are we even talking about the same thing when we refer to those two types of movements?

KR: Yeah, this is a very good question. I think it depends on what level of analysis you are talking about, whether there is some rationale for using the same label to refer to them. I think myself that if you're thinking of populism as I do, as a political logic that structures political spaces, a binary divide between some sort of virtuous people, however you define the people, and then some sort of nefarious or corrupt elite, however you construct the elite...if populism is understood as a basic political division between the elite and the people, so that populism is evoking some sort of appeal to popular sovereignty, I think you can identify forms of populism on the left and the right. At that level of analysis, there is something they share. They are both making some sort of common appeal to the people against an elite. But of course, the devil's always going to be in the details, and ultimately these are radically different kinds of movements or radically different kinds of populisms. There is much more that differentiates them, I would argue, than what they share. So, I think we have to be cautious in using the populist label. In fact, I would argue that the populist label is way too overused. In particular I'm cautious of using it without the adjectives that would define what kind of populism that we're talking about. So, I am uncomfortable simply talking about populist parties in Europe because in Europe you do find populisms of the left and the right. I would always attach whatever other identifying labels, the far right or the ethno-nationalist populists, or the left populisms in southern Europe. I think those adjectives tell you much more about the nature of those movements and what their impact is likely to be on the society where they emerge as opposed to simply referring to them as populism. At the end of the day I think what they share as populist is fairly thin and probably fairly insubstantial. What is, I think, more important is where they differ.

Americans who are fed up with politics as usual have recently flocked to populist political candidates. They see the rupture of the political establishment as a good thing. What would you say to someone who thinks that populist government would make life better in the United States?

KR: (laughs) Yeah, it is a tough question because clearly a lot of people are unhappy with the status quo. I think that both of our traditional parties have limitations in terms of really being able to effectively incorporate and respond to the full range of interests that exist within American society. So, it's very understandable that people are interested in new alternatives. It's important to know when we talk about the kinds of figures that many people would label as populist in the US, which is Trump on the right or Bernie Sanders on the left, it's striking that both of them in contrast to what you usually see in Europe or Latin America, they both emerge within traditional mainstream parties. Trump is not a traditional Republican by any stretch of the imagination, but he uses the Republican party as his vehicle to gain access to electoral office. Bernie Sanders is also not a traditional Democrat, but he also ran using the primaries. The primary system in the US opens the door for candidates who are not traditional members of the political party or members of the party leadership to appeal directly to the people for support, in essence to try to use the primaries then as an institutional opportunity to run as a populist figure against the political establishment. So, in some ways American political institutions are uniquely designed to create opportunities for this-- not just the primaries but I think other aspects of our institutions. I would argue that simply running against the establishment does not get you very far. I think there are very legitimate reasons to run against the status quo and the establishment in the United States, but on what basis are you doing so? When you look at the rationale for Bernie Sanders's critique of the establishment, it is radically different in most ways than Donald Trump's. Sanders is in particular going after the influence of private wealth on the democratic process in the US, and the extent to which the political establishment is dependent upon the sources of funding that come from private interests and the ways in which that distorts democratic representation. I happen to share a lot of those criticisms. I think that the fact that a populist candidate may be bringing those kind of issues to the table may be an important way of expanding the range of democratic debate in the United States, thinking about, are there things we can do to try to reform and improve our democratic institutions? It is easy to look around the world and identify places where populism creates real challenges to democracy. But I think we also must recognize that populism does bring in new voices, new interests, sometimes new issue positions into a democratic area in ways that can expand democracy and potentially reform democracy. I think that is what makes populism especially difficult for us because it can be a two-edged sword. Populism almost always means bringing in new people or giving new voices some sort of representation in the political arena. The question, is, can you do that in ways that amplify and perfect democracy as opposed to doing it in ways which end up whittling away traditional kinds of democratic levers. And that is the problem that we see in places like Hungary, Venezuela, where you see populist figures coming to power and concentrating power in ways that undermine the checks and balances of liberal democratic rule. I think that the challenge for democracy is, can you find ways to amplify democracy in positive ways without undermining those democratic checks and balances? This is not just a populism problem. This is an age-old challenge that democracy faces.

Trump's Make America Great Again slogan successfully serves as an empty signifier onto which different groups project meaning. But he has also faced opposition within his own party. Why do you think other Republican candidates were unable to compete with Trump and his message during the 2016 primaries?

KR: I think this is something that caught a lot of us by surprise, even those of us who take populism seriously and recognize that there are strong populist currents in American society. I think that many of us underestimated the extent to which the Republican party really has transformed itself in recent decades. And in some ways the party has been cultivating those kinds of populist currents for quite some time. But you had a party establishment that was always able to maintain control of the party at the top level and make sure that one of their candidates was the nominee for the presidency. And we saw that in 2012, where there were a series of grassroots populist type figures who channeled these currents within the party and challenged Mitt Romney in the presidential campaign in the primary season, but at the end of the day it was Romney who prevailed and those populist candidates fizzled out. What was different in 2016 was that Trump never fizzled out. He made it very clear that at the grassroots of the Republican party, this is the party. It has become an anti-establishment party that has deep populist tendencies, and he is the figure that pulls those different strands together. I would argue now that it is his party, and it is very much a populist political party, and it is less of mainstream conservative party than the Republican party was traditionally. So, you still have mainstream elements within the party, there's still a party elite that remembers the old way of doing things, but the party has become very ideological, and it is also become very populist, and those things do not necessarily go together. But I think Trump has effectively knit together those strands within the party, so at this point it really is very much his political party. And in the absence of some sort of crisis within his administration, I see very little opportunity for any mainstream challenge to Trump from within the Republican party.

And so you have business millionaires more in touch with the Republican base than mainstream politicians who have been doing this for years and who actually come from these districts and not from Manhattan.

KR: Yeah, this is one of the classic contradictions of the Trump era. Populism almost always is riven with contradictions, and this is a classic one. How is it that a billionaire can take up the populist mantle as the representative of the common person, of we the people? But Trump is not a conventional billionaire. Obviously, he's wealthy, but he was never fully integrated into the most elite Wall Street financial sectors of American capitalism. He represented a different branch of American capitalism. So even though he became quite wealthy, he was never really fully accepted within those elite networks. And in some ways, he sort of represented this place where wealthy capitalism intersected with pop culture, with the celebrity culture. He is in the professional wrestling hall of fame, not as a wrestler but as a businessman. It was casinos, it was the beauty pageants, it was professional wrestling. He was not a titan of Wall Street. So, in some ways he connected to a sphere of Americana as sort of a business celebrity more than a business tycoon himself. And in many ways as he remade his business empire, he did so as a celebrity more than as a businessman. But at the end of the day, whatever his wealth may be, he is an individual of rather common tastes. This is something in Pierre Ostiguy's work on populism where he talks about the flaunting of the low, the ability to talk gruffly. For Trump, the kind of food he eats, his way of talking, his mannerisms, are not those of a titan of Wall Street. He has

sort of everyday man kinds of appeals. And there is a place in some ways that I think that helps to authenticate who he is to people at the grassroots. He's sort of like them, just more successful. He is like them, but he has more money. And in the study of populist leadership there's work that talks about this. Yeah, you must be like the everyday person, but the reality is the average worker doesn't want someone just like them, just a worker in the White House. They want somebody who is more like them, but only somehow better or more successful or knows how to get things done. And in a sense, I think when Trump talks, they hear somebody who thinks and talks the way they do, and yet somebody who's a billionaire and who they see as a very successful business person. I would also like to point out, to come back to this notion of the flaunting of the low, which Ostiguy defines in sociocultural terms. It's sort of the ways in which Trump is deliberately politically incorrect, something that the establishment, the elite is directly offended by. Oftentimes populist figures like to make fun of the elites, they like to affront elites. And a leader who speaks in those terms, the kinds of things that many of us would be offended by, they tend to appeal to a lot of people who are angry with things, who feel that they have been neglected, or worse, that they have been exploited somehow or been abused by those who are in power. And so, someone who they see as speaking the truth to power, they like that combative streak. And some of the opinion polls suggest that more than Trump's policies-- and who knows, the policies are all over the map, there is nothing coherent or consistent about the policies-- what is consistent in Trump is this combativeness, and this willingness to be politically incorrect, and to not adhere to the basic norms and rules of the game. And that appeals to those slices, those sectors of society who feel left behind and resent their lack of power. And so again, this is one of the ways in which a billionaire can frame himself as someone who can really represent those groups in society.

The 2018 midterm elections brought in Democratic freshmen legislators, some of whom have been pushing for legislation and positions that are left of the mainstream Democratic party. Do you see some similarities here to the change of the Republican party into a movement-based party going on?

KR: I think there is an element of that and I think a lot of that is a very positive energy at the grassroots within the party. I think that there were a lot of things about the Democratic Party as a party establishment, or a party machine, that I personally would find objectionable. I think that there is a new, sort of renovation process that is underway at the grassroots. It is bringing a lot of new energy and new ideas into the Democratic Party in ways that are very very positive, and in some ways they are remaking the party into less of a party machine and more of a grassroots-based movement, which might be a very good thing for the party and for American democracy.

It is important to keep in mind, though, that it does in some ways feed what people call the polarization in American politics, which in many respects, I think, has been a misinterpretation of what we have seen. I think we must be careful in how we use that term, because when you look at it from the two political parties, the polarization has been highly asymmetric. Until recent times in the United States, and by that, I mean to the extent that there is been polarization American politics, it's largely been the Republican party moving in a more ideological direction. We forget that the Democratic party clearly tried to not only move to the center, but in many ways was supporting very pro-market kinds of policies on trade and on financial deregulation. This was hardly a party of the radical left, and I think very few people

would even recognize the Democratic party as a party of the left - certainly not in any comparative perspective. The Democratic party could not be compared to parties of the left in European democracies. In a comparative context, the Democratic party would not be considered to be a party of the left. Now, with the rise of Bernie Sanders - arguably the Occupy Wall Street movement in some ways fed some movement currents, which I think filter their way into the Bernie Sanders campaign of 2016 and which you see increasingly active at the grassroots within the party. You see movements becoming infused into the Democratic party, which have never been absent. We forget that the civil rights movement had a strong presence historically, [just as] the women's movement, the anti-war movements. There has always been at least some movement dynamic within the grassroots of the Democratic party, but I think there are new elements of that today. And I think they are pulling the party more to the left on a range of public policy issues, both economic and cultural.

Now there was a version of that story, of course, that played out in the Republican party in recent decades as well. The Tea Party movement, certainly, pulled the party to the right, but you also had an infusion into the Republican party from the Christian evangelical movement, the anti-abortion sectors, the gun rights movements, and now, in contemporary times, anti-immigrant types of movements. So there has been some mobilization at the grassroots that has pulled the Republican party further to the right. And until fairly recent times, I think, the story of polarization was largely a story about the conservative party. I think we are in a situation today, where you can see both parties moving towards their respective poles and taking more ideologically differentiated positions on the issues. That has certainly opened the democratic arena to a wider range of debates, which can be quite healthy and can be rejuvenating, but it also tends to intensify the conflicts. I think it creates a lot of uncertainty over how the institutions will manage this, because we're accustomed to the institutions being set up to function in a context where the two parties overlap in the middle and where both parties sort of compete in the center for what we call the median voter. And in a context where the two parties are moving towards their respective poles, the ways in which institutions like the Supreme Court, Congressional investigative commissions, or other kinds of institutions of American democracy work, becomes quite different. And so, I think that is some of the uncertainty that we see in contemporary American politics.

That partly answers the next question, which was, if Trump's brand of right-wing populism should be met with a new brand of left-wing populism.

KR: I myself would probably not want to call it left-wing populism. But I do think that Trump's brand of populism should be met by a lot of energy at the grassroots from those sectors of American society that are troubled in terms of what Trump's presidency means for women's rights, for immigrants, for healthcare policies, for gun control, for a wide range of issues. Where we do see mobilization taking place is at the grassroots within the Democratic party, some of it to the left of the Democratic party. I think that mobilization at the grassroots creates some opportunities to bring new energy into the democratic arena in ways that can safeguard the institutions from some of the potential threats that could exist from forms of right-wing populism, and potentially even push the democratic process to make it more inclusive and more open to the

full range of interests that we see in American society. So, I see this energy at the grassroots as a positive development. I am reluctant to call it left-wing populism. I think there are new movements, and the challenge for them is to find ways to come together and to cohere into some sort of political platform that creates a real alternative in American democracy.

In your article "Parties, Populism, and Democratic Decay" you said that the two US political parties are differentiated more along the lines of social issues rather than economic issues. Do you think that populism is generally more concerned with one type of issue than others? Is differentiation regarding social issues more likely to mobilize populism than differentiation rather than differentiation based on economic issues?

KR: I think that with the rise of Bernie Sanders within the Democratic party you can now see the new politicization of economic issues in ways that we have not seen for quite some time. The Clinton presidency and its supporters in the Democratic party were not a branch of the party that was especially close to blue-collar workers. Theirs was a branch of the party that very strongly supported free trade, a branch of the party that basically implemented financial deregulation policies. So those are all pro-market policies that left aside a lot of American citizens. And so I think what you see now is the politicization in particular of economic inequalities under Bernie Sanders and questions of the levels of taxation: what kinds of Health Care, what kinds of rights do we have as democratic citizens to healthcare? These are the type of issues that Bernie Sanders and others from the left wing of the Democratic party have put on the agenda now, and that has expanded the Democratic agenda dramatically from what it was in the era of Clinton, and even the Obama era.

I think we see a very different debate underway over the range of policies on the economic axis. I think we are seeing a re-politicization of that economic axis on which the differences between the parties never collapsed in the U.S. The Republican party is so ideological on the other flank compared to Europe, but I think that the traditional understanding of polarization misses the fact that the Democratic party was not on the left pole, that it was very much in the center and even the center right on the economic axis, but that has changed considerably.

There has been polarization between the parties on the social or cultural axis that goes further back. This is basically an axis, I would argue, between some sort of cosmopolitan/multicultural/universalist understanding of who we are as a country, and something that is more nationalistic, more ethno-nationalistic, and tends to have strong religious identities as well on the other pole. And that pole has really been heavily politicized in many respects going back to the civil rights movement, and then the countermovement on the right against the civil rights movement. This process of party polarization really begins in the 60s, when the civil rights movement leads the southern conservatives to break with the Democrats and move into the Republican party. Right before then, the two parties overlapped in the center. We forget that the Republican party was more liberal on civil rights issues than the Democratic party until the 1960s. So this is a fairly recent phenomenon, but what's happened in the civil rights movement in this sense, and then the counter-movements that followed and the other movements that came in its wake - the anti-war movement, the women's movement, the gay rights movement - those movements all politicized the social-cultural axis in ways which have pulled the parties further apart over time. I would argue that is the axis where we have consistently seen true polarization

between the parties in American politics.

I think the economic polarization on that other axis is quite recent. Therefore, it's very problematic, I think, to talk simply about the left and the right in the United States. These are separate axes, if you plot them out spatially, they are orthogonal to each other. There is nothing about being an evangelical Christian, for example, that requires you to be a market fundamentalist on the economic axis. These are separate axes, and what the Republicans have effectively done is pull these axes together and convince people that there is such a thing as a "conservative movement" that is defined in terms of market orthodoxy, Judeo-Christian identities, and gun rights and other kinds of things - but that's a product of effective packaging. It is a bundling of issue positions that really occupied different competitive axes and there are ways in which they can be broken up. You see that in part with Trump, because Trump is supporting a trade war - nothing could be more antithetical to a market orthodox position than trade wars. And what Trump's populism has done, is pull together strands that allow him to appeal to certain constituencies that he could not appeal to if he adhered to the ideological orthodoxy of the Republican party on the economic axis. Trump himself is sort of redrawing these alignments in American politics, as populism often does, because populism is rarely, if ever, ideologically orthodox.

Talking about the two-party system in the US. In western European countries, populist parties have been maybe able to enter coalitions, but they have not been able to gain control of the national government. Would you say that a two-party system is inherently more susceptible to a populist takeover than a multi-party system?

KR: I think this is one of the places where the American institutions set us up for this unexpected turn, and in the absence of primaries you would not get this. In a parliamentary system, for example, it is the legislative block of the party that selects who is the Prime Minister. That obviously would not be Donald Trump in the Republican party - you would not have had Trump emerge in a parliamentary system. Proportional representation makes it easier for new parties to form, so far-right elements tend to form on the right flank of the mainstream political parties. What you see in Europe is that they start as very small marginal parties on the right flank. Now they have been growing over time, but they have not been able to access power directly in Western Europe. They have worked their way into coalition governments in a number of countries, but they have not directly taken the reins of power.

In the U.S. case you have the combination of a presidential system with plurality elections rather than proportional representation, and then primaries which allow an independent outsider to come in and run as a Republican, even if they are not a traditional Republican. That combination of institutions, I think, has left us susceptible to this kind of populist takeover in ways that we did not really imagine. Without the primary system, Trump would have had to run as an independent. There are cases, like Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, where the traditional establishment breaks down and somebody can run as an outsider against that establishment and win elections. We have not seen that in the United States. Instead, the populist outsider works within one of the mainstream parties and basically has now taken control of one of the parties.

So, it's a very different institutional dynamic the way in which it is played out here. We

see this kind of populist leadership and power in a number of Eastern European countries, post-communist Hungary in particular and Poland now, but we have not seen this populist leadership take control and become the head of states in the Western European context. Salvini is sort of the strongman in Italy, but he is only the minister of the Interior. He is not the Prime Minister, but he clearly has a strong influence. In Austria and other places, you see these parties in coalition governments, but nowhere do they directly control the reins of state power yet in Western Europe.

And lastly, what are any future projects that you are currently pursuing?

KR: I am hoping to do a little bit of work that is new for me, which would be to look at the Republican party in a comparative perspective. I think we do not have a good handle yet on how the party has been transformed over time by the infusion of these movement currents into the party and its transformation into a populist vehicle.

I think a lot of the American politics literature doesn't give us a good handle for understanding that process of transformation, and I don't think we have a good understanding of how the Republican party is more ideologically orthodox - or ideologically radical if you want to call it that - than any of the other mainstream conservative parties that you see in Europe or elsewhere. But while it has this ideological orthodoxy, it also has this populist current that has now been grafted onto this ideological platform in ways that are very unusual. As a political scientist, I think the Republican party is a very unusual case that needs to be understood in comparative terms because that gives you a different vantage point on what's taking place than what you can do just by studying it from an American politics perspective. So that is what I am hoping to move towards.

We Are Right, They Are Wrong: The Antagonistic Relationship Between Populism and Discourses of (Un)truthfulness

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Populism maintains a specific relationship with discourses of (un)truthfulness. Yet, although a growing body of research has explored the nature and effects of populist rhetoric, populism's cultivation of reality and dishonesty has been under-theorized. In this paper, we explore three relationships between populism and (un)truthfulness: (1) the cultivation of a conspiracy theory in populist discourse; (2) populism's denial or discrediting of expert knowledge or empirical information, and the legitimacy of journalism and mainstream sources of knowledge and (3) populist constructions of alternative truths that resonate with common sense and the experiences of the ordinary people. We further explore the effects of discourses of (un)truthfulness, and ways to combat the potentially negative political consequences of populist disinformation. Together, by exploring the discursive relationship between populism and (un)truthfulness, this paper aims to provide more detailed insights in how populist versions of reality and dishonesty that attack mainstream knowledge and interpretations may impact society and political decision-making. Keywords: populism, disinformation, fake news, conspiracy theories.

Populism has been regarded as a key threat to democracies around the globe (Aalberg et al. 2017; Albertazzi & McDonnell 2008; Canovan 1999). Among other things, populism is in conflict with the principles of deliberative democracy as it emphasizes a Manichean outlook that potentially contradicts the principles of reason, diversity, and a rational exchange of arguments between citizens with differing viewpoints (Waisbord 2018). Populist ideas may also foster polarized divides in society by activating or augmenting the perceived divide between the ordinary people and the corrupt elite and/or dangerous others (Müller et al. 2018). One crucial implication for deliberative democracy, central to this paper's argument, is that populism's anti-elitist rhetoric delegitimizes established truths and factual knowledge (Egelhofer & Lecheler 2019; Tambini 2017; Waisbord 2018), which undermines the principles of a well-functioning deliberative democracy. More specifically, political disagreement should derive from agreement on the underlying factual reality (Arendt 1969), which is under threat when empirical facts are stripped from their epistemic status.

Although some scholars have argued that populist ideas challenge established knowledge and emphasize distrust in the elite by introducing conspiracy theories and alternative facts

(Bergmann 2019; Silva et al., 2017; Waisbord 2018), we know markedly little about how truthfulness and honesty are constructed in populist discourse. And, more explicitly, how populism as an antagonistic discourse (Jagers & Walgrave 2007) opposes its own alternative realities to established facts and expert knowledge. It is relevant to understand populism's relationship to the truth as the increasing success of populist parties throughout the globe (Aalberg et al. 2017) implies that populist conspiracies and alternative realities find increasing support among citizens. The populist delegitimization of established knowledge, expert sources, and empirical facts may resonate with increasing levels of doubt and distrust in established facts among the electorate.

Even though opinions provide the foundation for democratic decision-making, these opinions and political disagreement should have a factual basis (Arendt 1969). If populist constructions of reality undermine the foundations of shared truths on which political disagreement is based, increasing relativism toward facts and expert opinion can be cultivated (Van Aelst et al. 2017), which presupposes that lies are justified as they reflect opinions. In order to understand the implications of reality discourses for deliberative democracy, it is thus crucial to arrive at a fine-grained understanding of how reality is referred to in populism and framed in opposition to alternative realities that oppose established facts and expert sources.

Populism, which can be defined as the cultivation of an antagonistic divide between the ordinary people and the corrupt elite (Mudde 2004), relates to discourses of (un)truthfulness in three important ways: (1) it oftentimes refers to a conspiracy theory or a hidden truth; (2) it denies expert knowledge, the veracity of empirical information, and the legitimacy of journalism and mainstream sources of knowledge; and, (3) it introduces alternative truths that resonate with common sense and the experiences of the ordinary people. It thus strongly resonates with the politics of disinformation. By attacking established facts and empirical evidence, factual reality becomes subject to manipulation and fabrication (Monot 2017). This attack on established knowledge is central to populist discourse: Populists throughout the globe label elite knowledge and expert opinion as fake news (e.g. Egelhofer & Lecheler 2019), and present citizens with alternative realities that circumvent established truths.

These three factors are important to consider in today's post factual information era (Van Aelst et al. 2017; Lewandowsky et al. 2012). Hence, the current media landscape is characterized by high choice, fragmentation, and algorithmic-driven selective exposure options. As a key consequence of these technological advances, the information people receive is largely driven by confirmation bias since people have a tendency to select and uncritically accept information that reassures their existing views, whereas they avoid or dispute information that is not in line with their ideologies, identities or issue attitudes (Knobloch-Westerwick et al. 2017; Stroud 2008). These processes are not necessarily rational or conscious. People have a tendency to avoid cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) when selecting and processing information. Hence, incongruent information results in discomfort and is consequentially more likely to be avoided or counter-argued. Congruent information, in contrast, reassures a positive and consistent self-image and is more likely to be approached and uncritically accepted (Taber & Lodge 2006).

This information setting, and such biased processing by citizens, may facilitate the spread of populist ideas across society. In an era where the veracity of facts is less influential than

information that reassures echo chambers or existing ideological identities, and in a digital information setting where non-professional communicators can express themselves without the interference of journalistic gatekeepers that verify statements or sources, fact-free and populist sentiments may not only reach the audience in increasingly more pervasive ways, but they may also have a strong impact on people's beliefs and political decisions when they reassure the hopes and fears they are experiencing.

In this paper, the relationship between populism and discourses of truth and dishonesty is explored theoretically. In addition, based on the conceptual connection between populism and discourses of (un)truthfulness, theses on the political consequences of spreading populist realities and accusations of dishonesty are advanced. By conceptualizing the connection between populism and the truth, this paper does not only contribute to a better understanding of the electoral success of populist parties around the globe, it also postulates practical recommendations on how different actors responsible for the supply of political information should deal with the challenge of populism. Can we actually think about practical solutions to mitigate the potential negative consequences of the rise of fact-free sentiments in a time where the truth has increasingly become more subjective? Can we re-connect truth and politics (Arendt 1969; Manot 2017) by helping citizens to distinguish facts from alternative realities and conspiracies introduced by populists? Here, it should be stressed that political decision-making is not necessarily rational. Even though people may vote for populist parties because they feel that these parties are best able to represent their needs (Aalberg et al. 2017), they may not always be capable or motivated to find the truth. Emotions or prior attitudes and behaviors may motivate political action, and populist communication may intentionally seek to respond to these emotions and heuristics. The key contribution of this manuscript is to explore the role of reality and alternative facts in populist discourse, which may contribute to our understanding of increasing relativism toward facts in a post-truth world (Van Aelst et al. 2017) connected to the rise of the populist zeitgeist (Mudde 2004).

Defining Populism as a Discursive Frame in Politics, Media and Society

Populism has been defined in different ways. The most cited conceptualization considers populism to be a 'thin' ideology that revolves around the expression of a Manichean divide between the ordinary people and the corrupt elites (Mudde 2004). This ideology is thin or incomplete as it does not entail a full or all-encompassing frame of reference to comprehend socio-political reality (Mudde 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). It simplifies political issues by filtering them through a perceptual screen such that society is divided by the ordinary people versus the corrupt elite that block the interests of the homogenous people. The thin core of populism may be supplemented by different host ideologies, such as nativism (right-wing populism) or economic inclusionism (left-wing populism).

We regard populism as a set of ideas that can be communicated, experienced and primed, on both the supply-side (i.e., political parties) and the demand-side (i.e., voters). Taking the premises of the ideational approach as a point of departure, populism can be approached from a communication or stylistic perspective (Aalberg et al. 2017; Jagers & Walgrave 2007; Moffitt 2016). More specifically, the populist ideas of politicians become tangible through the language they communicate, and they need a medium to express their realities to the voters they claim to

represent. On the demand-side, citizens gain familiarity with the issue positions of populists, and populist ideas of other actors, through the information channels they select and attend to. Hence, to comprehend the challenges of populism and the political consequences of populist rhetoric, we have to focus on populist *communication* as a starting point (Aalberg et al. 2017).

Indeed, a growing body of research indicates how populist ideas are expressed by politicians via the media, and social media in particular (Engesser et al. 2017; Ernst et al. 2018). Social media channels allow communicators to circumvent mainstream elites and media channels that populists accuse of spreading lies. By circumventing journalistic principles, routines and roles that involve the verification of claims and sources, populists can use social media to their advantage and directly communicate to the ordinary people they claim to represent, whilst relying on a fact-free and hostile discourse that cultivates the boundary between the ordinary people and the culpable others. Hence, as populist voters are known to doubt the mainstream media and even regard the information spread by the media elite as Fake News (Fawzi 2018; Schulz et al. 2018), the direct communication of fact-free populist sentiments via social media channels is an effective channel to reach the populist electorate.

Populism and the Hidden Truth: Conspiracy Theories and Populist Rhetoric

Populists do not only attribute blame to the allegedly corrupt elite for failing to represent the ordinary people's will, they also frequently point to a hidden reality, or conspiracy of different actors that are said to cooperate to deprive the people (Bergmann 2019; Silva et al., 2017;) This is most salient in the discourse of right-wing populist actors who, for example, claim that the mainstream elite and immigrants are collaborating to 'replace' the native population. On the left-wing, such conspiracies mainly entail an alleged collaboration between the extreme rich (i.e., banks, the wealthy 1%) and the political elite that contributes to a widening gap between the extreme rich and the extreme poor (Aalberg et al. 2017). Indeed, extant literature has defined an important affinity between populist discourse and conspiracy theories (Bergmann 2018; Silva et al. 2017). Following the rise of populist movements in the 21st century, it can be observed that populist conspiracies have been connected to many different issues. Climate change policies are, for example, frequently referred to as a conspiracy between elite actors and the mainstream media that hide reality from the ordinary people in order to promote their own agenda. Right-wing populists oftentimes introduce an alternative reality (i.e. climate change is a hoax and a waste of resources) and blame the media and opposed political actors for lying to the people.

But what are the key components of a populist conspiracy, and how is this connected to the discursive relationship between populism and the truth?

Just as populism cultivates an antagonistic divide between the ordinary people and the corrupt elite, a conspiracy theory is Manichean in nature (Barkun 2003; Oliver & Wood 2014). More specifically, conspiracy theories emphasize that an 'evil' elitist outsider is posing a threat to the in-group (Barkun 2003). Hence, in conspiracy theories, the powerful elites are blamed for hiding the truth from the people; they cover up reality in order to promote their own evil schemes. Conspiracy theories further highlight a severe sense of distrust and skepticism toward the established truth, and knowledge that is created by the established order (Barkun 2003). This element of conspiracy theories can be used to conceptually link populism to discourses of (un)truthfulness. More specifically, populist rhetoric attacks the established order, including the

empirical evidence and experts that are regarded as part of the elitist enemy. These mainstream sources of verified information and realities are regarded as a tool of the powerful in conspiracy theories (Fenster 2008). Hence, the powerful elite are said to *deliberately* spread falsehoods and ‘fake’ realities to maintain their own power positions, to silence the oppressed voices, and to prevent mobilization of the people.

This worldview is shared by many populists. Hence, the elites are oftentimes accused of silencing the voice of the ordinary people, and for deliberately lying to the silenced majority in order to promote their own political agenda (Hameleers 2018). Populism therefore does not only involve the expression of a binary divide between ‘us and them,’ it also aims to reveal a perseverant struggle between the truth and honesty of the people and the fake reality forced upon the electorate by the elites. Populism’s understanding of these elites does not limit itself to the established political order, or to politicians in government. Indeed, the mainstream media, referred to as the Fake News media by many radical right-wing populists throughout the globe, corporations, or the corrupt monitory institutions that steal from the honest people (an idea that is also salient in left-wing populism), and supranational institutions, such as the unresponsive European Union, can all be scapegoated in populist rhetoric. European right-wing populists, for example, frequently blame the European Union and national governments for deceiving the ordinary people: Their global climate change and refugee policies are referred to as conspiracies intended to profit from the people’s welfare whilst depriving them of their identities.

In many cases, populists explicitly point to a conspiracy between different enemies of the people (Bergmann 2019; Silva et al., 2017). For example, the political elites are accused of secretly collaborating with banks or corporations to fill their own pockets, whilst depriving the ordinary people. This ‘chameleonic’ nature of populist out-group constructions also explains why populist actors can remain populist when in power. Although they have become part of the political establishment themselves, they can distract their followers and continue to express their populist issue positions by shifting blame to other elites. Perhaps the most influential example of this discursive shift can be observed in the case of Donald Trump in the US. Prior to the elections, the Democrats and the political elites in government were his main target of blame shifting. Yet, after becoming president of the US, different out-groups were invented, among which the Fake News Media is the most salient (Hameleers 2018). Against this backdrop, cultivating a conspiracy that involves different elitist groups that are accused of posing a threat to the ordinary people becomes a very effective and adjustable communication tactic for populists that gain political power.

Populist Disinformation: How Populism Delegitimizes Established Truths

The centrality of attributing blame to the mainstream media and established truths in populist discourse links up to the politics of disinformation. Disinformation can be defined as the intentional spread of untrue or dishonest information (Freelon & Wells 2020; Tandoc Jr. et al. 2018; Wardle 2017) and can be deployed to achieve electoral success or discredit the opposed party, for example. Disinformation has frequently been associated with the politics of the radical right-wing, a party family that may spread dishonest information to augment polarized divides in society and to raise distrust and cynicism in the established political order (Marwick & Lewis 2017). Disinformation can be associated with many different topics and issues, such as the European refugee crisis of 2015, the pandemic coronavirus in 2020, or governmental

communication related to climate change. Central to recent disinformation campaigns is that political actors manipulate or fabricate information in order to make it reflect their political agenda (Freelon & Wells 2020). This may not only be harmful as it can cultivate factual misperceptions, it may also have consequences on less rational perceptions by contributing to affective polarization and to negative out-group emotions (Marwick & Lewis 2017).

Disinformation may involve different practices, such as the decontextualization of information to fit a certain (partisan) issue position, the pairing of different sources of multimodal information to present an alternative storyline, or the complete fabrication and manipulation of reality to communicate a new reality that is out of touch with the objective truth (Wardle 2017). One example of disinformation that relies on different modalities to fabricate often political stories is Deep Fake News, in which deep learning technologies and artificial intelligence are used to make real people say fake things. Such forms of manipulation may be highly persuasive as audiovisual content is typically perceived as credible and authentic.

As argued by Waisbord (2018), we can identify a clear relationship between populism and the politics of disinformation. Disinformation is defined by its political intentions; actors who communicate fact-free or fabricated stories do so in order to change or disrupt the established order (Freelon & Wells 2020; Wardle 2017). Such tactics also underline populism's references to (un)truthfulness. Populist actors attribute blame to the established truths and knowledge to delegitimize the status quo and established facts to create momentum for alternative worldviews that cultivate people centrism (Marwick & Lewis 2017). In doing so, they may contribute to increasing relativism toward established knowledge and expert sources. Such relativism may contribute to factual misperceptions among the electorate, but can also undermine trust in the authorities or official sources of information. As an example, right-wing populist actors across the globe expressed distrust in the WHO and other sources of expert knowledge during the coronavirus outbreak in 2020. For interventions proposed by the government to be successful, it is important that citizens trust factual information about the pandemic.

Populist actors, and radical right-wing populists more specifically, often attack mainstream and established knowledge by casting doubt on the honesty and accuracy of the information spread by the mainstream. Hence, journalists of established media channels are frequently personally attacked for disseminating lies that hurt the ordinary people. By allegedly neglecting reality, and by not relying on accurate information, the legitimacy of the mainstream press is attacked, and voters are told that they should no longer trust the mainstream media that aims to damage the people. The same tactics are applied to empirical evidence and expert knowledge; by pointing to a conspiracy between elite expert and politicians, and/or by delegitimizing evidence as left-wing propaganda, populists emphasize that the sources of information spread by the mainstream are not trustworthy, and should not be taken into account in making political decisions. Such accusations have severe consequences. By delegitimizing established truths, populists cultivate momentum for an alternative reality that resonates with their supporters' perceptual screens. Hence, motivated by the desire to maintain cognitive consonance and confirm prior held beliefs, people may be persuaded by information that resonates with their identities, values and beliefs, irrespective of its veracity (Nyhan & Reifler 2010; Van Aelst et al. 2017). Populist communicators are known to strategically respond to

people's perceived deprivation, anger, and fear. By tailoring their blame attributions in such a way that they respond to these sentiments, populists may be highly effective in communicating issue positions that lack any factual basis. But what are the central features of the 'alternative reality' that populists *do* convey to their followers? What reality do they contrast to the 'fake' reality propagated by the elites?

Populist Reality: Prioritizing the People's Experiences and Feelings over Reason and Facts

Populist rhetoric strongly resonates with people centrism (Aalberg et al. 2017; Jagers & Walgrave 2007). This means that the experiences, interpretations, and analyses of the ordinary people should be the focal point of politics according to the populist rationale. Moreover, ordinary people should be regarded as more authentic and trustworthy sources than the dishonest elites. Indeed, extant research has shown that populist citizens have specific preferences for information in their daily news environment; expert knowledge and analyses should be circumvented, whereas the ordinary people and their interpretations should play a central role in the news (Hameleers et al. 2017). Hence, the 'populist reality' may be regarded as an interpretation of socio-political reality in which the people's experiences and analyses are at the center stage, and expert knowledge and verified empirical evidence are received with doubt and skepticism.

Such a populist reality resonates with the key stylistic features of populist communication. Hence, populists rely more on emotional language, common sense, conflict-coverage, and simplifications than mainstream actors do (Aalberg et al. 2017). More specifically, populists simplify reality into a power struggle between the good people and the evil elite, and rely on an emotional language to cultivate in-group identification and distance to the 'evil' outsiders (Hameleers et al. 2017; Wirz 2018). This populist reality further emphasizes that the ordinary people are part of an honest in-group, who are victimized by external pressures they cannot directly control. Hence, the ordinary people are depicted as pure and virtuous, and are much closer to reality than the elites that reside in their ivory towers.

The reality of the ordinary people prioritizes feelings and common sense over empirical evidence, which is said to be fabricated or invented to support the status quo anyway (Hameleers 2018). Hence, according to the populist rationale, when people are driven by their common sense, many pressing issues will be solved. Or even better, common sense may reveal that some problems do not even exist, but are rather invented or fabricated by the elites to maintain the power discrepancy between the established order and the silenced others (i.e., climate change). This again connects to an alleged populist conspiracy theory where the evil forces of power are accused of creating problems that do not really exist in order to maintain their position in power and silence the ordinary people.

The reliance on the people's knowledge and experiences in populist reality constructions can be extrapolated to the media preferences of populist citizens (Hameleers et al. 2017; Schulz et al. 2018). More specifically, people with stronger populist attitudes are found to prefer news coverage that quotes ordinary citizens instead of experts (Hameleers et al. 2017). These ordinary people, in turn, are trusted most when they describe their own experiences and feelings toward specific events or developments (i.e., refugees entering the native people's country or crime rate developments). Populist cultivation of reality prioritizes episodic and conflict framing to interpret

issues so that anecdotic evidence is trusted more than empirical evidence, which is related to some distant ‘fabricated’ and elitist construction of truthfulness.

Populist reality constructions may not only be characterized by a specific type of framing, but also by prioritizing some *issues* over others. Hence, some topics may be deemed more important in populist reality, whereas other issues are deemed as not being worth any attention at all. In line with extant literature on populism, there are two issues in general that are typically owned by right-wing populist parties: criminality and immigration (Aalberg et al. 2017; Smith 2010). More specifically, right-wing populist worldviews claim that these two issues should receive most attention in political decision-making, and politicians (i.e., the elite) who are not acknowledging the priority of these issues are accused of looking away, or only serving their own corrupt agenda. To provide an example, radical right-wing populists in Europe stress that Islam is the greatest threat to the Western world. At the same time, such populists emphasize that the mainstream politicians fail to see the importance of this issue; they are even blamed for protecting the ‘dangerous’ others. Populist realities can thus also be characterized on the agenda level in which the allocation of political and financial resources is depicted as a zero-sum game; the attention and money spent on supposed non-issues, like climate change, is a waste and should be spent to deal with ‘real’ and more pressing issues facing the ordinary people.

The Political Consequences of Spreading Populist Truths and Disinformation

Exposure to populist realities and disinformation may have far-reaching political consequences. As indicated by recent experimental research (Hameleers et al. 2018; Matthes & Schmuck 2017; Wirz 2018) and survey data paired with content analyses (Müller et al. 2017), exposure to populist worldviews may activate similar interpretation frames among receivers. At the same time, mis- or disinformation has been shown to result in factual misperceptions, or inaccurate attitudes among voters (Thorson, 2016). How should we understand the process by which receivers are affected by populist reality and disinformation constructions, and what are the consequences on a societal level?

Populist rhetoric may affect people on an individual level by activating or priming support for a populist worldview or ideology (Bos et al, 2019). More specifically, populist references to reality emphasize a binary divide between the truthful ‘us’ and the lying or dishonest ‘them,’ which may activate similar mental schemata among voters. Hence, as shown in negative stereotyping research, exposure to binary worldviews and negative stereotypes may make negative stereotypes highly salient and accessible in the minds of receivers (Dixon 2008). Thus, when citizens are exposed to populist realities in their daily environment, for example in their news media diets, their interpretation frames may become more aligned with populist realities. When they need to arrive at a political decision (voting, attributing, responsibility) the primed stereotypes may be used as a heuristic cue; the elite is punished and the populist contenders who voice similar negative stereotypes are rewarded at the ballot box. Exposure to populist ideas may thus even correspond to a higher populist vote intention (Hameleers et al. 2017).

The theoretical framework of priming and negative stereotyping presupposes that populist worldviews and (mis)perceptions of reality are not easily created or altered. Hence, populist worldviews and realities may be relatively stable traits that are not easily swayed by

cues in people's information environment. This means that misperceptions may not be created when people are exposed to populist realities or disinformation, but rather that pre-existing incorrect perceptions of a populist reality are reinforced or activated when people are exposed to disinformation and populism (Hameleers et al. 2018).

As a key political consequence, existing divides in society may be strengthened or augmented when populist realities are disseminated through online information channels. More specifically, people who oppose populist interpretations of reality (i.e., those who prefer empirical evidence and expert-centered news coverage) may not only reject populist worldviews, they may also counter-argue populist ideas when exposed to populist realities. This means that their existing disapproval of populist realities and their preference for expert-based coverage and empirical evidence is activated. At the same time, people with pre-existing populist worldviews may selectively expose themselves to more populist news coverage, and these self-selected populist realities may further prime their existing worldviews (Hameleers 2019; Müller et al. 2018). This means that, as a key political consequence of the spread of populist constructions of (un)truthfulness, the societal divide between supporters and opposers of populist worldviews may be further consolidated, and the cleavage between the ordinary people and the elite may be reinforced.

The perseverance of such populist echo chambers can be explained in the framework of defensive motivated reasoning and cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957; Taber & Lodge 2006). More specifically, people have a tendency to process information in a way that confirms their prior attitudes; incongruent information is avoided, rejected or counter-argued, whereas congruent information stands a higher chance of selection and acceptance. When people's prior attitudes are in line with populist constructions of (un)truthfulness, they are more likely to accept these populist interpretations of reality. When people are exposed to populist reality constructions that run counter to their views, in contrast, they may reject or avoid these interpretations to prevent cognitive dissonance. Another key political consequence of the spread of populist constructions of reality can be connected to the characterization of the current information setting as post-truth or post factual (Lewandowsky et al. 2012; Van Aelst et al. 2017). In other words, in the midst of the perseverance of technological affordances of high-choice and fragmented media, the 'objective truth' has increasingly become a matter of interpretation and opinion, and the evidential value of facts is no longer undebatable. Hence, in line with populist worldviews, expert knowledge and evidence is seen as subjective, and dismissed as a tool of the powerful elite to maintain their power positions, and to manipulate the general public. Citizens that support populist worldviews may thus become increasingly more skeptical of empirical evidence and expert opinion as these sources of knowledge are regarded as part of hidden evil forces that hide the reality the ordinary people are living and witnessing. Facts and verifiable evidence may thus lose power in a society where populist worldviews prevail since these sources of truth conflict with a people-centric and anti-elitist worldview.

Dealing with the Challenge of Populist Realities

Although the omnipresence of populist realities in the media, public opinion and politics may be regarded as a key threat to representative democracy and democratic communication (Waisbord 2018), there are some potential treatment recommendations that we can put forward.

Here, we can rely on two potential interventions that have been applied to political communication, and disinformation more specifically: news media literacy interventions (Vraga & Tully 2016; Tully et al. 2019; Vraga & Tully 2019) and corrective information that refutes disinformation (Hameleers & van der Meer 2019; Nyhan et al. 2019; Wood & Porter 2018). Generally, we can discern two ways of combating the potential negative consequences of the spread of populist realities—initiatives that make the audience more critical and resistant by inducing their critical skills *before* populist disinformation is received (pre-bunking), and tools that respond to populist reality constructions by verifying and refuting falsehoods (de-bunking). Even though we should not understand political decision-making as an exclusively rational process on the individual-level of voters who are guided by facts and empirical evidence, making facts easily available to citizens and offering recommendations on how the facts can be distinguished from erroneous information and lies can help citizens to navigate the increasingly more complex digital information setting. Hence, the aim is to make factual reality central to political disagreement: even though citizens may disagree on causal and treatment attributions for problems experienced in society, these sources of disagreement should be based on agreement on the underlying facts.

In the setting of the correction of disinformation, fact checkers that debunk falsehoods have received most empirical attention (Hameleers & van der Meer 2019; Nyhan & Reifler 2010; Thorson 2016). The results of most experimental research are mixed: in some cases, fact-checkers that rely on empirical evidence to refute incorrect claims in political communication may help to correct misperceptions (Hameleers & van der Meer 2019; Nyhan et al. 2019), whereas other research points to a central role of defensive motivated reasoning (Thorson, 2016). This means that, when news consumers are exposed to false information (in our case populist reality constructions that rely on inaccurate and fact-free statements to attack the elite) that they strongly agree with, they will avoid, reject or even counter-argue corrective information presented in fact-checkers. A so-called ‘backfire effect’ of corrections is, however, not identified in recent research that shows that fact checkers are at least capable of correcting factual misperceptions among partisans, even if their ideological lenses align with the communicative untruthfulness (Hameleers & Van der Meer 2019; Nyhan et al. 2019). Overall, research on fact-checking indicates that factual misperceptions can be corrected by exposing people to facts (Wood & Porter 2018), but ideological or affective perceptions are relatively hard to change by confronting people with the factual reality.

Even though fact-checkers that debunk populists’ false representations of reality may be effective at times, there are at least three major drawbacks that can be associated with debunking. First of all, although factual misperceptions can be corrected on a short term, fact-checkers do not affect the evaluation of candidates or ideological identities (Nyhan et al. 2019). This corresponds to the notion that politics is not only about making rational judgements pertaining to the veracity of information, but also a matter of identity and emotions. As argued by Arendt (1969), democracy is about opinions, but these opinions should be based on agreement on the basic facts. Second, in times of information overload and fragmentation, it is impossible to verify all political information that reaches citizens. Hence, the setting of personalized communication implies that it is hard to establish an individual’s news diet, so how can we reach people with corrections in a fragmented news setting if we do not even know what falsehoods they have seen? Extant

experimental research has mainly looked at the effects of fact-checkers in a forced exposure, artificial media setting, but we know little about the real-life effects. Third, although backfire effects may be scarce, there is at least evidence that fact-checkers are less likely to be selected when they attack existing views (Hameleers & Van der Meer 2019), which indicates that the actual impact of corrective information spread via platforms such as PolitiFact.com or factcheck.org is rather limited. Given these challenges, what can we do to mitigate the impact of populist untruthfulness?

Extant research has shown that media literacy interventions can induce news consumers' critical skills (Tully, Vraga, & Bode 2019). Media literacy can be defined as the critical skills needed for news audiences to navigate their information environment (Aufderheide 1993; Ashley, Maksl, & Craft 2017), as well as the skill to recognize disinformation (Tully et al. 2019). As shown by Tully et al. (2019), news media literacy interventions that teach audiences how to recognize and deal with disinformation can have an impact on misperceptions, although one single learning intervention may not be enough to make an impact. Yet, news media literacy interventions may be a powerful weapon in the fight against disinformation as they are not connected to one single news article, which also means that their effects depend less on existing partisan ideologies or existing attitudes. Moreover, they may reduce the impact of all instances of disinformation that reach news consumers in fragmented digital information settings, as they induce critical skills among citizens that they can use whenever they encounter novel information. In the long term, governmental interventions and educational packages may help to promote more critical skills among news consumers and the impact of disinformation and populist constructions of reality may be reduced drastically. Yet, we need more empirical research on the effectiveness of pre-bunking initiatives to populist constructions of disinformation.

Discussion

It has frequently been argued that our current information society poses a threat to democracy. Among other things, the affordances of social media may have contributed to a fragmented and high-choice information setting (Bennett & Iyengar 2008; Stroud 2008) in which citizens show a tendency to selectively expose themselves to content that confirms their own frames of reference (Knobloch-Westerwick et al. 2017). In this setting, alternative constructions of reality or disinformation may prevail since attitude-consistent information stands a higher chance of selection and acceptance than incongruent information, irrespective of the veracity of such content. Defensive motivated reasoning may thus be stimulated in a high choice information setting (Bennett & Iyengar 2008), and this may give rise to a so-called post-factual communication era (Van Aelst et al. 2017). In such a context, objective, verified evidence may be regarded as truthful insofar it confirms people's existing views, and alternative realities that contradict empirical evidence are readily available in high-choice information settings.

Such an information landscape provides the contextual backdrop for the central relationship between populism and (un)truthfulness explored in this paper. When people can shape their own biased information environment, expert knowledge and empirical evidence may be circumvented, whereas people-centric and anti-elite constructions of the truth may prevail at times of increasing distrust in mainstream institutions. More specifically, I identified three levels

of affinity between the politics of populism and (un)truthfulness: (1) populist conspiracy theories that point to a deliberately hidden truth; (2) a populist de-legitimization of established expert-based knowledge; and, (3) the introduction of alternative realities that resonate with a populist people-centric and anti-elitist worldview. Together, these associations between populism and discourses of (un)truthfulness give rise to political disinformation in two ways; elite knowledge and information is dismissed as untruthful or Fake News (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019), and people-centric experiences, emotions, and common sense are seen as more accurate and truthful than rational, verified and expert-based knowledge.

The perseverance of populist constructions of reality and disinformation have severe political consequences, of which three are most central. First, when accusations of dishonesty and conspiracy theories resonate with citizens' existing populist perceptual screens, they can result in factual misperceptions. The attacked elites and experts are distrusted and regarded as the peoples' enemies, irrespective of the factual basis of the accusations. An uninformed electorate may be dangerous for democracy, as voters are not able to base their political decisions and accountability on factual information, and instead rely on emotions and sentiments that can easily be swayed or manipulated by political actors that aim to gain power, such as radical right-wing populists. Second, such confirmation biases and defensive motivated reasoning may augment polarized divides in societies; people with populist interpretation frames may increasingly be separated from people who do trust expert knowledge and empirical evidence. One example is the increasing cleavage between right-wing populists and the left in Western European countries that have historically been regarded as relatively less polarized. Finally, the salience of accusations of Fake News and the introduction of alternative fact-free interpretations may cause more confusion and skepticism among citizens, who may no longer be able to discern truthfulness from dishonest and manipulated information. This is even more important in the setting of increased technologies and artificial intelligence. More specifically, it is already possible to fabricate audiovisual material that looks authentic. So-called Deep Fakes are already being used to make an existing person say and do things they never did, and they are increasingly easier to make. These technologies are rapidly evolving, and, when in the wrong hands, can be regarded as powerful tools for political actors to influence society and public opinion in a goal-directed way.

Despite these threats to democracy, this paper ends on a more positive note. Different interventions have been developed to combat the consequences of untrue or biased information, of which news media literacy interventions and fact-checkers are potentially the most salient examples. Although fact-checkers that refute partisan disinformation may be effective (Hameleers & van der Meer 2019; Nyhan et al. 2019) they cannot keep up with the high pace and fragmentation of today's stream of digital information, and they may not be selected by citizens that disagree with their attacks on their beliefs (Hameleers & van der Meer 2019). It may thus be important to make news consumers more media savvy, and stimulate more critical skills and healthy skepticism needed to filter out inaccurate and dishonest information from reality. In this setting, pre-bunking initiatives and news media literacy interventions have been regarded as viable alternatives to make people more resistant to persuasion by communicative untruthfulness (Tully et al. 2019). Yet, evidence on their effectiveness is scarce, and messages that tell people how they should behave are at risk of being rejected or avoided. Again, this indicates the challenge of

interventions that aim to combat disinformation by confronting people with facts: people are not always consciously and rationally navigating the digital information environment, and may accept and approach information that confirms their ideological perceptual screens that act as filters to distinguish convenient realities from factual information that undermines their beliefs.

Against this backdrop, we can formulate the following practical recommendation. News media literacy interventions should be tailored to overcome confirmation biases (Tully et al. 2019) and frequently repeated through different channels to make sure that these messages actually reach people with different ideological leanings. Even though political decisions are not always rational, fact-free discourses may best be combated by making factual information easily accessible for all citizens. Moreover, these interventions should reach people at a younger age, and should also provide practical recommendations on how to deal with the challenge of populist disinformation—what can people do to expose themselves to balanced and truthful information that does not simply confirm their priors? Finally, these news media literacy interventions should be combined with de-bunking initiatives that should have a preventative impact on the longer term. Repeated exposure to fact-checkers should induce more knowledge and confidence in media consumers so they can recognize falsehoods and manipulative content in their daily information environment.

Although this paper aims to offer new conceptual insights into the alignment between populism and (un)truthfulness, and its potential consequences and remedies, future empirical research is needed to map the salience of populist constructions of reality and dishonesty, and the effects of such constructions on public opinion. We lack research on the impact of populist ideas and disinformation in real-life settings. How are populist constructions of reality and disinformation reaching people in a fragmented information setting, and how are people affected by it outside of artificial laboratory settings? When future research sheds more light on the process by which citizens are affected, we can also start to design more effective interventions that can prevent the political consequences of dishonest populist communication among societies across the globe.

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Reactionary Populism and the Historical Erosion of Democracy in America.

An Interview with Nancy MacLean, *Duke University*

Interviewers: Aimee Imlay and Matthew Wentz, *University of Kentucky*

Nancy MacLean is the William H. Chafe Professor of History and Public Policy at Duke University, and the award-winning author of several books, including Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan; Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace; The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents; and Debating the American Conservative Movement: 1945 to the Present. She also served the editor of Scalawag: A White Southerner's Journey through Segregation to Human Rights Activism.

Her scholarship has received more than a dozen major prizes and awards, and has been supported by fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Humanities Center, the Russell Sage Foundation, and the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowships Foundation.

Her most recent book is [Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America](#). Democracy in Chains was a finalist for the National Book Award, and the winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Award in Current Affairs, the Lannan Foundation Cultural Freedom Award, and the Lillian Smith Book Award. The Nation magazine named it the "Most Valuable Book" of the year.

In the Introduction of your book, Democracy in Chains, you write that "the single most powerful and least understood threat to democracy today" is "the attempt by the billionaire-backed radical right to undo democratic governance" (xvii). It is very clear that you mean this statement without exaggeration. Why do you think this is so little understood? Why do you think it should be our most pressing concern? Finally, how do we combat these billionaire-funded radicals who are determined to de-democratize the United States?

Nancy MacLean (NM): I think the reason that this threat is so little understood is that the architects of this project do not want it to be understood by the majority. They understand that what they are really seeking would be repellent to the majority and can only succeed by means of stealth and incremental changes of the governing rules of our society, including the legal and constitutional rules. Therefore, they are trying to achieve what they are doing kind of behind the

public's back. They, of course, have public faces. In fact, the Koch network funds over 150 organizations in the United States alone - not counting the overseas ones. And all those organizations of course have public faces, but the key elements of this project are being done in stealth by deliberate misinformation and disinformation. For example, consider climate science denial and promoting the myth of voter fraud to justify voter suppression. And we could go on about the other stealth efforts. In summary, the reason why it is so ill understood is that they do not want us to understand it. They would like to go under the radar. And in fact, Charles Koch has said that his father had an expression that the whale that surfaces is the one that gets harpooned. They would much rather operate in secret. And in fact, a new book on the Koch business empire called "[Kochland](#)" by a business reporter shows that secrecy is also built into the Koch industries business model. That addresses why it is ill-understood.

Why do you think it should be our most pressing concern?

NM: The reason it should be our most pressing concern is that the scale of money that the Koch network is investing in all these operations to render our democracy dysfunctional for the majority has absolutely no parallel in contemporary life. No parallel in history. This is so audacious and radical an effort that the social sciences do not even have a concept for what is happening. We have let inequality develop in our society to such an absurd extent that Charles Koch and his recently deceased brother, David Koch were among the two wealthiest men in the world each having a fortune of some \$50 billion. As a result, investing hundreds of millions of dollars to change our society is chump change to them. It is pocket change. Their political spending is so significant that it rivals the major political parties. At times when it is not election time, it is even more than those political parties. It is vast. And I think an alternative way to get it, why it's so important and why it should be the urgent focus, is that if we took that Koch money out of our political system and those organizations that it funds out of the public conversation, we would be having very different experience of the last 20 years and of the future. For one thing, we would be able to act on the catastrophic threat to our planet that comes from fossil fuel industries like Koch industries at this point.

The foundations that Charles Koch is associated with are the leading funders of climate science denial. By Greenpeace calculations they have provided over \$127 million to organizations engaged in climate science denial. In other words, deliberately trying to deceive the public about what the science is telling us. I cannot even find words to describe the human impact of that. And the number - the millions of people whose lives will be harmed, disrupted, and sometimes lost entirely because of that effort. For example, the UN estimates conservatively that by 2050, we will have 150 million climate migrants in the world and that is a conservative estimate. Some other estimates predict 2 billion. This is what this fossil fuel industry is doing to us and Koch industries leads the effort.

It is interesting because Koch industries is not publicly traded. So, there is no stakeholder intervention or potential for intervention because it is not publicly traded. Do you think that makes this more dangerous?

NM: Yes. I write about this in the book and others who have written about the Koch industries business model have also commented on this. Charles Koch is contemptuous of publicly traded

companies because they do have transparency and therefore do not engage in the kind of very long-term strategic planning that Koch does and are subject to shareholder and other public pressures. I might add here your university has a Koch funded center on campus - the Center for Free Enterprise. And as a scholar, it is mystifying to me that university administrators would take monies from an organization like the Charles Koch Foundation knowing what they have done to our political system and particularly knowing that they have engaged in systematic misinformation about the science of climate change. I do not see how any university can host disciplines in the sciences and in good faith recruit students and faculty to the sciences when they are also taking money from the Charles Koch foundation and its associates.

What can students do about that?

NM: Well, I think all citizens can do something about this Koch network. The single most important finding of my research is that the Koch network is operating in the way that it is because they understand that they are a permanent ideological majority, that nobody wants to live in the world they are trying to create. And that is why they have used the strategies that they have. Therefore, just bringing sunshine to this by informing the greatest number of people possible about who they really are, what they are up to and how they work is a huge contribution.

Students can alert other students, alert faculty, alert community members, alert donors, alert alumni, and alert the press to the dangers of these Koch centers is important. There is a wonderful organization called [UnKoch My Campus](#). That organization was created by two students who attended universities with large Koch centers. One of them, the flagship Koch center at George Mason University that I wrote about in *Democracy in Chains*, and the other is at Florida State University. And the students witnessed firsthand, over four years, how the Koch presence on their campus undermined academic integrity and created all kinds of problems. Their reports on these centers document how universities welcome this presence at their own peril and that has been shown, case after case. Their website is full of good materials on that and reports that really show the dangers of Koch investment. I think if students took the leadership on this it could have a very big impact.

The Koch brothers publicly denounced Trump in the last election – breaking, arguably, their Republican allegiance. What does this mean for the Republican party? Do you think that this foreshadows the splintering of the right between libertarians and populists?

NM: I do not think David Koch, who is now deceased, ever said anything against Donald Trump. David met with Trump at Mar-a-Lago, but Charles Koch at one point described Donald Trump as a monster. I think that Charles Koch probably finds Donald Trump to be vulgar - someone he would never invite over for dinner. But at the same time, the Trump administration has been very useful for the Koch network. When Charles Koch boasted at a donor summit last year, he said: we have gotten more accomplished together in the last five years than I was able to accomplish in the previous fifty years. At another donor summit, he said we have accomplished more in the last year than the previous ten years.

In other words, things are going swimmingly for them in many domains in the Trump administration. Key examples of that are how the Koch network through the Federalist society

and through Donald McGahn as White House counsel were vetting all of Trump's judicial nominees. Trump appointed their judges to the bench. Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh were their choices and they invested a fortune in making sure that they were confirmed. They have also advised on the federal judiciary nominees that Trump has proposed. Trump has been able to name more federal justices to the bench than any president in living memory, thanks to Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell, the Senate Majority Leader. Essentially taking many of those appointments away from President Obama. So, in terms of defining the operating rules of our government and society, the legal rules, they have had huge victories through the Trump administration.

The tax bill was also something their people were advising on almost daily. They boasted that they were in daily contact with White House. That tax bill is going to be devastating to most Americans over time and has already driven up the deficit considerably, which they will use then to argue for a constitutional convention. Additionally, they have gotten things that they want in domain after domain, from attacks on public education and funding for private education and for-profit colleges, from Betsy DeVos in the Department of Education, to unending all kinds of workers' rights and protections in the Labor Department under its shifting leadership over time. Certainly, they are getting the fossil fuel industries' agenda through the EPA and the Department of Energy. In domain after domain, they are getting what they want. The one exception to that is tariff policy. They have not been happy with the president's protective tariffs, but that is small potatoes compared to everything else that they have gotten.

It is interesting now that Trump is facing impeachment. I have been kind of following, trying to see what the most Koch allied members of Congress are doing regarding this and how their think tanks are commenting or not commenting on it. They all seem to be sticking by the president. I really think that future historians and journalists are going to find out that there were much closer connections between members of this administration and the Koch network than journalists had been paying attention to.

Trump is getting his policy directives from people who are interested and do have a stake in these things, and they are shaping those policies and he is putting them through. I think of him now as the Distractor in Chief. And in fact, one of his energy officials recently boasted about this in meeting with oil and gas executives, he said it is absolutely thrilling to be working for this administration. The president has a knack for turning the attention of the press and the people elsewhere while we do the work that we need to do. There are some people who portray Trump as kind of coming out of nowhere and being this bizarre exception in American politics. But really if you look historically, he is the culmination of a long process of the decay in that party.

What the Koch network has done kind of brilliantly, and they boast about it, is basically change incentives and punishments to bend the Republican party to the biggest donors' purposes. Through their capacity to raise huge amounts of money to invest in candidates who will toe the line or to primary any who do not toe the line, they get their way. The Trump base attacks anybody who does not toe the line. And again, you see that most dramatically in the case of policies related to the fossil fuel - protecting the fossil fuel industry. In *Democracy in Chains*, I write that in the 1990s, there was no difference between the two major parties in their recognition of global warming, climate change as human caused, and the threat that needed action. Of course,

they differed on how to address it, but both parties recognized it as a threat that needed action. This dates to George Herbert Walker Bush in the early 1990s. Yet, by 2014, only 8 of 278 Republicans in Congress would admit that climate change was happening and caused by human activity. It was Vice President Mike Pence who circulated that climate pledge.

I think people need to understand that traditional notions of Democrats and Republicans or liberals and conservatives just do not apply anymore in understanding this situation. There are many Republican voters who want to make sure we have clean air and water and want to make sure we act on all the extreme weather. They are getting directly affected, especially in rural areas and coastal areas. But their party is not listening to them. It is listening to these powerful donors.

Some scholars have argued that the rise of populism (this is assuming that Trump can be categorized, of course as a populist) has included the erosion of democratic institutions by weaponizing them with ideologies. Brett Kavanaugh and the other the federal judges that Trump has appointed are all libertarian-leaning. How do you think that this affects the erosion of our democratic institutions?

NM: As a historian, I cannot talk about populism without modifier. There is reactionary populism, for example, I wrote about that in my first book, on the Ku Klux Klan. There's progressive populism: the kind that we saw in the People's Party during the 1890s and that you see in the Bernie Sanders campaign. Elizabeth Warren and many progressive populist organizations are doing great work around the country. I think that at some level, some amount of populism is part of the air we breathe in modern democratic societies because people who are campaigning for office are trying to get things done and have to appeal to masses of people. And anger is a powerful motivator, so they will couch what they are doing in terms that arouse people's anger against elites of some kind.

But what is distinctive in the kind of populism that we are seeing from figures like Donald Trump and Bolsonaro in Brazil, is these reactionary populists or right-wing populists, do not give a damn about the people. They are using the anger of the people over decades of neoliberal austerity and failed promises, but they are harnessing and weaponizing that anger in order to move an agenda that is about corporate supremacy. It is a disgusting sleight of hand. I was just reading this book by Michael Lewis called *The Fifth Risk* and it highlights what the Trump administration has done in federal departments and agencies. Lewis discusses the Department of Agriculture, writing that Trump is a president who won the rural vote, particularly the white rural vote; thus, those white, rural Evangelical voters are his strongest base of support. Lewis argues that surely Trump would care about the Department of Agriculture given his base is rural. However, Lewis documents that the Trump administration did not attend the briefings by the Department of Agriculture to orient the new administration. They appointed Trump loyalists who do not care about the rural people. And if you look past the rhetoric and instead at the policies, you see the policies are serving corporate elites. And similar to what I learned from my research on Ku Klux Klan and lynchings in early 20th century America and then on this Koch led project in our time - it is an old trick to use populist language to achieve elitist ends. And considering the kind of populism that is coming from the political right now, it is attacks on elites who are perceived to be too liberal. Elites who are obeying the law with regard to refugees,

upholding the dignity and rights of African Americans and Latinos and others subject to racism. It is a cheap trick. That is how I think about it.

This is an issue on theories of populism. Thus, do you see any connections between your historical work in the rise of right-wing populism in the US and Trump as the culmination of a plan?

NM: We've seen a kind of long-term deterioration in the Republican party. Many political scientists, historians and journalists have written about that, but there was a kind of crossing of the Rubicon in 1964 by making Barry Goldwater their presidential candidate, which was the outcome of deep organizing from college Republicans and other adult figures on the political right. But Barry Goldwater was really the first neoliberal candidate, free market fundamentalist, not on his foreign policy, where he was cold war Hawk, but domestically. He talked about privatizing Social Security. He was against labor unions. He wanted to prioritize the Tennessee Valley Authority. An agenda against minimum wage, maximum hours, all these different things. To get him to be the candidate the folks who were doing this (and this included William Rusher, who was editor of the *National Review*), they were very explicit in their meetings. And I've seen the documents from the meetings stating that they wanted to shift the Republican party from the Northeast, where its leaders then were based, to the, they actually said the States of the former Confederacy, to plant the Republican flag squarely in Dixie. And the idea was to appeal to white voters who were hostile to workers' rights from the CIO and the New Deal and especially to the Civil Rights Movement. So, when Barry Goldwater ran in 1964, he basically only won in the States of the Deep South that were most hostile to civil rights and his own state of Arizona. That was the beginning of a process that then went on through the Nixon administration. People talk about the Southern strategy. Ronald Reagan held his first post-convention rally after he became the 1980 nominee in Philadelphia, Mississippi, where civil three civil rights activists had been murdered. That was a deliberate attempt on the part of his campaign to reach what they called the Wallace-inclined voters. This is clearly pandering to racism and stoking hostility using a kind of reactionary populism to agitate white voters to hate the federal government.

So, this has been in play for a very long time and Donald Trump is the kind of strange fruit of all of that, in that he has taken this to such an extreme. In terms of his candidacy though, his populist stance was very helpful for him in distinguishing himself from the rest of the Republican field. It is hard to remember today, but all the other Republican front runners, including many that folks thought would be the nominee, like Jeb Bush or Marco Rubio, they had taken that kind of Koch pledge. They were carrying out that agenda. They were talking about cuts to Social Security and Medicare. They were against workers' rights. They were attacking public education. They denied climate change, etc. Donald Trump was the only person who had not taken the kind of Koch pledge and he called them puppets. And that really stuck with voters as they could see that something was happening to their party and he did not require them to take that nasty Koch medicine. He said he was going to give everybody healthcare better than Obamacare. No cuts in social security and Medicare. Of course, he said all the ugly things that he had said from the beginning about Mexican citizens and Mexicans in the United States. And he denied President Obama had been born in this country.

For a Republican voter, who would not vote for a Democrat, who wanted to be loyal to the party, but who did not want that Koch medicine, Donald Trump looked like the guy. I think he used populist appeals very effectively to distinguish himself from the rest of the Republican field, which had bowed to the donors, that rich radical-right Donor class. The other thing I think that a lot of people on the left do not understand is that when the radical right talks about the swamp, they mean something different from the rest of us. You or me or people who are writing for our national newspapers, they assume the swamp is K street, right? The corporate lobbyists. But for Trump and for James Buchanan and Charles Koch and the others, the swamp is not really that swamp. For them, the swamp is teachers, public school teachers who are pushing for more money for public education. The swamp is Planned Parenthood, which is an effective lobbyist for public health measures that benefit low-income people. The American Association of Retired People (AARP) is a big target for them. So, they think all these citizen-led organizations, labor unions of any description, particularly public sector unions, they think all of these organizations based on collective power among the citizenry are the swamp. These groups can move policy and get tax transfers for particular purposes. We have two understandings of the swamp that are completely at odds.

From another angle, the Trump administration needs to be seen as a culmination of things long underway on the libertarian right. That is, they have been attacking the administrative state for a long time. The federal agencies, they would call them bureaucracies, they would say that these bureaucrats are essentially independently enforcing their will and it is a gross misrepresentation of how politics in a modern society operates. For every federal agency that is doing work, it is licensed to do that work by majoritarian representation. For example, Congress passes a Clean Air Act, the legislation creating the Environmental Protection Agency, but House and Senate members know that they do not understand the science of that, so they create the goals for the agency and then delegate the scientists in the agency to figure out how to accomplish those goals on the part of the public. The right tries to de-legitimize regulation by saying this is this kind of unchained administrative state with these rogue bureaucrats running roughshod. But, but the whole point of what they are doing is trying to get it so we will no longer use government to restrain corporations from harming the public or harming competition. So they created this whole language of the deep state that now, has been taken in whole new directions, but the vocabulary was created by the kinds of people that I write about in *Democracy in Chains* and that operate through these Koch organizations.

And a lot of what they spin out along these lines is created by their academic grantees, their faculty grantees who work in these centers. And many of the people at these centers have nothing to do with academia. Yet they spin out all these policy studies that make the case for deregulation, attack the administrative state, etc. At the Scalia School of Law at George Mason, there was a project on the administrative state run by Neomi Rao, who is now a federal judge, thanks to Donald Trump, is in Brett Kavanaugh's old seat. One of the Koch center donors stated that they were going to bring her back to GMU with this multimillion-dollar center after she takes down the administrative state.

Koch has been personally very strategic has been investing in changing the courts since the 1970s, by investing in law and economics programs, in something called the Institute for

Justice. He also boasted that he provided seed money for the Federalist society. He understands that legal and constitutional rules can be used to constrain what the people in government can do. And it is interesting that after all these years of the right attacking what they called the activist judiciary, now that the power has swung the Cato Institute publishes a book called the *Case for an Activist Judiciary*.

Adorno's Critique of the New Right-Wing Extremism: How (Not) to Face the Past, Present, and Future

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This paper serves three purposes relating to a lecture Adorno gave in 1967 on "the new right-wing extremism" that was on the rise then in West Germany; in 2019, the lecture was published in print for the first time in German, to wide acclaim, followed by an English translation that appeared in 2020. First, it is important to situate the lecture in its historical and political context, and to relate it to Adorno's status as a critical theorist in West Germany. Secondly, Adorno's diagnosis of the new right-wing extremism (and related forms of populism) and his conclusions about how to resist and counteract it are relevant to the current political situation in the United States, even though he presented his analysis more than half a century ago. Thirdly, Adorno's lecture provided the model for a type of education that is oriented toward enabling students to face unpleasant facts about modern social life in constructive ways, including recognizing and resisting right-wing populism and extremism, in an age that imposes greater and greater uncertainty and challenges on individuals. In conclusion, it is evident that in a rapidly changing world, the "tricks" of right-wing populists and extremists are astonishingly unoriginal and static, which in part may explain their appeal and effectiveness. Reading the pedagogy Adorno suggested as a practical application of his critical theory highlights the importance of enabling individuals to recognize the "normalcy" of proliferating experiences of cognitive dissonance, and to respond to such experiences by adopting a productive rather than defeatist stance with regard to the increasing complexity and the intensifying contradictions of modern societies in the twenty-first century, as they are accompanied by myriad possibilities and threats.

I consider the survival of National Socialism *within* democracy to be potentially more menacing than the survival of fascist tendencies *against* democracy. ... That fascism lives on, that the oft-invoked working through of the past has to this day been unsuccessful and has degenerated into its own caricature, an empty and cold forgetting, is due to the fact that the objective conditions of society that engendered fascism continue to exist.

Theodor W. Adorno ([1959] 2005, p. 90, 98)

[O]ne might refer to the fascist movements as the wounds, the scars of a democracy that, to this day, has not yet lived up to its own concept.

Theodor W. Adorno ([1967] 2020, p. 9)

In 2019, the original German version of Theodor W. Adorno's 1967 public lecture, "Aspekte des neuen Rechtsradikalismus," appeared in print for the first time (Adorno [1967] 2019; translation: *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism*, Adorno [1967] 2020; subsequently *Aspects*)¹ Thus, the publication of this lecture occurred half a century after Adorno's death in 1969, in the context of proliferating right-wing populist movements in Germany and elsewhere, and a growing number of right-wing governments around the world. What may be most striking about the lecture, in retrospect, is not so much that his effort was directed at illuminating right-wing trends that are virulent again today, but that he did so with astonishing clarity, efficiency and accuracy so many years ago, while difficulties remain today to conceive of effective strategies to contain or prevent the destructive potential of right-wing movements and politics. On the one hand, these difficulties might be indicators that the appeal of fascism and its ability to garner support is symptomatic of problematic dimensions of modern societies that are integral to their functioning and structure, such as the persistence of a spectrum of inequalities; on the other hand, this appeal also might be expressive of the limitations of *formal* democracy that today is being viewed, erroneously, as a sufficient substitute and approximation of an emphatic understanding of *substantive* democracy, broadly conceived. After addressing the need to distinguish between populism, radicalism, and extremism, I will situate Adorno's lecture in its historical and political context in the 1960s in West Germany, in the process pointing out parallels with current circumstances in (unified) Germany. Next, I will provide a summary of key points of his diagnosis of the *new* right-wing extremism, focusing especially on the role of fear, and compile a catalogue of practical strategies and tactics he suggested for resisting and counteracting right-wing populist ideas and forms of extremism. Even though Adorno presented his analysis more than half a century ago, the section that follows will illustrate in cursory fashion the relevance of his diagnosis as well as practical suggestions for how to assess the current political situation in the United States, by employing the category of American exceptionalism, with analytical (rather than political or ideological) intent. Although Adorno did not address the issue of education explicitly in his 1967 lecture, it is so heavily implied that appreciating fully what he was trying to convey demands drawing attention to the type of education (and requisite mindset) he was advocating towards the end of his life, during exactly the same time period when he gave his lecture on the new right-wing extremism. Without having become familiar with this kind of education, many individuals will not be able to face, and especially not be likely to master, the challenges of life in modern societies constructively, and in ways are consonant with their values and life goals. The type of education Adorno advocated is intended to foster explicitly spelled-out, critical and reflexive perspectives on the past, present, and future – with regard to both individuals' socially and historically situated selves, and their particular society's darker side. Adorno's combined preference for the openness of the essay form, and his reservations about his lectures being recorded, illustrate his pedagogical commitments exceedingly well and support related propositions he formulated on many occasions. In its succinctness, Adorno's 1967 lecture

¹ The recording of the original lecture in German had been available for years on the web-site of the Österreichische Mediathek, Audio-visual Archive of the Technical Museum, Vienna, for years: <https://www.mediathek.at/oesterreich-am-wort/suche/treffer/atom/014EEA8D-336-0005D-00000D5C-014E5066/pool/BWEB/> (Adorno 1967a). The web-site also includes several other recordings of Adorno lectures, see <https://www.mediathek.at/oesterreich-am-wort/aus-aktuellem-anlass/archivaufnahmen-von-und-mit-theodor-w-adorno/>.

– influenced and inspired as it was by his American experience, and representative of his multifaceted work as a whole – may have the potential of serving as a model for how to enhance our understanding of political and educational dilemmas all modern societies should have faced much more explicitly, non-defensively, critically, and reflexively, in the past, must face in the present, and will have to commit to facing in the future, if ever more predictable catastrophes of many kinds are to be averted, and the preconditions of those catastrophes transformed in favor of modes of social, political, and economic organization that are more conducive to authentic (rather than increasingly alienated, anomic, and disenchanting) forms of individual, social, public, and societal life.

Populism, Radicalism, Extremism

Adorno's lecture was located at the intersection of populism, radicalism, and extremism, though neither explicitly, nor necessarily in ways that were intended to clarify the issues at hand, and the differences involved. For one thing, Adorno never referred to populism in the lecture, which is a term that at the time was not as common as it is today.² On the other hand, the lecture was interspersed with references to and observations about "people" and "the people." These remarks, references, and observations pertained to people as *subjects*, as active – though not necessarily self-possessing – individuals belonging to larger aggregates, such as societies or countries, yet holding certain views, having specific experiences, and representing particular practices from a catalogue of options provided by their society or country, with various implications for how they see and situate themselves in relation to their own, each other's, and their society's past, present, and future, and how they confront corresponding challenges. In addition, Adorno acknowledged that in modern societies, "people" – as individuals and groups of individuals – in myriad ways are being "framed" as *objects*, e.g., as the bearers of ideology and the targets of propaganda who are expected to serve certain purposes, by forces – both concrete groups of actors and abstract processes – that usually are not transparent to most members of a society, and which would have to be revealed and identified overtly for individuals to be able to move toward being subjects with agency.³ Moreover, in the original German version, Adorno referred to "right-wing radicalism" (*Rechtsradikalismus*), whereas the translation refers to "right-

² As far as I was able to determine, in Adorno's twenty-volume set of collected works in German, he used "populist" just once (in vol. 14, p. 308), in the section on musical life in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* ([1962] 1988), p. 118, and he did not refer to "populism" at all.

³ This is an important issue that I cannot address here in detail; suffice it to say that frequently and erroneously, such forces are being identified in terms of "conspiracies," even though they may be representative of the normal operations of corporate capitalism, as recently scrutinized by Jane Mayer (2016) and Nancy MacLean (2017), or of what I have referred to elsewhere as the "constitutional logic" of modern societies (Dahms 2009, esp. 91-94; 2012; in preparation; and Jalata and Dahms, 2015); neither the "normal" – i.e., internally consistent and predictable – operations of corporate capitalism (see Panageotou 2017), nor the "constitutional logic" of modern societies, is consistent with "common sense" assumptions individuals obtain in the process of socialization and education, nor are they admissible in terms of conventional assumptions; still, many people yearn for more or less easy explanations in an increasingly disorienting world, regardless of whether they have the necessary mindset, training, and skills, or willingness to make the effort to acquire them, or not. Regarding frequent flaws in conspiracies "theories," see, for instance, deHaven-Smith (2014) and Cassam (2019).

wing *extremism*” (which, not surprisingly, would translate as *Rechtsextremismus*, and which Adorno is not known to have used). However, this distinction is indicative less of a clear conceptual difference than of different terminological conventions in time and space: during the first two decades of the Federal Republic of Germany, which coincided with the last twenty years of Adorno’s life (after returning from America in 1949), the established usage was “right-wing radicalism.” which during the early 1970s – at the time of nascent left-wing and international terrorism (Aust [1987] 2008) – was replaced by “right-wing extremism.”

Since the beginning of the current century, populism, radicalism, and extremism are terms that have been used frequently in political and cultural discourse and analyses, to draw attention to, describe, try to respond to, advocate, or assess profound changes and reorientations in, or in relation to, modern democratic societies. In academic debates, social theory and social research, interest in the phenomena these terms refer to, along with their origins and growing appeal in public life, has been intensifying continuously. Yet, even in academia, it is not unusual for these terms to be used loosely and interchangeably, and they do not often reach the level of clarity typically associated with carefully formulated and distinguished *concepts*. Indeed, it is in the nature of these terms that differences in how speakers or writers have been using them is confusing, in part because they commonly appear to refer to similar – if not exactly the same – phenomena, and because populism, radicalism, and extremism also are used as labels to refer to a range of agendas, activities, and actions. Often, how populism, radicalism, or extremism is being used tells us more about the users and their agenda than about the phenomena, and it does not necessarily advance the purpose of clarifying the distinctiveness of a specific social movement, an ideology, a set of political goals, or the vital aspects of the condition of modernity or democracy. In addition, rather than serving the purpose of illuminating pivotal and controversial issues and challenges, the terms also are being employed and deployed to reject any and all views that do not directly and strongly reaffirm conventional or mainstream notions about how to act in a particular situation or how to position oneself with regard to a particular issue, such as “democracy,” without specifying the kind of democracy that is being alluded to or regard for careful distinctions and specific circumstances, or whether or not at least some of the grievances voiced by populists, radicals or extremists may or do have a basis in reality, in lived experiences, or are justified in some form. At the same time, there are – undeniably – important differences that must be acknowledged and distinctions which must be made, for a productive engagement with a range of phenomena that do not all fit into one category, to be within reach.

In recent years, among the phenomena the three terms refer to, both *populism* and *extremism* have been examined and discussed to a much greater extent than *radicalism*, with populism applying especially to trends in societies with democratic political systems and cultures. Conceptually, radicalism and extremism refer to more or less abstract categories and often pursue goals that are “global” in nature (in the sense of: without discernible limits), and with practical intent being oriented toward the transformation or creation of a *totality* (e.g., society, humankind, or planetary civilization).⁴ Abstract categories are being applied or goals

⁴ In a kind of “short-circuit,” liberal theorists, such as Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin, and Ralf Dahrendorf, more or less blatantly took the etymologically shared root of “totality” as a philosophical and theoretical concept and “totalitarianism” as a political concept as evidence that thought that aspires to address and clarify issues at the level of

pursued with determination, and occasionally with a sense of moral righteousness, regardless of whether they are grounded in a shared and agreed-upon reality, and whether the goals, realistically speaking, are at all attainable. In some cases, actions even may be motivated by the recognition that the successful transposition of abstract categories into reality in fact is highly unlikely. By contrast, populism joins a long line of efforts to advocate the “interest of the people,” of promoting the “real” interests of the people that make up society, or of being most responsive to popular needs and demands. According to William Outhwaite (2018, p. 1790),

Populism, like nationalism and democracy, is an ideology of popular rule. However, where nationalism (in some of its aspects) stresses the civic or ethnic ‘belonging’ of the people, populism invokes ‘the people’ as opposed to elites, such as an established political class. It can therefore take a left- or right-wing form, and is often ambiguous or ambivalent between them.⁵

The distinction between left-wing and right-wing populism indeed has received much attention in recent years, including in the U.S., especially since the 2016 Presidential campaign, which was accompanied by the formation of two opposing forms of populism, represented each by a Presidential candidate whose campaigns rejected established approaches and strategies to achieving goals that they deemed to benefit mostly the political class. Although populism usually is seen in terms of left-wing or right-wing ideologies, there is nothing inherently fixed that demands that it should lean in one political direction or the other. In both fact and principle, promoting the interest of the people implies *all* the people, not just this group as opposed to that group, and if attainable, orienting actions toward such a goal would be difficult to disagree with. However, promoting the interest of all the people constitutes a truly tall order: who determines who “the people” are and what “the people” want, and how does one go about making such determinations, in the absence of established and widely accepted and supported practices designed to insure that the interests and needs of all the people will be taken into consideration and account of? After all, for the most part, “the people” is an indispensable rhetorical device employed for the purpose of attracting voters or to generate mass-loyalty, and to simulate unity where there are conflicting and competing interests, the constant potential for strife, and an absence of shared understanding and purpose, except under certain highly unusual circumstances, such as after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (“United We Stand!”), but not during the current Coronavirus pandemic during which the tensions between different segments of the population are on full display.⁶ Would it be possible to identify and assess conflicting interests

totality inevitably, in some way, lays the foundation for, and legitimates, forms of *totalitarianism*. See, e.g., Rotenstreich (2000).

⁵ See also Müller (2016) and Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017); regarding extremism, see Berger (2018).

⁶ This complex of issues has been discussed at length in the debate about American exceptionalism, if employed as a productive analytical and comparative concept in social and political theory, as well as sociology, but not as a political or ideological category. At the beginning of the first chapter of Seymour Martin Lipset’s (1996) related work, he wrote,

Born out of revolution, the United States is a country organized around an ideology, which includes a set of dogmas about the nature of a good society. Americanism, as different people have pointed out, is an “ism” or ideology in the same way that communism or fascism or liberalism are isms. As [the British writer, philosopher, and critic] G. K. Chesterton put it: ‘America is the only nation in the world founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the

and whether and how well existing strategies to reconcile such interests might work? Is it possible to truly reconcile conflicting interests at a time of continuously diminishing solidarity, when the latter concept is used mostly as a means of political propaganda, without corresponding commitments and efforts to sustain and cultivate actual solidarity across groups in society?⁷ Considering the immense obstacles that have been standing (or intentionally were placed) in the way of successful forms of both collective action and political programs which may be genuinely oriented towards the advancement of “the people’s interest,” in recent decades, with the ideology and policies of neoliberalism having been especially effective at thwarting progressive efforts, it may have been inevitable that populism has taken more or less radical and extreme forms, focusing on right-wing or left-wing ideals, ideas, goals, and tactics. At the same, though, it is important not to establish a simple and seemingly straightforward equivalence between both versions of populism, as the substance of their ideals, ideas, goals, and tactics generally are qualitatively different, with potentially very different implications and intended end-results.

Both *radicalism* and *extremism* are different from populism, since at the most fundamental level, they do not have a referent such as “the people” (vague as the latter may be in many instances), but follow and advocate an abstract ideal or set of principles that is more or less highly contested, and distinguishing radicalism and extremism from each other is more difficult. To begin with, context usually does play a key role in determining what the terms in fact do refer to, in different countries, political parties, and time-periods. For instance, there is not necessarily anything wrong with pursuing or applying a *radical* approach to achieving an objective, since *going to the root* of an issue or perspective, for instance for analytical, theoretical or critical purposes, may not only be justified, but necessary for a task at hand. On the other hand, adopting an *extremist* position to achieve a goal implies a structural flaw, a mismatch between a task or challenge and the basic presuppositions that inform practical steps, or a strategy chosen to attain a goal or prevent a development or event. The lacuna between “radical” and “extremist” is further complicated if we – as in the case of *populism* – try to compare between *radicalism* and *extremism* as “isms” – as *ideological* renderings.

Declaration of Independence.’ ... [T]he nation’s ideology can be described in five words: liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire. (p. 31)

Note that Lipset identified populism as one of the five key dimensions of “Americanism.” The quote within the quote is from Chesterton (1922, p. 7), not to be confused with the British fascist A. K. Chesterton. The ubiquity of tensions within American society, which – in terms of its foundation – may celebrate competition to a greater extent than any other society, resonate strongly with Mugambi Jouet’s (2017) more recent book on American exceptionalism, and his central observation that in many ways, American conservatives (who, if they vote, usually support the Republican Party) are not only separated by a major ideological, intellectual, and policy-related gulf from Europeans, and in many ways from the rest of the world, but also from liberal and progressive Americans who tend to support the Democratic Party (again, to the extent that they vote). In a sense, in terms of population, there are “two Americas” which appear to see less and less eye to eye, on more and more issues, as time goes by. Disagreements about whether to support lockdowns and to wear masks during the pandemic illustrates this gulf in attitudes, convictions, and willingness to consider and support the welfare of others (or not). See also Brown (2005) and Voss (1994). Regarding the implicitly and more or less subtly limiting horizon of American ideology, see Dahms (2019b).

⁷ See, e.g., McCarthy (2017), who uses the U.S. pensions system as a foil for an in-depth analysis; on a related topic, also Hardy and Hazelrigg (2007).

Radicalism as an ideology may amount to the stance that under specific conditions, in the face of particular circumstances, anything short of radical position is unjustifiable – maintaining the *radical* stance is taken to be morally, politically, or culturally imperative, and anything short of it will adulterate how we grasp a problem, choose to advocate an approach to tackling a problem, or conceive of a reference frame necessary for solving a problem. By contrast, maintaining an *extreme* viewpoint or starting point for practical actions, by definition, is “out of bounds” and exaggerated, not merely by those who disagree or who certain actions may be directed at, but also those who perpetrate an action – the excessiveness of the action is the means of choice to attain the goal, e.g., to disseminate “a message.” Put differently, a *radical* approach implies the possibility of a categorical distinction between, on the one hand, how a situation is being assessed, e.g., through a theoretical, analytical, research-related (as in basic research), or ideological lens for the purpose of *diagnosis*, and on the other hand, an array of possible *conclusions* that can be drawn with regard to what to do practically, in light of the diagnosis, e.g., whether to accept or ignore it, etc.⁸

Yet, such a distinction does not apply with regard to an *extremist* position: there is neither an interest in the accuracy or legitimacy of a diagnosis or the evidence it might have produced, especially from the vantage point of others (for instance, the extremists’ targets), but also with regard to the extremist precepts, on the basis of which a course of action could be scrutinized; extremists exist in a universe of self-fulfilling prophesies in which nothing is being tolerated that does not confirm or reinforce the extremist position and objectives, and there is no real need for a diagnosis, except within the narrow confines of means in relation to ends: which action to choose to attain a desirable goal that was set in the past, and which must not be examined or questioned in terms of previously unavailable data. In this regard, too, especially etymologically, there is a major difference between radicals and extremists: a radical must engage in a measure of reflexivity, since going to the root of a matter demands a distinction between surface appearances and underlying causes, whereas an extremist must not permit the possibility of crucial distinctions beyond the assignment of good and evil, which is taken to be obvious and clear-cut, and which all actions must reaffirm.

To return to Adorno’s lecture on right-wing radicalism/extremism: recalling the earlier point regarding the need to recognize that differences between populism, radicalism, and extremism tend to be influenced not least by changing terminological conventions in specific societies during particular time periods, and acknowledging the fact that Adorno’s analysis of right-wing radicalism/extremism was formulated in (West) Germany and resonated strongly in unified Germany more than half a century later, it may not be entirely surprising that – possibly expressing a more or less similar combination of sensibilities and mentality – the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*) – the German domestic

⁸ Claus Offe’s comparison of similarities and differences between attacks on the welfare state from the Left and from the Right during the early 1980s found that the “analyses” (really, their *diagnoses*) presented by “the liberal-conservative and the socialist critics,” of the problematic character of the welfare state as it started to become evident during the 1970s, “exhibit[ed] somewhat surprising parallels” ([1981] 1984, p. 157). By contrast, their conflicting conclusions about how to remedy those problems pointed in very different directions.

security agency – currently provides this official distinction between right-wing radicalism and right-wing extremism:

Efforts that are being directed against the core of our constitution – the free democratic basic order – are being referred to as *extremist*. There is often a lack of clarity about the concept of extremism. Unjustifiably, it often is being equated with *radicalism*. Thus, critics of capitalism, for example, who express fundamental doubts about the structure of our economic and social order, and who want to change it from its foundation, are not yet extremists. In our pluralistic social order, radical political views have their legitimate place. Those who want to realize their radical objectives do not have to fear being observed by the Protection of the Constitution; at least not as long they recognize the basic principles of our constitutional order. (quoted in Nandlinger 2008; my translation; emphases added)

Since in this distinction, what Adorno referred to in the 1960s as “right-wing radicalism” is equivalent with the current usage of “right-wing extremism,” we do not have to concern ourselves with the distinction between radicalism and extremism with regard to his lecture, but it is still useful to keep in mind that there are bound to be important differences between radicalism and extremism, and that these differences are likely to have a bearing on a more rigorous distinction between right-wing populism and left-wing populism.

Adorno and Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism in Context

The purpose of the lecture Adorno gave on April 6, 1967, at the University of Vienna in Austria, entitled “Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism” (Adorno [1967] 2020) was to present⁹ “informal observations” (p. 1; literally, “loose remarks”) intended to complement existing theories of right-wing extremism. He was motivated to do so in light of recent electoral successes of the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), which had been founded in 1964 and was the only neo-Nazi party in West Germany. Just over two decades after the end of World War II, the NPD, which styled itself after the main established parties in West Germany during

⁹ The 1967 lecture whose recent publication provided the occasion for this article had been recorded in Vienna and has been available online (Adorno 1967). It appeared in print for the first time in summer 2019 in German, initially on its own as a small paperback with an afterword by the historian Volker Weiss, as *Aspekte des neuen Rechtsradikalismus* (Adorno [1967] 2019), and later that year in a volume of Adorno lectures, *Vorträge 1949-1968*, and edited with great care by Michael Schwarz (Adorno 2019), as part of Adorno’s *Nachgelassene Schriften* (posthumous writings) which comprise many volumes, including, e.g., his correspondence, and seminar notes and transcripts. Both *Aspekte des neuen Rechtsradikalismus* and *Vorträge 1949-1968* were published by Suhrkamp, which also published Adorno’s *Collected Writings* in twenty volumes, and a long list of associated volumes, conference proceedings, and secondary literature; the English translation by Wieland Hoban appeared in the U.K. in April of 2020, and in the U.S. in June, under the imprint of Polity. While the German edition of the lecture on its own plus Weiss’s afterword includes one single footnote referring to a lecture Adorno gave the night before on social conflict, also in Vienna on the same occasion (though without the related references: see Adorno 1967b for the lecture, and Adorno [1968] 1972 for the essay), the translated version of *Aspekte* has three additional clarifying endnotes, but the same text included in *Vorträge 1949-1968* comes with two informative paragraphs and forty-four endnotes by the editor, most of which are exceedingly detailed and helpful (pp. 730-742). I consistently will refer to the translation of the lecture in italics, since both the original print publication in German, as well as only version available in English, appeared as stand-alone publications.

the postwar era (especially CDU/CSU – the Christian Democratic Union in most of West Germany, and Christian Social Union in Bavaria; SPD – the Social Democratic Party; and FDP – the Free Democratic Party), successfully garnered enough votes to be represented in several West German state parliaments, but was not able to reach the required 5% minimum of votes cast to be represented in the federal parliament. In *Aspects*, Adorno expanded on themes he previously and explicitly had addressed, and related insights he had presented eight years earlier before the Coordinating Council for Christian-Jewish Cooperation in Wiesbaden, in his well-known 1959 public lecture, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past” ([1959] 2005), at a time when there was no right-wing party in West Germany.¹⁰ Adorno later referred to it as “an attempt to deal with the threat [of right-wing extremism] not through fruitless indignation and cosmetic measures, but rather by comprehending it in its deeper dimensions” (Adorno [1962] 2005, p. 308).¹¹ He returned to these themes precisely because during the mid-1960s, the newly founded right-wing NPD achieved a series of electoral successes.¹²

¹⁰ The 1959 lecture appeared in print shortly after Adorno had delivered it (Adorno 1959) and then in 1963, in a collection of his essays (Adorno 1963). A recording was aired as part of the educational programming of Hesse state radio (where both Wiesbaden and Frankfurt are located, the former being the state capital) in early 1960, which is available as the first of a set of CDs with Adorno lectures and an interview (Adorno [1960] 1999/2006). The first translation into English appeared under a different title in 1986 (Adorno [1959] 1986), but the above-mentioned version I will rely on here appeared in 2005.

¹¹ After Nazi Germany’s capitulation in May 1945, the victorious Allies formed four occupation zones. West Germany resulted from a merger between the western sectors controlled by France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, while East Germany was identical with the Soviet Zone; both lasted from 1949-1990, when they were unified under the umbrella of the legal and political system of West Germany. The distinction between East, West, and unified Germany is important for many reasons, including for the purpose of this article. For instance, while the western Allies demanded that their zones adopt western-style democratic political systems within the Federal Republic of Germany, and also made more or less formal and determined efforts to establish a commitment to democratic citizenship and the rule of law, the German Democratic Republic was modeled on Soviet communism. While the western Allies also tried to instill – within limits – a sense of responsibility and an admission of culpability among leaders and the citizenry for the Nazi period that translated – among other things – into reparation payments to other countries, the Soviets allowed, indeed encouraged East Germans to view West Germans as fascists who bore all the responsibility for Nazi crimes and for unleashing World War II. In West Germany, by the 1970s, resistance to facing up to Germany’s responsibility for some of the worst atrocities ever committed and for millions of deaths started to weaken, in no small part as a consequence of a major change in government 1969 that brought with it far-reaching educational reforms. We will return to some of these issues below. For a trend in the military that many suspected and which recently has come to light and confirmed, and which also highlights a *measure* of difference between the former East and West Germany, see Bennhold (2020).

¹² The English edition includes the clarifying endnote (carried over from the endnotes included in Adorno 2019) to the effect that the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) was a “collective movement that initially united a spectrum extending from national conservatives to right-wing extremists and, as a party, became the leading German neo-Nazi organization. In the new millennium it became largely insignificant” (Adorno [1967] 2020, p. 66). Inevitably, as usually is the case, the situation is more complicated. Suffice it to say here that the party originated in *West* Germany during the 1960s, when Germany was still divided, and played no role in “actually existing socialist” East Germany – as the officials in the German Democratic Republic referred to their system – since it would have been illegal. The success of the NPD played an important role in Adorno’s *Aspects*, and it will be necessary to address this below merely in cursory fashion, since – as is typical for parliamentary democracy – the political party landscape in West Germany was (and in unified Germany is) far too complicated to detail on this occasion, and does not compare to the American two-party system. For a useful and early examination of the NPD’s ideology, see Schreiber and Chen (1971).

What was *new* about this form of right-wing extremism was that the NPD propagated and promoted ideas and approaches to social, political, cultural and economic challenges that were not identical with, but in many ways inspired by the National Socialists, and more than thirty years *after* the latter had begun to implement similar ideas and motifs, and more than twenty years after the detrimental and destructive consequences resulting from their efforts had become blatantly apparent – during World War II, the Holocaust, with Nazi Germany's unconditional capitulation in 1945, and in the years that followed. In addition, even though most West Germans remained in a state of mostly defensive denial about the Nazi era and – depending on their age – their involvement during the time period, the incongruity between the NPD's approach to "solving problems" and the nature and condition of the real societal circumstances that prevailed during the 1960s in politics, culture, and society, was apparent to most voters. On the other hand, there is a perverse sort of congruity inasmuch as especially *formally* democratic systems for the most part were then and are now not truly suitable to meeting political, social, economic, and cultural challenges either, and their success largely has been resting on their ability to *manage* those challenges in ways that relieve the bulk of citizens from having to acknowledge and worry about corresponding paradoxes, contradictions, threats, and the permanent presence of crisis, while delaying efforts to address the causes of those challenges into a distant, and from our vantage point, ever more uncertain and precarious future (see Wolin 2008).

A productive reading of Adorno's 1967 lecture in the present context, as democracy is being weakened, undercut, and under attack around the world once again, requires situating it in broad strokes in the socio-historical and political context to which it was a response and into which it was an intervention. In addition, the lecture resonates with many aspects of Adorno's critical-theoretical work, as the latter evolved from the 1930s to the late 1960s. In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that *critical theory* was not conceived in Germany, but in 1937 in New York, by Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, after they had spent three years in the United States (Horkheimer [1937] 1986, Marcuse [1937] 2009). After Hitler came to power and the Nazis had taken over the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt in 1933, Horkheimer – who as director had made preparations to pull up shop, if necessary – arranged for the Institute to leave Frankfurt and move – first to Geneva, then to Paris – to settle in a building on the campus of Columbia University in New York in 1934. In important regards, the conceptualization of critical theory reflected their early experiences of living and working in the United States, especially with regard to the (in)ability of mainstream approaches in the sciences, the social sciences, and philosophy, to reflect on and respond to the exceedingly disturbing world-historical situation, as fascism was spreading and becoming increasingly influential internationally, and while the only concrete attempt to rein in the spread of capitalism had begun to deteriorate into Stalinism.¹³ Adorno, who was not a member of the Institute at the time, had remained in Europe, staying in regular contact with Horkheimer from Oxford, England, where he lived and worked between 1934 and 1938, and joined the Institute for Social Research in New York a few months after Horkheimer's and Marcuse's respective essays introducing and advocating critical theory had appeared in print.¹⁴

¹³ Regarding some shared elements of the New Deal, Italian fascism, and National Socialism, see Schivelbusch (2007).

¹⁴ Regarding Adorno's time in Oxford, see Müller-Doohm ([2003] 2004), pp. 187-241.

As it turned out, in retrospect, without Adorno's determined commitment to promoting and developing further this tradition of thought, and willingness to embrace his American experience (and somewhat ambivalent experience of life in America¹⁵), critical theory in all likelihood would not have become as recognized and prominent after World War II, initially in West Germany, decades later in the U.S., and then in (unified) Germany after 1990. Indeed, Adorno's years in the United States consistently and distinctively exerted a clearly discernible influence in his writings, at a much higher pitch than in the works of Horkheimer (who returned to West Germany at approximately the same time as Adorno) or possibly even Marcuse (who decided not to return to Europe). Moreover, Adorno's active participation in empirical research activities, as well as his focused concern with social, cultural, and artistic conditions and trends, sensitized him to a much greater extent to differences between European and American life, and to social expectations and modes of communication and interaction characteristic in and of the latter. Finally, even a merely initial assessment of the relevance of Adorno's *Aspects* today demands that insights he spelled out and enumerated in his lecture be related to recent and current work and research which resonates with, confirms, or develops further his observations, thus illustrating the persistent relevance of his mode of theorizing and critiquing societies with democratic political systems in the twenty-first century.

Despite various ups and downs and regular shifts in the appreciation of Adorno's writings and overall contribution since Adorno's passing in 1969, he never entirely disappeared from what Habermas ([1962] 1989) has been referring to as the "public sphere," initially in West Germany, and since 1990, in unified Germany. In intellectual and artistic circles, Adorno and his work continue to occupy a prominent place in German culture and society. Although there was a noteworthy Adorno revival of sorts in 2003, on the occasion of the centennial of his birth, and amplified by the publication of three biographies, numerous conferences, and programming on television and radio, few would have expected the strong and almost enthusiastic reaction in the media to the release in print of his 1967 lecture in 2019, half a century after his unexpected death, which occurred just over a month before he would have turned sixty-six years old.¹⁶ For several weeks, Adorno once again was everywhere, to the excitement of many, and the chagrin and annoyance of some.¹⁷ The reason was as simple as it was obvious: the rise in preceding years of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), a center-right conservative party that has been fraught with internal conflict between more moderate and more far-right groups, including a strong right-

¹⁵ Despite are many related misrepresentations and problematic assessments, Adorno's American experience, was much more positive than often is claimed; e.g., Jenemann (2007), Mariotti (2016); for a problematic misrepresentation, see Offe (2005).

¹⁶ Adorno was born on September 11, 1903, and died on August 6, 1969. The German edition of *Aspects* appeared on July 14, 2019. The biographies were by Detlev Claussen ([2003] 2008), Stefan Müller-Doohm ([2003] 2004), and Lorenz Jäger ([2003] 2004). Of the three, Claussen's is very engaging, Müller-Doohm's impressively detailed and comprehensive, and Jäger's most problematic and least necessary, in that his stance regarding Adorno the person and his work is based on hostility or lack of comprehension, or both.

¹⁷ E.g., Dietschreit (2020), Dirsch (2020), Mersman (2019), Moldenhauer (2019), Reichwein (2019), Schuster (2019), Widmann (2019). For examples of radio or television programming, and responses in newspapers, see <https://www.3sat.de/kultur/kulturzeit/buch-adorno-aspekte-des-neuen-rechtsradikalismus-100.html>, <https://www.swr.de/swr2/doku-und-feature/swr2-essay-2019-12-09-100.html>.

wing populist wing, and which, like the NPD in the mid-1960s, initially won seats in several state parliaments, and then superseded the success of its precursor, the NPD, by entering the federal parliament in Berlin in 2017, with 12.6% of the votes.¹⁸

Many moderate, liberal and progressive Germans were stunned and consternated by the AfD's rise and success, which received an additional impetus and became more xenophobic and anti-immigrant when, during the 2015 refugees crisis caused mostly by the Syrian conflict in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, German Chancellor Angela Merkel committed to helping refugees especially from war-torn Syria and Libya's civil war, but also from other parts of Africa, to seek asylum in Germany, while close to one million arrived in Germany. Merkel's "Wir schaffen das!" (We can handle it!) initially received broad support across the German population, especially in the former West German states that became the Federal Republic of Germany (BRD) in 1949, but in the former East Germany (the late German Democratic Republic, or DDR, which institutionally and legally had been absorbed politically, legally, and economically into the BRD in 1990), resistance quickly took shape, especially in Dresden in the growth of PEGIDA (or Pegida) – Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident – a pan-European, anti-Islamic, and far-right political movement, whose demonstrations had begun in 2014. Although the relationship between the AfD and Pegida has been strained throughout, there has been synergistic (if tenuous, never formal) cooperation, and many personal associations, e.g., with AfD members participating in Pegida demonstrations (see Klikauer 2020; for analyses of right-wing populism in different European countries that were published in 2013, along with counter-strategies, see Melzer and Serafin 2013, especially Botsch, Kopke, and Virchow 2013).

Despite a wave of blog posts, newspaper and magazine articles, editorials, and scholarly publications, as well as debates in the mass media, which were dedicated to explaining the formation of Pegida and the success of the AfD, none of the analyses or related hypotheses presented stood out as providing a remotely satisfying explanation. In the meantime, prominent members and leaders of the AfD, including Alexander Gauland, a former member of the conservative party, the Christian Democrats, made increasingly outrageous claims, such as that the Nazi period was "bird shit" within the purportedly grand 1000-year German history, and several AfD members were charged with engaging in "Volksverhetzung" (incitement of the people, usually on the basis of objectively incorrect, misleading, or knowingly false claims relating to National Socialism and with manipulative political intent, such as Holocaust denial), a punishable offense, and similar charges. To many citizens and observers, it occurred that the up until then unexpectedly successful model of postwar (West) German democracy and political stability might be in peril, as in successive state elections and the most recent federal election, the rabidly anti-constructive right-wing AfD clearly exceeded the phenomenon of a "protest vote" and was able to establish a substantial measure of reliable popular support.

Yet, just as Adorno and his work remained an integral component especially of the (West) German intellectual and cultural public sphere, so, too, at least tacit support for right-wing positions and politics never entirely disappeared from (West) German politics. Aside from the NPD, the Republikaner Party (a national conservative party opposed to immigration founded in

¹⁸ The AfD was founded in 2013, in response to the European debt crisis – the Euro zone crisis that began in 2009. See Costa Cabral, Gonçalves, and Rodrigues (2017) regarding the Euro crisis.

1983, and modeled on the Republican Party in the U.S.) was a noteworthy instance, even though its half-life was rather short, and its appeal geographically limited. The famous “Historians’ Dispute” (see Knowlton and Cates 1993) of the mid-1980s highlighted another undeniable blemish on the commitment in West Germany to democracy and unwillingness to learn from the past, at the highest level of government, triggered by Habermas in an article in one of the main West German weeklies, *DIE ZEIT*, in which he drew attention to the prominence of revisionist historians among conservative chancellor Helmut Kohl’s closest advisors (who, after the SPD-FPD coalition had ended in 1982, as party leader of the CDU headed a coalition government that included the CSU – the CDU’s Bavarian version equivalent – as well as the FDP).

One also must keep in mind that whenever the Christian Democrats – the conservative “catch-all party” – worked with the Social Democrats at the federal level in Germany, as from 1966 until 1969 in a “Grand Coalition,” as well as between 2005 and 2009, and since 2013, support for right-wing populist groups tended to strengthen, since during these “legislative periods” of cooperation with the SPD, the CDU/CSU no longer provided a “home” for the most conservative and right-wing groups in West Germany, and later in Germany. It is noteworthy that in the former East German “actually existing socialist” states, the AfD has been more popular than in the West, and more extreme. With the rise of the AfD, which coincided with developments elsewhere – such as the Brexit movement and referendum of 2016, the 2016 Presidential election campaign and its outcome in the U.S., Duterte in the Philippines, Bolsonaro in Brazil, and moves toward “illiberal democracy” within the borders of the EU, as in Hungary and Poland – groups and citizens in German that have been committed to democracy were increasingly flustered by several elements of the AfD’s success, which seemed to adhere to and reflect a more or less mystifying logic, such as employing democratic tools and procedures to advocate against or subvert democracy.¹⁹

In this context, the publication of Adorno’s *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism*, combined with historian Volker Weiss’s helpful “Afterword” (2020), struck a chord and was appreciated as an effective way to begin to situate right-wing trends and movements in societies with democratic political systems, in general, and the rise and electoral successes of the AfD, in particular, in a larger historical and international context fraught with similar developments. It had been apparent for some time that the accelerating pace of social change, related uncertainties, and concurrent real or perceived threats of many different kinds scared and made a growing number of individuals susceptible to simpler answers than the complexities of a globalizing world allowed. The latter for some time has been translating into a peculiar kind of resentment and anger directed at purportedly singularly (and singularly powerful) responsible parties (including especially established political parties), groups with specific characteristics (such as immigrants), or decision-makers purported to pursue surreptitious and malevolent agendas. During the Coronavirus pandemic, for instance, right-wing groups in Germany and elsewhere

¹⁹ For a set of sociological analyses of Brexit, many provided by social and political theorists such as Gurinder Bhambra, Craig Calhoun, Colin Crouch, Gerard Delanty, John Holmwood, and Simon Susen, see Outhwaite (2017), including Dahms (2017a); also Diamond (2020).

have been suggesting that efforts are afoot to create a totalitarian world government, among many other similar claims being made in many countries.²⁰

Still, how were Adorno's "informal observations," formulated in 1967, perceived to be so noteworthy in 2019, especially since they were entirely in keeping with his diverse interests, many of his publications, and the research agendas pursued at the Institute for Social Research, by himself and several of his colleagues, such as Max Horkheimer, Leo Löwenthal, Herbert Marcuse, before and after his arrival in New York in 1938 and formal employment at the Institute, and after his return to Germany in 1949?²¹ As Adorno kept pointing out in his lecture, conspicuous affinities exist between his observations in *Aspects* and insights gained from his involvement in *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, Sanford. [1950] 2019)), the famous (and somewhat notorious) study whose research had been conducted during the 1940s, and whose results were published in 1950, with Adorno having written the introduction and several other parts.²² One of the main conclusions presented in *The Authoritarian Personality* was that in liberal democracies, a substantial segment of the population is not necessarily in support of liberal democracy or its values, and frequently are opposed to them, without necessarily revealing – or being willing to reveal – this fact.²³ From the vantage point of liberal democracy and positions that are consonant with it, this notion evidently is highly disturbing – after all, what reasonable person would not be in support of at least some of the personal and collective advantages and benefits liberal democracies have to offer over all other historically known and empirically existing forms of government in societies comprising millions of members? The evidence that is emerging in recent years, and for which ample indications were available throughout the history of democracy, suggests that the share of those with ambivalent or negative attitudes toward democracy, especially if it does not serve above all their own very tangible interests, is much greater than was assumed.²⁴

Indeed, to liberal democracy and its proponents, the notion that many citizens of modern societies with democratic political systems would oppose it, is largely anathema – despite the fact that most institutions and regulated processes in modern societies with democratic political systems were designed and built specifically to make it difficult for those eager to take advantage of others, to harm others, to denigrate others, to do so, and that to the extent to which (and in the ways in which) these and other practices have turned out to be discernible and observable and irrepressible, that they occur within the limits of law, whose enforcement in various ways is fraught with the perpetuation of injustices, and especially social injustices, that modern social structures – as specific forms of social organization – inherently are contingent on. In addition, this qualifier is necessary since the *economic* system modern societies with democratic political systems are based upon, at the same time legitimates, relies upon, and encourages activities that

²⁰ For a related article, see D'Urso (2020).

²¹ See Wiggershaus ([1986] 2007), pp. 149-260.

²² I will not even begin to delve into the expansive literature that emerged in response to this work, but would like to mention a short piece that was published almost a decade ago, before concern with right-wing populism and extremism became a widely discussed theme: Stoner and Lybeck (2011).

²³ See my essay on Brexit (Dahms 2017a).

²⁴ See, e.g., Jouet (2017).

are designed to facilitate and perfect techniques for taking advantage of others, harming others, and denigrating others, even if in subtle ways, *within clearly defined boundaries which are beneficial to the stability and functioning of modern societies as specific social orders and distinctive forms of social, political, and economic structure.*

Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism (1967)

Adorno set the stage by referring to the above-mentioned, earlier public lecture and subsequent publication, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past” (Adorno [1959] 2005). The lecture and essay are well-known for Adorno having highlighted the need to confront German history in light and because of the unspeakable atrocities committed during the Nazi era, in the name of Germany, and by many of its members at all levels of social and bureaucratic organization, from the very top – the national government – to the very bottom – in everyday life and interpersonal relations. Ignoring the darker features and episodes of any society’s past and present inevitably comes at a price, in the form of myriad consequences that manifest themselves in the very fabric of social, political, cultural and economic life, in many ways. Specifically, Adorno addressed paradoxes in West German politics, culture, and education, and difficulties and impediments to live up to claims which would suggest that West German society was committed to taking on the challenge of working through the past in constructive fashion, to ensure that nothing of the sort would ever happen again, and to strengthen forces and dimensions in society determined to prevent related tendencies.²⁵ Yet, as he showed, for the most part, such claims cover up that most Germans, including especially many individuals in decision-making positions, developed uncanny skills to reject or dispel confrontation with and to avoid or subvert actualization of those claims. At the time in Germany – and this is true for societies in general, including modern societies to this day, and contrary to appearances – processes of socialization and priorities in education for the most part are coded in ways that are meant to turn children into “good,” obedient members of society who are eager to act and make decisions in ways which support and stabilize, are beneficial to, and reinforce the dominant features of a given society, such as with regard to social structure and economic inequalities.²⁶ Inevitably, children don’t have much of a sense – if any – of what their socialization and education means, where and how they originated, which patterns define and orient them, and what tasks and myriad functions they are supposed and expected to fulfill, with what kinds of implications and consequences, as far as institutions and different segments of a given population are concerned. After all, individuals are prone to reliving not only their own past, but the past of their forebears also. This

²⁵ Note that unless I explicitly am referring to East Germany or the German Democratic Republic, my observation will apply to West Germany (until 1990) or to unified Germany (since 1990). Whereas in West Germany, the earlier and initially rather disingenuous claims about working through the Nazi past – an effort that was demanded by Allies, especially the U.S. – took hold at a certain level of intensity, especially in the educational system and cultural institutions, as well as the mass media, in East German, such efforts were neither made, nor expected by the Soviet Union; see Dirks (2005), Leide (2007). Incidentally, Austria, where Adorno held his 1967 lecture (and which had joined Nazi Germany in 1938), a process of working through the past began, like in West Germany, during the 1970s, when the Social Democrat Bruno Kreisky was chancellor (see Neugebauer 2000). For a discussion of Germany and Austria in relation to effects that the Vichy Regime had on postwar French politics and culture, see Axer (2011).

²⁶ For an informative overview over this and related issues, see the handbook edited by Apple, Au, and Gandin (2009).

is an issue in all societies in which social structure and identity structure are sufficiently compatible, complementary, and congruent, to insure that existing social and especially economic inequalities are being maintained, along with the division between those who benefit from the existing social order and those who make it work and pay the price for its operations – socially, psychologically, emotionally, physically, and politically.²⁷

Arguably, the dimension of Adorno's *Aspects* that may well be most relevant today, especially in the context of social theory, pertains to the ability and willingness – or lack thereof – of individuals, especially as members of certain groups characterized by distinctive modes of socialization and education, to respond to proliferating and different kinds of expectations, to seize upon the opportunities, and to bear the burdens that living in the early twenty-first century entails. Like a thread, the singular theme that resonates throughout the different dimensions of the new right-wing extremism Adorno addressed in his lecture is *fear*. Evidently, there has been an intrinsic link between the inclination to support or subscribe to right-wing extremism, along with a sense of increasingly being overwhelmed by the demands individuals have had to face, cope with, and confront in the post-World War II modern world, and especially under conditions of globalization, and concurrent threats to one's established identity, as it is tied to, and both a reflection and a function of, concrete socio-historical circumstances. The evidence would suggest that the proliferation and intensity of this inclination to be favorably inclined towards forms of right-wing extremism has been increasing in recent years. Put differently, how individuals are positioned and able – or not – to face the past, present, and future, appears to translate into and to be expressed in their political views and preferences, and the latter in reverse may also serve as indicators of the former. In his 1959 lecture, Adorno observed that “working through the past” – which during the postwar years in Germany had been put forth as a necessary means for maintaining a moral compass, mental and emotional health, and what Fromm ([1955] 1990) referred to as a “sane society,” in political and cultural life had deteriorated into

[a fashionable] slogan that has become highly suspect during the last years. In this usage “working through the past” does not mean seriously working upon the past, that is through a lucid consciousness breaking its power to fascinate. On the contrary, its intention is to close the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory. The attitude that everything should be forgotten and forgiven, which would be proper for those who suffered injustice, is practiced by those party supporters who committed the injustice. ...

One wants to break free of the past: rightly, because nothing at all can live in its shadow, and because there will be no end to the terror as long as guilt and violence are repaid with guilt and violence; wrongly, because the past that one would like to evade is still very much alive. (Adorno [1959] 2005, p. 89)

²⁷ Elsewhere, I have framed this issue in terms of “planetary sociology,” see Dahms (2018), esp. 166-167, and Dahms (forthcoming).

Diagnosis

At the beginning of *Aspects*, Adorno picked up a theme he addressed in his 1959 lecture, “the thesis that the reason for right-wing extremism, or the potential for such a right-wing extremism, which was not yet truly visible at the time, is that the social conditions for fascism continue to exist,” and that “despite the collapse of fascism itself, the conditions for fascist movements are still socially, if not politically, present” (Adorno [1967] 2020, pp. 1-2). He explained these social conditions as causally related to economics and the fact that the process of capital becoming more and more concentrated continues unabated. Yet, it is precisely this “tendency toward concentration” that produces a very basic and common fear, or rather, a set of fears, since

[it] still creates the possibility of constantly downgrading strata of society that were clearly bourgeois in terms of their subjective class consciousness and want to cling to, and possibly reinforce, their privileges and social status. These groups still tend towards a hatred of socialism, or what they call socialism; that is, *they lay the blame for their own potential downgrading not on the apparatus that causes it, but on those who were critical towards the system in which they once had a status, at least in a traditional sense*. Whether they are still critical and have the same practices today is another matter. (p. 2; emphasis added)

Without the constant “threat of impoverishment” (p. 3), right-wing extremism would be much less attractive. Among its possible causes, the possibility of “technological unemployment continues to haunt society to such a degree that in the age of automation ... even the people who stand within the production process already feel potentially superfluous – I put this very starkly – they really feel potentially unemployed” (ibid.). Anticipating how many individuals have been experiencing globalization, Adorno referred to the fact that “in the age of the great power blocs” – at the time, the conflict between the superpowers U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. – the role of nations is bound to diminish, with clear implications for many individuals: “in both socio-psychological and real terms, there is a very widespread fear of being absorbed by these blocs and, in the process, being severely impaired in one’s material existence” (p. 4): to the extent that individual identity is wrapped up with or grounded in national identity, what towards the end of the century was described as the impending “end of the nation-state” indeed must have been frightening and have accounted for anti-globalization attitudes at least to a certain extent. Adorno compared efforts to firmly hold on to the nation at a time when the real circumstances of more and more countries, during the Cold War, became less and less conducive to independent national decision-making, to Catholic witch trials during the Counter-Reformation: both instances describe phenomena – the nation and Catholicism – that were in the process of becoming less influential (and never may have been as influential as nostalgic imagination would have had it). Just as the witch trials did not occur during the Middle Ages, when Catholicism was still hegemonic in Europe, but during the early modern period when Catholicism needed to defend and assert itself against nascent forms of Protestantism, so, too, the nation was being celebrated during the 1960s – a period of declining importance. “And this fluctuation, this ambivalence between an overwrought nationalism and the doubt about it, which has to be

covered up so that one can convince oneself and others, so to speak – this could already be observed [in 1959]” (p. 5).

Adorno then turned to a set of initial conclusions that all were linked to an imminent fear of the consequences of societal developments that was at the heart of the new right-wing extremism – a fear of loss of identity and an inability (or resentful unwillingness) to face the modern condition, with adherents of newer versions of fascism being distributed across the entire population, regardless of social class or strata positions, differences between rural and urban populations becoming more intense, and new fascism was not just being attractive to established Nazis or sympathizers, but also to younger people, especially those whose identities had formed under National Socialism and were threatened by Germany’s collapse and capitulation (pp. 6-8).

Referring to research relating to the “lunatic fringe” in the U.S., Adorno acknowledged that in all democracies, a certain percentage of the population is likely to resist or reject the expectations, standards, and values of democratic societies, and pointed out that this may be symptomatic at least in part of the fact that all existing democratic systems have remained incomplete and formal, in terms of socio-economic criteria and conditions (pp. 8-9). He rejected attempts to tie increases in right-wing extremism to business cycles, with economic downturns supposedly making such extremism more appealing; empirical evidence did not confirm such a link.

Moreover, while fears are a central factor in the new right-wing extremism, paradoxically, the anticipation of horror is a central feature also, and draws attention to a complex relationship between fear and a peculiar excitement at the prospect of social catastrophe: while being concerned about “what will become of it all” should there be a major crisis, individuals with such concerns also tend to yearn for catastrophe, and feed off of apocalyptic fantasies. The strength of an *unconscious* desire for disaster and catastrophe should not be underestimated, since it is not just psychologically motivated, but has an objective foundation:

Someone who is unable to see anything ahead of them and does not want the social foundation to change really has no alternative but, like Richard Wagner’s Wotan, to say, “Do you know what Wotan wants? The end.” This person, from the perspective of their own social situation, longs for demise – though not the demise of their own group, as far as possible, the demise of all. (pp. 10-11)²⁸

Certain aspects of the *new* right-wing extremism were integral features of German society, such as a strong inclination towards efficient organizations, a favoring of unity, and rejection of loners,

²⁸ A minor detail: both Volker Weiss in his “Afterword” (2020), p. 53, and Michael Schwarz in a related endnote in Adorno (2019), p. 732n633, reference Wotan’s purported question and answer, as Adorno purportedly quoted it. However, since in its original form, *Aspects* was a lecture, Adorno did not reference this quote, as he might have (but probably would not: his writings are filled with implicit and explicit references meant for those in the know, who are presumed to be familiar with what he was alluding to, and the specific context where it originated); still, in this instance, in the flow of free speech, Wotan’s question and answer – “Do you know what Wotan wants? The end.” – was not *one* quote, but *two separate quotes*: Adorno combined the question, which Wotan posed in *Siegfried* (the third opera in *The Ring of the Nibelung* cycle) to the earth goddess, Erda, with the answer, which Wotan gave in *Die Walküre*, the previous, second *Ring* opera, in his conversation with Brünnhilde, his favorite daughter: “Auf geb’ ich mein Werk; nur Eines will ich noch: das Ende, das Ende!” – “Ended is my work, but one thing waits me yet: the ending, the downfall!” (libretto by Frederick Jameson).

as well as “the idea that political compromise per se is already something degenerate” (p. 12), which was strong in certain segments of the bourgeoisie – the fear of betraying one’s self by working with opponents. Adorno further pointed out that neo-Nazis are prone to pretend or exaggerate purported achievements, which trigger a concern among those reluctant to join that they be left behind. Moreover, Germans “seem to live in perpetual fear for their national identity, a fear that clearly contributes to an overvaluation of national consciousness” (ibid.), e.g., in the face of the division of Germany into East and West.

Adorno emphasized that one must not underestimate these movements on account of their low intellectual level and lack of theory; rather, Right-wing movements are generally capable of extraordinary perfection in applying and relying on available means of communication, even though usually their actions and goals usually are not informed by a coherent and discernible theory, the level of intellectual sophistication is typically low, and the tension between ends and means is fraught by a peculiar blindness and abstruseness. Yet, this constellation of rational means (which are being used with consciousness and purpose) and irrational ends,

corresponds to the overall tendency of civilization, which leads to such a perfection of techniques and means while the overall social purpose falls by the wayside. The ingenuity of the propaganda used by these parties and movements is that it balances out the ... unquestionable difference between the real interests and the fraudulent aims they espouse. It is the very substance of the matter, just as it was with the Nazis. When the means increasingly become substitutes for aims, one can almost say that, *in these extreme right-wing movements, propaganda actually constitutes the substance of politics.*” (p. 13; emphasis added)

Given that political groupings have a capacity to survive systems and disasters (p. 14), “all the manipulation and coercion of these [right-wing] movements, the fact that they are somewhat akin to the ghost of a ghost” (p. 15), manifests as their potential to grow into delusional systems. Drawing on *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson and Sanford [1950] 2019), Adorno referred to the “manipulative type” – individuals “who are simultaneously cold, without relationships, strictly technological in their mindset – but also insane in a certain sense [representing a] strange unity of a delusional system and technological perfection [that] seems to be on the rise and once again playing a decisive part in these movements” (p. 16).

Right-wing extremists and those who support them tend to respond well to the “cultural sector” being used

as the area in which they can rage most and will surely try and try even more to rage. There is a whole array of designated enemies. One of these is the imago of the communist. ... [Yet, today] there is no longer a communist party in Germany, and this has really given communism a sort of mythical character – that is, it has become completely abstract; and this peculiar abstractness means that anything that somehow does not fit is subsumed under this all-purpose term ‘communism’ and opposed as something communist. (pp. 18-19)

Intellectuals, “another *bête noire*, of course – as long as one cannot be openly anti-Semitic and as long as one cannot murder the Jews, because that has already happened – ... are especially hated. The phrase ‘left-wing intellectual’ is another one of these bugbears” (p. 21).²⁹

Adorno went on to reiterate the absence of any kind of theory that the new right-wing extremism might be able to rely on; the peculiar role existentialism played in legitimating rampant anti-intellectualism (p. 22); the peculiar and paradoxical prominence of anti-Americanism (p. 26); and the warped ways in which anti-Semitism and ideology are being relied upon and deployed (p. 23), with a strangely inverted attitude toward democracy: “Openly anti-democratic aspects are removed. On the contrary: they constantly invoke true democracy and accuse the others of being anti-democratic” (p. 24): “In its content, of course, this [right-wing] ideology, in so far as it is an independent, fully developed ideology – *and I consider the ideological component entirely secondary to the political will to have one’s turn* – is one essentially based on Nazi ideology. ... [I]t is amazing how little in the way of new elements has been added to the old repertoire, how secondary and rehashed it is” (p. 25; emphasis added).

There is, however, a peculiar unity between a highly fragmented ideology and propaganda, whose basis is the appeal to the *authority-bound personality*, the genuine and true audience of right-wing movements and parties (p. 29), and in related fashion, a combined hatred and deep-seated fear of psychoanalysis as a means to reveal the workings of the unconscious. Right-wing extremists have no interest in grasping how they are driven by the unconscious, and any attempt to convey this possibility – or that they may be captives of their unconscious – instantaneously produces rage, which is symptomatic of a particular type of syndrome: right-wing propaganda specifically is not meant to, and does not bring unconscious tendencies out in the open, but pushes them further into the unconscious – to artificially keep them there. A pronounced fixation on the reliance of symbols is symptomatic of this syndrome, and “it is a substantial part of this syndrome that these authority-bound characters are inaccessible, that they will not let anything get through to them” (p. 38). This explains why “a relatively small number of recurring, standardized and completely objectified tricks that are very poor and thin in themselves yet, by being constantly repeated, gain a certain propagandist value for these movements” (p. 30). In sum, “right-wing extremism is not a psychological and ideological problem but a very real and political one. Yet the factually wrong, untrue nature of its own substance forces it to operate with ideological means, which in this case take the form of propagandist means” (p. 39).

Practical (and Pedagogical) Implications

Having covered a vast array of topics – ideology, propaganda, power, anti-Semitism, anti-intellectualism, anti-Americanism, communism, the authoritarian personality, the unconscious, democracy, ghosts, and apocalypse – Adorno also provided a range of suggestions about how to respond actively and constructively to the new right-wing extremism in the 1960s. His suggestions add up to a call for critical self-reflexivity, to face the challenge in ways that are not fraught by fear but motivated by determined resistance to both the phenomenon of right-wing extremism, and the causes that sustain it. As he put it at the end of his lecture,

²⁹ “Bugbears” is a somewhat odd word, especially in American usage; Adorno referred to *Schreckwort* – “scare word.”

Perhaps some of you will ask me, or would like to ask me, what I think about the future of right-wing extremism. I think this is the wrong question, for it is much too contemplative. This way of thinking, which views such things from the outset like natural disasters about which one makes predictions, like whirlwinds or meteorological disasters, this already shows a form of resignation whereby one essentially eliminates oneself as a political subject; it expresses a harmfully spectator-like relationship with reality. How these things will continue, and the responsibility for how they will continue, that ultimately lies in our hands. (p. 40)

Adorno strongly advised against operating “with ethical appeals, with appeals to humanity, for the word ‘humanity’ itself, and everything associated with it, sends the people in question into a rage; they see it as fear and weakness” and he identified as

one of the most crucial aspects of how to resist this movement – the only thing that really strikes me as effective is to warn the potential followers of right-wing extremism about its own consequences, to convey to them that this politics will inevitably lead its own followers to their doom too, and that this doom was part of it from the outset, just as Hitler started saying, at an early stage, ‘Then I’d rather put a bullet in my head’, and then repeated the claim at every opportunity. So if one is serious about opposing these things, one must refer to the central interests of those who are targeted by the propaganda. This applies especially to young people, whom one must warn about every kind of drill, about the restriction of their privacy and their lifestyle. (p. 17)

Rather than reconstructing Adorno’s suggestions for how to confront the phenomenon of the new right-wing extremism and related “tricks” and techniques, which are interspersed throughout his lecture, it may be most useful to compile them into a list of bullet-points, not least because they take the form of clear instructions. While this treatment may appear to be incompatible with Adorno’s dialectical way of thinking and theorizing, he evidently was intent on providing a sort of catalogue with practically oriented critical instructions for how to contest right-wing ideologies and movements, and a reminder about the varied forms that especially extremist tactics and strategies take. His suggestions were as follows:

- Study closely and resist a sophisticated “technique in the new manipulation of anti-Semitism,” i.e., allusion and innuendo, especially its cumulative effect.
- “[T]ry to find legal means by which a democratic state would be able to intervene” (pp. 23-24) whenever the manipulative anti-Semitism technique is being used.
- Develop an “art of opposing [the proclivity of right-wing extremists to put truth in the service of untruth that] lies substantially in picking out the abuse of truth for untruth and resisting it” (p. 26).
- Scrutinize attacks on the democratic political establishment and parties that are in support of democracy, which provide supporters of right-wing movements with “the feeling that now, with this movement that seeks precisely to abolish freedom, they are regaining their freedom, their freedom of decision and spontaneity” (which is linked to anti-Americanism in a strange manner) (p. 27).

- Analyze the “autonomy of the symbol in relation to what it represents,” since it is an “allergic point” (p. 34).
- Avoid “the tactic of keeping quiet about these things [which] has never paid off, and [the new right-wing] development has surely advanced much too far today for it to work” (p. 37).
- Appeal to individuals’ real interests, instead of moralizing, since research for *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, Sanford [1950] 2019) showed that

even prejudiced personalities, who were certainly authoritarian, repressive, politically and economically reactionary, when it came to their own transparent interests, transparent to themselves, reacted quite differently. So they were mortal enemies of the Roosevelt administration, for example, but with those institutions that were of direct benefit to them, such as tenant protection or cheaper medicines, that was where their anti-Rooseveltianism immediately stopped and they behaved relatively rationally. This split in people’s consciousness strikes me as one of the most promising points of departure to counter the developments I have discussed (p. 37).

- Focus on “the real subjects of a study that would need to be understood and changed ... the right-wing extremists, not those against whom they mobilize their hatred” (p. 38).
- Make “a socio-psychological problem out of these [authoritarian] personalities who behave in this way and not any other, by reflecting on them, and on the connections between their ideology and their psychological, their socio-psychological structures ... [in order to eliminate] a certain naivety in the social climate ... and a certain detoxification has taken place” (pp. 38-39).
- Clearly identify the various “tricks” right-wing extremists use (as identified by Adorno), “give them very drastic names, describe them precisely, describe their implications and thus attempt to immunize the masses against these tricks, as it were, for nobody wants to be the fool.” (p. 39).
- Show “that the entire thing is based on a gigantic psychological ... rip-off” (p. 39).
- “[A]side from the political struggle by purely political means ... confront [right-wing extremism] on its very own turf. ... [W]e must not fight lies with lies, we must not try to be just as clever as it is, but we must counteract it with the full force of reason, with the genuinely unideological truth” (pp. 39-40).

*

Among the many different angles from which *Aspects* can be read today, two might be most striking. Regarding the first angle, Adorno drew attention to several key issues that have come to the fore with the rise of the Right and its growing appeal in recent years, and which social theorists and social scientists have worked to identify, after they had been neglected for decades. Moreover, there is a conspicuous congruency between his thought and his ability to look behind the veil of modern societies, including the formally democratic political systems without which

modern societies, such as they are, could not exist and function. In terms of the first angle, a series of works and observations have been published over the course of the last decade (e.g., relating to white privilege, apocalypticism, rejection of “socialism” in any form, and the unconscious) that confirm how needed the type of diagnostic scrutiny Adorno practiced remains today, and that we must strive to sustain a similar critical focus even when problematic issues do not force themselves upon us, and especially when progress and the various achievements of the modern age (e.g., civil rights, democracy, rule of law, and prosperity) do not appear to be under threat. After all, it is in the very nature of modern societies that these achievements *perpetually* are under threat, not just by certain groups and actors, but also and even more so by the logic according to which modern societies maintain order and “evolve” – the perverse *logic* – *indeed the socio-logic* – *of capital*, above all else.³⁰

In terms of the second angle, the urgent pertinence of Adorno’s determined commitment to scrutinizing modern societies and uncovering conventional, ideological, uncritical, and simply false and unfounded views that persist in, are about, and to some extent make possible and reinforce societies of this type as warped and inherently contradictory realities, provided a model for studying a social universe in which facts and norms keep colliding, without any realistic expectation that they will be reconcilable in the foreseeable future, in the absence of major qualitative transformations. He was willing to reject the widespread notion, especially among liberals and progressives, that all the people who inhabit these societies are concerned and interested in the welfare of others, unless specific experiences or circumstances prevent them from developing such concern and the ability to relate to others as equals or productively, to engage in empathy; in point of fact, among many other things, *neoliberalism* constitutes an incentive structure not to develop such concern and abilities. Instead, he acknowledged the many social, political, and cultural costs and economic benefits that come with this notion, as it conflicts with reality (as ample evidence has been suggesting throughout history, including recent history) and has been translating into and supporting the operations of modern societies, with costs and benefits being distributed unequally across society. Predictably, the pertinence of Adorno’s commitment to unflinching critique continues to account for his writings and version of critical theory either being welcomed and appreciated, or regarded as a most annoying, unsettling, and brazen *impertinence*, not just in certain political quarters, such as the *alt-right* (e.g., Jay 2010/2011, Huyssen 2017, Wendling 2018, Forscher and Kteily 2019), but also among academics who pursue research and adhere to approaches in ways that are consonant with official and mainstream perspectives and representations of modern societies and do not require an explicit – and explicitly spelled out – commitment to critique.

Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism in America Today

When trying to assess the continuing relevance of Adorno’s *Aspects* in the present context, including in the United States, it evidently is important to avoid simple over-generalizations of his observations or superimposing his categories or reference frame directly. Over the course of his life, Adorno became an increasingly astute observer and was attuned to regular convulsions and adaptations modern societies had been going through, including in his personal experience,

³⁰ See Dahms (2017b, 2020a, in preparation).

during his teenage years which coincided with First World War and the collapse of German Empire, followed by the Weimar Republic from 1919 until early 1933 as Germany's first and flawed experiment with democracy, then during the first year of the Nazi era, before his move to England in 1934 (while continuing to visit Germany each summer until 1937), then his years in the United States from 1938 until 1949, and finally in West Germany after his return to Frankfurt that year.³¹ The long list of pointed conclusions he drew and the verdicts he was not reluctant to pass may have *seemed* to have been overstated at the time, but in retrospect, many of his statements appear to have applied rather literally and certainly do so today, as long as we keep in mind that they do not allow for simple, isolated and reductionist applications. As he put in "The Meaning of Working Through the Past" ([1959] 2005, p. 99), "I have exaggerated the somber side, following the maxim that only exaggeration per se can be the medium of truth." Rather, his verdicts and conclusions must be interpreted first within his agenda and the larger web of his positions, insights, and overall purpose, as they pertained to rescuing a modicum of humanity in a world increasingly incompatible with the notion of a good (or undamaged) life, especially after the combined catastrophes of National Socialism, Stalinism, Holocaust, and World War II (see Adorno [1951] 2005).

As is well known, Adorno regarded with suspicion the desire to return to normalcy, to forget, ignore, downplay or rationalize the horrors of his or any other era in history that was fraught with catastrophes caused by humans, as they draw attention to the latency of what social theorists and scientists in recent years have started to refer to as the "dark side of modern society" – as a betrayal of the intellectual's commitment to illuminating the social worlds we inhabit, distinctive as they are in space and time.³² Critical social theorists, philosophers, and social researchers ought to maintain this commitment as par for the course, especially since proponents of mainstream approaches frequently obsess – implicitly, if not explicitly – over how to reconcile the purported sanctity (but common inanity) of everyday life, with its often silly distractions, contradictory and conflicting practices and values, and irresistible narrow-minded preoccupations, with the requirements of knowledge about (modern) societies becoming less and less sustainable along an expanding spectrum of indicators, if they ever were sustainable to begin with.³³

Indeed, there appears to be a correlation between societies becoming more and more difficult to maintain due to many different types of intensifying strain, on the one hand, and how, on the other hand, they continue to stay stable by perpetuating – not least through everyday life practices, patterns, and habits – types of inequality, exclusion, and exploitation which are incompatible with the "self-descriptions" modern societies promote of themselves, and the validity claims they insist they embody, in no small measure through the legal, political, and

³¹ There was a structural and proto-methodological comparativism at work in the research and perspectives of many members of the Institute for Social Research of the so-called Frankfurt School that also applies to Adorno; see Dahms (2017c).

³² E.g., Mignolo (2011), Alexander (2013).

³³ For my delineation and critique of mainstream approaches, as they neglect to examine the gravity concrete socio-historical conditions exert on efforts to illuminate those conditions, see Dahms (2008).

educational systems.³⁴ In a growing number of instances, the determination to interpret in terms of everyday categories large-scale processes of transformation at the societal level that clearly both precede and are beyond the reach of human decision-making and influence – i.e., under most circumstances, human decision-making and influence are shaped by, but do not have the capacity to alter those processes transformations, except in very small ways – is producing disturbing and disorienting effects which many individuals have a hard time acknowledging and accepting.³⁵ How we face the past, present, and future, with what kind of consequences for ourselves and others, depends on how well prepared we are to accept and understand, without despairing, that modern societies emerged and in many regards function and maintain order as a result of (and through) anonymous processes that we have little or no control over, but which shape and even constitute us to a large extent – our identities and selves, individually and especially socially and collectively, including at the national level. Whether or not processes of socialization and especially educational institutions and priorities are conducive to turning unavoidable experiences of cognitive dissonance – which in modern societies are socially and economically necessary for how they are structured and function – into occasions for attaining greater (and ideally empowering) awareness and understanding of the vicissitudes of politics, culture, and economy in the context of global civilization, is bound to influence how individuals will cope with those experiences, and how many will turn violent, and to what extent.³⁶

³⁴ I am referring here to Luhmann's use of the concept, "self-description," and its potential centrality to social theory, as a complement to ideology critique (though Luhmann did not intend it as such); see, e.g., Albert (2016/2019):

[A]lthough Luhmann's theory is a theory that is also a theory about politics, it is not a political theory. Rather, for Luhmann political theory is a form of reflexive self-description of and within the political system. ...

While public opinion provides a basic reflective scheme for the self-observation of the political system that is highly flexible in accommodating contingency, the self-description of the political system relies on a range of basic semantic figures that have been "frozen" since the late 18th century. Luhmann's diagnosis in this respect does not deny variation and evolution, but emphasizes continuity in the three basic figures of representation, sovereignty, and democracy. All three figures provide related solutions to the problem of communicating about the system's unity within the system, which inevitably leads to paradoxical communication, as communication within the system about its unity in fact itself perpetuates the system (it is not an observation from the outside). Put differently, the system needs to deal with the paradox inherent in the scheme of parts/whole, that is the paradox inherent in a unity that is supposed to mark a difference (of the system and its environment).

These paradoxes cannot be resolved. ...

³⁵ Leebrick's (2015) study of the process of environmental gentrification in rural and small-town Appalachia (rather than in urban settings) employs early Frankfurt School critical theory (among other frames) to illuminate social change under conditions of global capitalism, and is highly instructive in this regard.

³⁶ Drawing on Adorno and Lipset, Erwin K. Scheuch and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (1967) developed a model "that is based on the assumption that the potential for radical right-wing movements exists in all industrialized societies and should be understood as a 'normal pathological' condition. In all fast-growing modernizing countries there are people who cannot cope with economic and cultural dislocation, and who react to the pressures of readjustment with rigidity and closed-mindedness. These reactions can be mobilized by right-wing movements or parties offering political philosophies that promise an elimination of pressures and a simpler, better society. These philosophies do not contain just any utopia but a romanticized version of the nation before the first large wave of modernization. The core of the

To some extent, this constellation between cognitive dissonance and willful unawareness presents a paradox par excellence: on the one hand, we have the option of grasping how the constitutional logic of modern societies is inversely related to individual human agency; on the other hand, grasping and accepting this logic is necessary for whatever measure of such agency may remain. Without the necessary kind of educational priorities, individuals will be more and more likely to be “caught like the deer in the headlight,” incapable to weigh the alternatives, and become increasingly disinterested, “simply” making a choice and then adhering to it for as long as possible, or they will become increasingly resentful.

Expanding on the analysis Adorno presented in *Aspects*, right-wing populists and extremists resent that modern society is based on a logic that severely limits individual human agency. Yet, they insist that the values, preferences and choices that motivate their actions (white supremacy, racism, sexism, etc.) are their own, while adhering to a program that closely mirrors the anonymous processes modern societies rest upon, and which frequently resemble or are modeled on premodern patterns of power and domination (and tied to persistent social inequalities, forms of discrimination, etc.). Right-wing extremists appear not to be interested in understanding any these linkages, and if they do, then only in order to reaffirm the premodern patterns, even though modern societies necessitate a form of purposeful resistance against how they are structured and function, in order for individuals to retain any amount of autonomy. This purposeful resistance is incongruous with the resentful stance of many right-wing extremists with regard to modern society, which they reject because its stability, and its ability to maintain enough legitimacy in the eyes of enough of its members, rests on and depends on the consistent promulgation of claims about its operations that point beyond the inequalities and forms of discrimination that are integral components of its fabric. What right-wing extremists reject about modern societies are precisely these aspirational claims, not the fact that they are not being actualized; they would prefer for those claims not to be made, and for inequalities and discrimination to remain, as long they would be among the beneficiaries. They also never would allow themselves to grasp any of these dynamics, since doing so would shake the illusion of their own individual autonomy and self-determination and shatter the values and presumptions their existence and worldview are based upon.

There are many angles from which the relevance of *Aspects* for the U.S. could be examined. Evidently, his perspective was profoundly influenced by his American experience, and constitutes a sort of hybrid of lessons learned under exceptional circumstances in several socio-historical and political contexts – four different political systems in Germany, and his years in the United States between 1938 and 1949. Several of the issues he identified and discussed have special weight in America, such as the emphasis in certain religious groups on apocalypse, and the cultural prominence of imaginaries related to Armageddon, which in other nations with predominantly Christian populations are much less pronounced. Fear in general is a much more common feature in the United States, partly because of attitudes about government, and partly

problem consists of a specifically a-synchronous dealing with the past, especially a dissent about the evaluation of modernity in the respective societies” (Minkenberg and Schain 2003, pp. 156-7). Note that the notion of “normal pathology thesis” is not a consensus position in the related literature; for instance, Cas Mudde (2010) has been advocating a shift from *normal pathology* to *pathological normalcy*. See also Mudde (2007, 2019) and Taylor, Currie and Holbrook (2013).

because of a widespread distrust with regard to “others,” including many Americans, as expressed in the strong gun culture and extent of private gun ownership, and exacerbated by the celebration of violence in entertainment. However, my focus here will be on education as an antidote to fear, regardless of whether fear is a response to difficulties to cope with increasingly challenging, complex, and contradictory expectations and demands, especially in relation to work and the need make a living, in the absence of a social safety-net as it still exists, if in reduced fashion, in most other industrialized nations. In fact, the issues that often have been addressed in terms of *American exceptionalism* intersect in telling ways with the currency of Adorno’s warnings about the new right-wing extremism, with exceptionalism not being important as a basis for ideological combat, but as an analytical and comparative reference frame. To begin with, a major impediment to assessments of the condition and prospects of a particular society, it is not sufficient to try to illuminate the society from within, as it is largely impossible to distinguish between features that are specific to a particular society, and features that are shared by all societies of the same time. Thus, American society being a modern society does not translate necessarily into America being more similar than different when compared to other modern societies; the opposite may be the case, depending on the specific issue and aspect of social reality at hand. By implication, efforts to identify the defining features of a particular society necessarily must rely at least on one other society of the same type as a foil for comparison. In many ways, the discourse about American exceptionalism, if it is employed as a means to identify distinctiveness, rather than superiority (as usually is the case when the concept is being deployed for ideological purposes), can serve the purpose of recognizing how unusual American society as a modern society in fact is, without having to go through the arduous process of familiarizing oneself with at least one other society, which is not especially likely to succeed in any case, in the absence of extended lived experience within the other society.

Whether and how citizens of the future will have the opportunity to gain an adequate understanding of American exceptionalism, in the sense of American distinctiveness, will impact directly on the ability of most individuals to appreciate both the brighter aspects and the darker aspects of American society, and what effects the resulting field of tensions will have on their own life choices, with regard to an array of potential opportunities and impediments, e.g., whether they should expect to experience more or less systematic discrimination, and what status America will have in the global economy and the system of international relations, especially as it manifests itself in terms of the threat of war, and many related issues, including the form and content of democracy, and their ability to influence policy or are its passive and powerless targets. After all, we are currently once again living in a time period during which the tracks are being laid down for how and by whom the medium-term future will be shaped. Determining who will have the opportunity to participate in this process and be involved in related decisions is a highly contested issue today, with well-organized efforts afoot to make sure that some groups of citizens will be excluded from this process, at least as much as possible, and others trying to withstand the influence of vested interests, power or wealth (which have made their peace with the logic of capital and are willing to do its bidding, as long as they are being generously remunerated for their efforts).

Under such circumstances, the role of education could not possibly be overstated, and this is where Adorno’s *Aspects* implicitly (but undeniably) relate to his contributions to education.

Above all else, Adorno may have been an educator, and not only in his formal occupation, but also very much as a public speaker and personality, as indicated earlier. The thrust of his thought was directed at conceiving and then practicing the kind of education intended and designed to prevent the sort of developments of which right-wing extremism is one of the worst and most dangerous examples (see Cho 2009). At his time, these circumstances may not have been quite as conducive to noticing the intensity and speed of social change, the pressures and strain it has been imposing on individuals, and the degree to which many are utterly unprepared to meet resulting challenges. Short of stopping progress in modern societies, and thus terminating their very possibility, the onus this condition imposes on education is enormous, to enable young people to understand their circumstances, the pressures they face, and the future that looms – and where it matters most, it appears that education is failing this task. In many ways, this is especially pronounced in the United States, which has many of the world's top universities, yet educational priorities are tailored in specific ways that are oriented towards skilling and training, responding to market needs, and protecting the existing social and economic structure, in a highly individualized fashion. Moreover, especially public education is highly ahistorical. Despite occasional fits and starts, history has remained an afterthought, and even more so, historical reflexivity. There has never been a sustained and determined effort to “work through the American past,” especially as far as the nation's origins are concerned, the prominent role that violence has been playing has been internalized in many ways rather than properly assessed. Yet, a past ignored is a past prone to return to haunt us and to be repeated, at whatever price and costs. In his essay on “Aldous Huxley and Utopia,” and referring to the reality imagined in *Brave New World*, Adorno ominously may have anticipated a terrifying future, which in many ways reads like our present:

“History is bunk,” an expression attributed to [Henry] Ford, relegates to the junkpile everything not in line with the most recent method of industrial production, including, ultimately, all continuity of life. Such reduction cripples [human beings]. Their inability to perceive or think anything unlike themselves, the inescapable self-sufficiency of their lives, the law of pure subjective functionalism—all result in pure desubjectivization. Purged of all myths, the scientifically manufactured subject-objects of the anti-*Weltgeist* are infantile. In line with mass culture, the half-involuntary, half-organized regressions of today finally turn into compulsory ordinances governing leisure time, the “proper standard of infantile decorum”, Hell's laughter at the Christian dictum, “If you do not become as little children...” The blame rests with the substitution of means for all ends. The cult of the instrument, cut off from every objective aim ..., and the fetishistic love of gadgetry, both unmistakable lunatic traits ingrained in precisely those people who pride themselves on being practical and realistic, are elevated to the norm of life. (Adorno [1955] 1967, pp. 102-3)

The discrepancy between the forces that are shaping or determining socialization processes and those that influence educational priorities and practices continues to grow, and anxiety in the face of rampant uncertainty is proliferating at greater and greater speed (see Crombez 2018). Facing the future is contingent on the ability to face the past, and in the absence of the latter, the present is being ground up between the factual horrors that never were fully acknowledged and

examined, and the imagined horrors that are looming in the future. Adorno's characterization of the social causes of the new right-wing extremism not only apply still, they are getting more intense – *worse* – in many ways. Fear of the consequences of automation and technological development (see Ford 2015, Knowles 2017) is more real than ever, and more justified, as projections suggest that with increasing reliance on artificial intelligence, millions of jobs will be destroyed, without a sufficiently equivalent number of jobs being created or being necessary – to recall one of Adorno's observations in *Aspects* (p. 3), superfluous humans no longer will be needed to keep the economic machine humming. Combine this sense of impending obsolescence with the fear that the status and influence of the United States in the world is declining, that the formerly "greatest nation on the face of the Earth"³⁷ conspicuously is in danger of losing this purported quality, including in regards in which it once was undeniable, that those with white privilege feel under attack, and that maintaining a middle-class standard of living has been getting more difficult, and many other developments, not just in the agricultural sector, the feeling of vertigo is difficult to avoid.³⁸

In many ways, such developments and related issues feed back into education not just as an ideal, but as a concrete practice and set of institutions mediated by policies, which in recent decades have been influenced and promoted neoliberalism. Yet, in the United States, like many other aspects of political, social, cultural and even economic life, education also suffers from far-reaching anti-intellectualism. Mugambi Jouet has traced the deterioration of what started as an epoch of enlightenment in America, which in many regards already had characterized colonial life and manifested itself fully in the Constitution, into widespread anti-intellectualism. In his recent book on *Exceptional America* (2017), with the benefit of an insider-outsider, Mugambi Jouet argued

that American exceptionalism is not only what divides Americans from the world – it is also what divides Americans from each other. Compared to other Westerners, Americans are far more polarized over fundamental questions regarding the purpose of government, socioeconomic equality, the literal veracity of the Bible, sexual morality, science, human rights, and foreign policy. As a result, America is torn apart by conflicts and injustices existing nowhere else or to nowhere near the same extent in the modern Western world. (p. 6-7)

Jouet explains this unique polarization as grounded in anti-intellectualism, Christian fundamentalism, culture wars of faith, sex, and gender, the tension between democracy and plutocracy, the fact that many Americans vote against their own economic interests or not at all, mass incarceration, executions, and gun violence, and America's position in – and many Americans' attitudes toward the rest of – the world. Tellingly, all these dimensions can be traced back to education fulfilling a peculiar set of roles that appear to aggravate features of American life that put it in an outsider's position among modern societies.

³⁷ Jouet (2017) uses this phrase as a foil, to emphasize his analysis of the distinctiveness rather than the superiority of American society (pp. 19, 24, 26, 235).

³⁸ Jock Young (2007) has provided a rather effective and convincing analysis that is pertinent in this regard.

Intriguingly, America and other nations are moving apart and closer at the same time. While liberal America is mainly evolving in the same direction as the rest of the West, conservative America has become an outlier because of its unusual ideology. Liberal America's worldview is not simply vastly different from the worldview in conservative America but also closer to the dominant worldview elsewhere in the Western world: Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Tellingly, universal healthcare is broadly supported by both liberals and conservatives in all Western nations except America, where Republicans persistently denounce the evils of "socialized medicine." In other words, "conservatism" tends to have a deeply different meaning in America than other Western nations. (p. 6)

As far as anti-intellectualism is concerned, Jouet is not suggesting that it has "fully eradicated the spirit of American enlightenment" (p. 57), which would be an odd claim to make, "since diverse examples demonstrate how a vibrant intellectual life has coexisted in America alongside anti-intellectualism – a powerful reminder that it is a nation of fascinating contradictions" (ibid). Rather, "[a]nti-intellectual populism could foster American decline, as it impedes rational decision making and problem-solving. It also contributes to polarization by titling conservative America to the far right, thereby hindering the possibility to compromise with liberal America" (p. 74). Recall Adorno's point about right-wing extremists in Germany regarding compromise as a sign of degenerateness, which throws a peculiar light on American conservatives, whose commitments to democracy would appear to be in doubt. "[T]he Republican Party is a mainstream party – a leading party in a two-party system – that as already heavily influenced by extremist leaders and a reactionary base adopting hardline positions on virtually every single issue" (pp. 78-9) well before the most recent Presidential election.

Because demagoguery has a noxious effect on the political debate, its prevalence in America has powerfully contributed to social polarization. A crop of extraordinarily anti-intellectual leaders, who would usually be relegated to the fringe in other Western democracies, are regularly able to attain top offices. Resorting to an astounding degree of disinformation, they exploit their supporters' ignorance, skepticism of education, and irrationality. (p. 79)

So, is the problem then there is not enough education, since like any other institutional context in American society with the exception of the military, a system of intricate stratification is in place that serves all, from the very rich to the poor, and which insures that the existing class structure will remain as stable as possible? As often is the case, the problem is much more qualitative than quantitative, and pertains to the pedagogical costs that come – among many other factors – with the need to sustain a widespread sense that America is "the greatest nation on the face of the Earth." This imperative, which defines the confines especially of primary and secondary education, and which reverberates in institutions of higher learning, as is further reinforced in other aspects of public life, especially the mass media, translates into invisible barriers on thought that pertain especially to the darker side of American society – the darker side of American history.

It is in this regard that education represents the other side of Adorno's critique of the new right-wing extremism. At the time when Adorno presented *Aspects*, most Germans resisted all efforts to face the past, and was focused on almost exclusively economic matters, looking forward to a prosperous future. Soon, the students would rebel and trigger developments that contributed to a major change in government, and a few years after the SPD-FDP administration came into power in 1969, the first major recession hit the world economy after World War II, threatening the "economic miracle" approach to the future. At the same time, however, educational reforms were being implemented that targeted the higher levels of the public school system, and required that two years of classes in the History specifically would be dedicated to learning about the history of National Socialism, German culpability in World Wars I and II, responsibility for the Holocaust. To my knowledge, this was the only instance to date that the political establishment in any society – supported by the educational system – encouraged several cohorts of high school students to apply and refine a critical perspective on their nation's history (see Neiman 2019, also Dahms 2019a, esp. pp. 224-27).

During the 1960s, among all his other projects and commitments, Adorno also dedicated time and energy to advocating a model for the kind of pedagogy that is necessary in all modern societies, if members of society are to attain a critically-reflexive level of understanding their society, as a precondition for developing a healthy sense of purpose and self, characterized by maturity. As Volker Heins wrote,

Adorno's interest in teaching was not external to his theoretical work; both were closely intertwined. Like other representational processes that have given rise to grand narratives of historical suffering, Critical Theory did not evolve in an institutional vacuum. Rather, the process unfolded within the institutional arena of the system of higher education, to which a core group of remigrated German intellectuals added the "Frankfurt School", as it was beginning to be called from the late 1950s onwards. It also unfolded within the wider civil society of West Germany and its communicative institutions. The choice of these arenas implied that meaning work was meant to be linked not only to social research, but also to the teaching of both students and the wider public. (Heins 2012, p. 71)

Heins, whose article appropriately is titled "Saying Things that Hurt," provides the following illustration for the effect and appeal Adorno has for his audiences:

Adorno filled large auditoriums and attracted a wide readership because he offered a narrative that integrated the horrendous events surrounding the disappearance of the Jews from Europe into the larger framework of a narrative. The construction of the Holocaust as a traumatizing universal symbol of senseless human suffering prompted audiences across Germany not only to identify with the victims of the concentration camps, but also with victims of the Vietnam War or the nuclear bomb – situations that, according to Adorno, had "certain catastrophic similarities" (Adorno 2006: 8; 2000b: 101, 106) with the Holocaust. Sometimes Adorno uses the Holocaust not only as a generic symbol to draw attention to the Vietnam War or other events, but also to dispel the illusion that anybody in the modern world lives on *terra firma*. The message is not simply:

identify yourselves with the victims of barbarism. It is also: you too are victims! Every one of you is an "object"; no one enjoys genuine "protection!". "The world is a system of horror!", etc. (Heins 2005: 37–8, 113)³⁹

Adorno advocated a very specific and increasingly important kind of education, and on right-wing extremism being symptomatic of failed or tilted education. The fear of losing privileges in many ways is indicative of an inability to face facts, in general, and of fear rather than facts influencing one's actions and decisions. In particular, it is important to be able to face unpleasant facts, considering that resistance to facing such facts threatens one's sense of self and identity, a situation which in a rapidly changing world is fraught with uncertainty and unpredictability, and requires a mode of teaching and learning that is incongruous with society protecting itself as a petrified social structure. Most teachers are ill-equipped to take on this kind of educational challenge and may not even be in the position to conceive of it. Some of the difficulties that come with the effort to read Adorno have to do with the fact that the movement of thought must be followed and reconstructed, instead of focusing on isolated statements pulled out and looked at on their own. This is important methodologically: there are no clear-cut conclusions, but dialectical assessments that jive with the way reality works, which is not static, but highly dynamic. If readers and listeners are not willing to follow along and "submit" to the argument, on the assumption that they may learn something new, the result inevitably will be a caricature of what Adorno was working to convey.

In his best-known contribution to a critical theory of education, "Education for Maturity and Responsibility" (Adorno and Becker [1969] 1999), in a conversation with the pedagogue Hellmut Becker on radio in 1969, Adorno said,

The underlying cause is, of course, the contradiction in our society that the social arrangements under which we live remain heteronomous, which means that no individual in today's society can, on their own, determine the nature of their own existence; that as long as this remains the case, society will continue to mould people through a vast number of different structures and processes, in such a way that, living within this heteronomous framework, they swallow and accept everything, without its true nature even being available to their consciousnesses. This does, of course, extend into our institutions, into discussion of political education and other such questions. The real problem of maturity today is whether and how one can work against this – and who this 'one' is, is a major question in its own right too. (p. 30)

If anything, the tension between heteronomy and maturity has increased precipitously in the interim, amplifying further the need to conceive of strategies designed to strengthen individuals' autonomy and ability to engage in forms of agency that are consistent with the reasons for making the effort to attain agency, and with the objectives to be attained. The concept Adorno used, *Mündigkeit*, and for which the English language does not have an exact translation or corresponding word, prominently was a key reference point for Immanuel Kant's understanding of enlightenment:

³⁹ Heins provides the following references for Adorno's formulation, "certain catastrophic similarities": Adorno ([2001] 2006, p. 8; [1998] 2000, pp. 101, 106).

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity [Unmündigkeit]. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: Sapere aude! [Dare to be wise!] Have courage to use your own understanding! (Kant [1784] 2009, p. 1)

Though Adorno was critical of Kant, the idea of maturity was central to both his thinking and the project of critical theory generally. Though the expectation should be that individuals would aspire to become and remain mature, like many other expectations, developments in recent years require perspectives on modern societies that are much more differentiated, or conducive to a much higher level of differentiation, with regard to whom and what such expectations in fact apply, and how. As heteronomy has been increasing during the last half century – especially since the onset of neoliberalism during the 1980s and the acceleration of globalization during the 1990s as an explicitly discernible and theorized process – enabling individuals to be mature nominally has remained a social, political, cultural and educational priority; but if promoted in earnestness through institutions and organizations, it would slow, disrupt, or redirect the trajectory of societal change that has taken hold in recent decades, since individuals as (more) self-aware and self-possessing actor would influence many different types of well-established and canonized decision-making processes.⁴⁰

Adorno as Critical Communicator and Teacher: Essays and Lectures as Forms of Resistance

It is one of the many ironies of the current state of affairs around the world that education for the most part ignores this paradoxical tension between projecting individual autonomy as highly desirable, on the one hand, and acknowledging that the type of social organization that our lives are patterned on is incompatible with such autonomy, on the other hand. Without determined and explicitly constructive efforts to ensure that individuals are capable of engaging in individual autonomy and of seizing on opportunities that objectively (and not merely subjectively) exist in modern societies, ideas, notions, and practices supporting or being oriented

⁴⁰ As Iain MacDonald (2011, p. 685) aptly wrote,

The paradox implicit here is indeed disturbing, namely, that an education in maturity requires an autonomy that reality both demands and causes to atrophy, like a bonsai tree, stunted and yet still somehow clinging to the potentiality proper to it. Does Adorno mean that we can never achieve substantial autonomy? Not at all. For autonomy is not a state of affairs or a condition that one actualizes once and for all in history; and heteronomy is not a sovereign power that arbitrarily struggles to suppress autonomy. Heteronomy is hardened autonomy, fearful of its fading reality; it is society wresting away from the individual the very power by which it came to be what it is: that of the individual experiencing and giving voice to contradictions. Autonomy, conversely, is the individual's contribution to spirit's becoming, which is to say: it is the indictment of the heteronomy whose historical stagnancy now (it is always 'now') calls for autonomy. Maturity, autonomy's generational coming of age, is in this regard simply the courage to experience the lived tension between autonomy and heteronomy without succumbing to either of the twin vanities of individual grandeur or resignation.

See also Susan Neiman (2008, 2014); with regard to heteronomy, see especially Postone (2009).

solely toward individual autonomy, without stressing corresponding and predictable difficulties to enact such autonomy, will cause increasing levels of frustration that easily can turn destructive.

Indeed, remaining cognizant of the field of tensions between everyday life and forms of structural violence above all requires a culture of remembering those who fell prey especially to horrors that were “man-made” with intentionality, as well as awareness of those who continue to fall prey to the seemingly normal and unavoidable workings of modern societies, within and across particular societies, both directly and indirectly, and the suffering they entail. Needless to say, the day-to-day operations and professional requirements that modern societies rest upon and have been imposing on individuals during the twentieth and especially the twenty-first century, thwart such remembering and awareness. As Adorno formulated in *Minima Moralia*,

For the intellectual, inviolable isolation is now the only way of showing some measure of solidarity. All collaboration, all the human worth of social mixing and participation, merely masks a tacit acceptance of inhumanity. It is the sufferings of [human beings] that should be shared: the smallest step towards their pleasures is one towards the hardening of their pain ([1951] 1978, p. 26).

In the context of the Coronavirus pandemic, as soon as lockdowns lasted for more than a few weeks, many individuals proclaimed that they had great difficulties coping without being able to meet those with whom they had had regular encounters, or without being able to make new encounters, and insisted on their constitutional rights; yet, it was difficult to avoid the impression that those very important social relationships many were claiming to be missing were an important part in the personal regimes of distraction many individuals maintain in order to be able to cope, and it was far more important to many to reestablish those regimes as quickly as possible, than to diminish the suffering of others, including especially the elderly and those whose immune systems were compromised for other health-related reasons.

Despite Adorno’s assertion that “[f]or the intellectual, inviolable isolation is now the only way of showing some measure of solidarity,” he was both a prolific writer and a prolific lecturer and teacher. In both regards, however, specific modes of communication were key to his efforts, not least because he was highly aware of the pitfalls of communication, both academically, and in everyday life. Also in *Minima Moralia*, he observed that “[t]he chance conversation in the train, when, to avoid dispute, one consents to a few statements that one knows ultimately to implicate murder, is already a betrayal; no thought is immune against communication, and to utter it in the wrong place and in wrong agreement is enough to undermine its truth” ([1951] 2005, p. 25). In an essay written between 1954 and 1958, Adorno explained and justified his preference for the *essay* as a literary form that is exceptionally conducive to a writing style and an approach to addressing pivotal social-theoretical, aesthetic, and philosophical issues, and aspects of the individual-society nexus, by enabling the writer to provide an analysis in which every point is, as it were, equidistant from the center of the issue(s) addressed and examined and, by implication, of the essay itself:⁴¹

⁴¹ This essay originally was included in the first volume of *Noten zur Literatur* (1958, pp. 9-49; published in English for the first time in 1984; again in a different translation in Adorno [1958] 1991, pp. 3-23), clearly as a kind of programmatic statement against prevailing views in Germany at the time, of the essay as “a hybrid ... [that lacks] a convincing tradition ... and [whose] strenuous requirements have only rarely been met” (Adorno [1958] 1984, p. 151).

The essay owes its freedom in its choice of objects, its sovereignty vis-à-vis all priorities of fact or theory to the circumstance that for it all objects are equally near the center to the principle that casts a spell over everything. The essay refuses to glorify concern for the primal as something more primal than concern for the mediated, because to the essay primacy itself is an object of reflection, something negative. It corresponds to a situation in which the primal, as a standpoint of the mind within a falsely socialized world, becomes a lie. (Adorno [1958] 1984, p. 167)

Indeed, it is not possible to state explicitly or to convey directly and unambiguously the importance and substance of an essay regarding its most important and valuable insights, observations, and claims, in a few sentences, in a manner that is consistent with its purpose. In fact, any attempt to bring the “heart” of an essay – a message, an observation, an “argument” – out in the open, to the point, and to present it seemingly ready-made to the reader, knocks the living spirit out of it and turn what ought to be an instance of active thought into dead matter entirely – a proposition, hypothesis, statement of fact, the specific context being immaterial, and prone to turning into dogma. Adorno’s affinity with dialectical thought can be explained through this lens and on the basis of this conviction, as can his reservations about – indeed, his opposition to – the simplicity of positivism, which he regarded as utterly incongruous with the nature of human and social reality in the modern age in general, and as an obstacle to the study of social, political, and cultural life, especially in the history of the twentieth century, if left to its own devices.⁴²

[T]he essay is not intimidated by the depraved profundity which claims that truth and history are incompatible. If truth in fact has a temporal core, then the full historical content becomes an integral moment in truth; the *a posteriori* becomes concretely *a priori*... The relation to experience – and from it the essay takes as much substance as does traditional theory from its categories – is a relation to all of history; merely individual experience, in which consciousness begins with what is nearest to it, is itself mediated by the all-encompassing experience of historical humanity; the claim that socio-historical contents are nevertheless supposed to be only indirectly important compared with the immediate life of the individual is a simple self-delusion of an individualistic society and ideology. (Adorno [1958] 1984, p. 158)

Adorno’s stance regarding authoritarianism, and his remarks about the new right-wing extremism, must be appreciated in this reference frame, even though *Aspects*, as a public lecture, did not constitute an opportunity to adhere and exemplify the essay form. The movement of thought, however, which evidently is at work, shares with the essay an unwillingness to organize the material in a manner that would have adhered to standards of clear and easily accessible presentation. After all, what Adorno was trying to get across did not exactly lend itself to a straightforward list of facts: that *authoritarian and right-wing responses could not be less suitable as strategies for coping with and addressing the challenges of modern life and especially the abstract, anonymous, and uncontrollable processes that sustain it, except in terms of the narrow-minded and short-*

⁴² See Adorno’s introduction and contributions to *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (Adorno et al., [1969] 1976), pp. 1-86 and 105-122.

sighted acquisition of temporary political power designed to take advantage of those challenges for personal (or a group's or class's) gain or profit, and most importantly with regard to the burden of conceiving of solutions to persistent challenges that modern societies have been both generating and facing to date, and especially those they inescapably will have to confront in an increasingly uncertain future, given the growing array of looming crises.

Adorno's critique of identity thinking as both the centerpiece and the focal point of his version of critical theory, and his rejection of mechanisms and ways of relating to the world that preclude appreciation of and respect for *non-identity*, are directed at how modern ways of relating to world and other(s) are synchronous with, reinforce, and indeed amplify and further intensify processes of alienation and reification.⁴³ Adorno's take on critical theory also is highly consonant, compatible, and complementary with – and expands on – the works of classical social theory. This affinity is particularly pronounced with regard to what Marx described as *capital accumulation* producing ever higher levels of *alienation*, what Durkheim saw as an inexorable process of greater and greater *division of labor* producing more and more intense forms of *anomie*, and what Weber framed as the ongoing *rationalization* of everything existing which – modeled on a Protestant ethic that is increasingly devoid of meaning – has been leading to the *disenchantment* of the world (see Dahms 2009, 2017b). If these processes – which include, but go beyond the ones theorized by Marx, Durkheim, and Weber – are being left unchecked and allowed to play out on their respective terms, the vanishing point of modern society is not the beginning of the “human millennium,” but the erosion or destruction of the social, potentially along with human civilization. Adorno's work was driven by a similar concern as the efforts of classical social theorists, his response being a more determined effort to promote a radical understanding of modernity in a manner that was oriented toward illuminating those operations and contradictions which members of society typically are ill-equipped (and not supposed to be able) to grasp, especially not in terms that “fit the bill,” partly because they are not being encouraged to make related efforts, and partly because they are actively being discouraged to do so, via a vast incentive structure designed and maintained to keep the underlying logic of modern societies from view.⁴⁴ To the extent to which individuals comply with or submit to such discouragement, their experiences are not truly theirs, but transpositions of the workings of modern societies as at least partially regressive social systems, into the practices and conduct of individual and social everyday life, and forms of social interaction and intersubjectivity.⁴⁵

Indeed, in Adorno's view, the advantages of the essay form in an era and under societal conditions that thwart the possibility of systematic knowledge about the intricacies, dynamics, and inherent tensions of those societal conditions, and in terms of how they are being perceived

⁴³ Regarding Adorno and non-identity, see Wellmer ([1984] 2012); regarding the continuing relevance of alienation and reification, see Dahms (2011), chs. 3 and 5.

⁴⁴ The combined result of the evolutionary nature of modern society as a heteronomous process that occurs beyond the influence and control of humans, and of certain groups making sure (to the extent that they can) that this underlying logic remains hidden, in order for those same groups being able to continue to benefit from them, may well be that fewer and fewer problems – such as *social* problems – are being perceived as solvable, or resolvable, so much so that more and more people are inclined to accept them and move on. See Dahms (2011), ch. 4.

⁴⁵ With regards to practices typically associated with “love,” see Dahms (2020a, 2020b).

by individuals as members of different groups, correlate with the pace and nature of social change in the modern age. The evolutionary vanishing point of modern societies from the outset was unclear, independent of or next to human will and desires, and outside the confines of most developmental narratives, ideologies, theological or theoretical traditions, but is especially so today.⁴⁶ How, then, to communicate this effectively even to interested audiences, in a manner that does not pervert the insights that are meant to come across? How to be an effective teacher at a time when it is exceedingly difficult to convey alternatives to an increasingly warped world in which, for example, humankind maintains itself by continuously reducing the global population of vertebrate animals, e.g., by 52 per cent between 1970 and 2010 (WWF 2014)?

As the advantages of the essay form pertain to the core of what is to be conveyed, the fact that this core cannot be expressed or stated outright, and any effort at doing so in fact would destroy its content and turn it more or less into its opposite, was the nature of knowledge about human existence and social conditions at least since the second half of the twentieth century. This constellation applies to an even greater extent in the twenty-first century, in the age of social media, despite the expectation that is so pervasive today: that all that matters ought to be conducive to explicit, unmediated expression. Yet, this expectation is merely a conceit, and less and less appropriate, making it more and more difficult for more and more individuals (whose total number meanwhile also has been increasing), to face the past, present, and future in ways that are conducive genuine rather than simulated agency.

Whereas the essay was Adorno's preferred form of writing, he had reservations about the spoken word being turned into text. As Michael Schwarz, the editor of Adorno's *Vorträge 1948-1949* (2019), wrote in a 2011 article about the neglect in research to date of Adorno as a public speaker and lecturer, the latter "felt an unease about recording the ephemeral, about objectifying the improvised and storing it. He had almost all recordings of his lectures erased. Regarding speech, which is used up in the moment, he did not have the will to preserve it. His unwillingness to let something be printed that did not meet his sensitive textual standards was strong" (Schwarz 2011, p. 289; my translation). Fortunately, in recent years, many of his lectures have become available, as well as a growing number of recordings of lectures, speeches, and interviews.⁴⁷ Still, as Schwarz described in detail, many of Adorno's publications initially were speeches or lectures, which enabled him to "test" his arguments, analyses, and critiques in front of audiences, and which he continued to refine later on. Adorno doubtlessly was able to appreciate the advantages of directly addressing and interacting with his listeners, and in turn reading his listeners and their reactions to what and how he presented his analyses and insights. He engaged both in free speech and presented fully formulated texts that he read to the audience, depending on his objective or what the organizers needed or asked for. He was a frequent speaker, employing many different formats, often taking the initiative in suggesting contributions or themes he was interested in addressing. During the 1950s and 1960s, Adorno contributed almost 300 times to radio programming on public radio – a format he had become acquainted with before the Nazis came to power in Germany, making seven appearances in 1931 alone – plus more than 300 appearances

⁴⁶ See Lyotard ([1979] 1984; see also Dahms (1992).

⁴⁷ E.g., Adorno ([1993] 2000, [2001] 2006; [2003] 2008; [1995] 2001).

in front of live audiences.⁴⁸ Although it often appeared to audiences that what Adorno presented was fully developed, this often was not the case, with him often speaking extemporaneously, just using a few handwritten notes jotted down on a piece of paper. As far as he was concerned, there was “an abyss between the spoken word and the texts that [he had] worked through good and proper” (p. 289; my translation). In fact, whenever Adorno wrote, he did so for readers, not for listeners, and many of his lectures were over the heads of at least most of the members in the audience (p. 291), partly because he was not prone to reiterating his views over and over, instead frequently developing them anew. During the last two decades of his life, Adorno participated in 114 radio dialogues and interviews, with such well-known figures as the fellow critical theorists Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, the film director Fritz Lang, the writer Elias Canetti, the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, the sociologist Arnold Gehlen, the conductor Pierre Boulez and the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen (p. 292). Adorno did not shy away from controversy and caused the occasional *éclat*, but he typically was entirely open-minded, spontaneous, and enjoyed the discussions. “As an intellectual, he saw himself challenged to break through fixed listeners’ expectations and projections of his public role” (p. 294; my translation). Schwarz concluded,

To present critical theory as public speech would be the desideratum of a historical mode of observation that places the emphasis on what happened and was spoken, rather than on what was written. Instead of the major works and large literary forms, the diverse praxis of speech and dialogue would come into view, a broadly dispersed activity – the ‘small change’ of verbal activities. Thus, the acoustic dimension of the Frankfurt School would become recognizable, which cannot be exhausted in the form of a few radio programs. (p. 294; my translation)

If we apply Adorno’s preference for the essay form and combine it with his reservations about the spoken word, to assess his lecture on the new right-wing extremism in relation to his work overall, we might suppose that it is one of only a small number of instances where he allowed himself to state the impetus of his overall work clearly and directly: *modern society’s potential to progress permanently is in danger of being overtaken by the regressive dimensions of human and societal life, especially insofar as – paradoxically – modern society as an empirical form of social organization fosters and relies on the latter*. Although, strictly speaking, the above supposition would go too far – *Aspects* above all is about the persistent problem of the new right-wing extremism in so-called democratic societies – the lecture still does provide strong indications of key motifs at work in Adorno’s writings and of how to read them today, even though he delivered the lecture just over two years before his passing and more than half a century ago, and under what appeared to be increasingly disconcerting circumstances. Ironically, and practically speaking, his *immediate* concerns would have been partly alleviated by the fact that as a result of

⁴⁸ After World War II, all television and radio in West Germany was “public-legal” (*Öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk*): “Since the years 1948/49, an umbrella term for the system of democratic radio [and television] for all established then in the western zones, i.e., the later Federal Republic of Germany. The term is derived from the fact that all the radio stations of the allied occupied forces with their transfer into German control – according to allied or German law – were organized as institutions of public law.” (my translation); https://www.ard.de/home/Oeffentlich_rechtlicher_Rundfunk/458368/index.html. – Regarding Adorno’s engagement on public radio in Germany, see Parkinson (2014); in the U.S., see Mariotti (2014).

the federal election on September 29, 1969, just weeks after Adorno's death (on August 6), the SPD under the leadership of Willy Brandt – who had been in the resistance against the Nazis – and the FDP were able to form a progressive, “social-liberal” coalition government for the first time after World War II, thus forcing the CDU/CSU into opposition, enabling the latter to distinguish itself more starkly from the SPD as its former “grand coalition” partner (from 1966 until 1969). The coalition the new administration was based upon effectively pulled the rug from underneath *both* the right-wing NPD as a viable political party with popular support (the party garnered 4.3% of the more important “secondary votes” cast in the national election, thus failing to reach the required 5% needed for a party to be represented in parliament), *and* the Leftist student movement and “extra-parliamentary opposition” (APO).⁴⁹

Compared to many of Adorno's other public lectures, his notes for *Aspects* were unusually extensive: seven pages of densely handwritten notes, often (and equally unusually) in complete sentences that literally anticipated his formulations (Adorno [1967] 2020, p. 41; Adorno 2019, p. 730). The care Adorno took in preparing the lecture indicates how important it was to him, and that it was not just one more obligation he agreed to and willingly or eagerly fulfilled. Evidently, the points he was making were close to his heart and getting them across effectively mattered to him. For present purposes, aside from highlighting the current relevance of the Adorno's 1967 lecture and analysis, it illustrates how the complexity of his thought and the diversity of his interests were ideally suited to explicate the breadth and the depth of the challenge right-wing extremism and related forms of populism represents in the early twenty-first century. Thus, we must aspire to both – complexity and diversity – in order to anticipate current and future challenges we already are, and undoubtedly will be facing sooner rather than later. How to conceive, then, of the kind of *praxis* that is urgently needed today and from here on out? This praxis will not result from focus on surface manifestations, but instead requires determination to grasp what kind of more or less visible forces produce and sustain those surface manifestations, such as right-wing movements and governments. It may be most productive to treat *Aspects* as a sort of pivot point in the proverbial hand-held fan of the many different dimensions of Adorno's overall work, as it correlated with key dimensions of modern social life, from individual experiences, to the culture industry, to art and music and their both regressive and dissident roles and fate in the administered world, sociology, negative dialectics, and education.

⁴⁹ Compared to many other countries with democratic political systems, the (West) German electoral system and process are rather arcane, due to the fact that they were designed to avoid discarding votes that did not go to the winning party or candidate (as long as they amounted to at least 5% of the votes cast); by contrast, discarding votes that did not go to the winning side is not only typical for, but intended by explicitly adversarial types of democracy, as in the U.S. and Great Britain, in order to create strong government, or rather avoid weak government. – Regarding the political situation at the time, including the role of the extra-parliamentary opposition, see Burns and van der Will (1988); for a contemporary study that included a clear distinction between the extra-parliamentary opposition, which was directed at the deficits of parliamentary or representative democracy (but in support of democracy generally), and “traditional Right antiparliamentarism (*sic!*) [which] was above all hostile to the principle of democracy and only secondarily to the representative institutions through which it was expressed,” see Shell (1970), p. 653.

Conclusion

Among social theorists, and critical theorists, in particular, Theodor W. Adorno occupies a distinctive and exposed position, for many reasons. Like none other, even compared to other prominent and highly productive representatives of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, especially Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, or to later theorists like Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, or Judith Butler, he at the same time maintained a level of consistency, rigor, and breadth in his work which, at a high level of output characterized by sophistication and mental clarity that continue to impress today, while also remaining connected to the norms and values according to which modern societies claim to function, and which they insist they support and promote like no other.⁵⁰ More importantly, though, Adorno was committed to calling things by their name, and he refused to fall prey to the temptation either to simplify his depiction of the world as it is, in ways that accommodated the mood of this or that era, or to expedience, or consumer demand, or the willingness of those around him to comply with the demands of their circumstances. For instance, while many others during the postwar era submitted to the regime of refraining from criticizing “western democracy” – really, modern societies in western Europe and North America – since not refraining from it was seen as support for Soviet Communism – Adorno insisted on the need to develop further, refine, and focus rigorous critique in light of developments at the time, as with regard to the “administered world.” At the same time, Adorno was never in any danger of providing ideological or theoretical cover for “actually existing socialism,” either. Just as he did in music, in theory, too, he did not compromise with the need to comply with any kind of system. In music, he regarded the challenge of atonality, as a refusal to abandon the challenge of facing freedom, and to install some kind of regime to “escape from it,” to use the title of one of Fromm’s ([1941] 1994) books, as a betrayal of the demands of the age. As a consequence, Adorno was – and his work continues to be – resented, partly because he demonstrated that as a social scientist and scholar, it is possible to describe social reality in modern societies in ways that are not fraught with compromises and the desire to accommodate the powers that be, or to not edge on, or keep in mind how we are supposed to write about reality, to comply with what we *ought to*.⁵¹ There are certain artists who (or works of art which) can, in

⁵⁰ Inevitably, though, high levels of consistency come at a price, often in the form of a particular type of hermeticism. Referring to the status of the “primacy of the object” in Adorno’s theory, Lawrence Hazelrigg wrote,

Adorno’s output is difficult to hold in internal coherence, given all the crosscurrents and silences that pulsate through it, as much of it was left in sketchy, incomplete, and provisional condition. On the one hand, his work can be understood as a late effort to overturn the limits which Kant left to us—that is, to offer a theory that would perform the function of a first-principle metaphysics, but without being overtly a metaphysics, and therein “rescue the nonidentical from the assaults of instrumental reason” (Habermas) ... The evident intent of Adorno’s “nonidentity thinking” or “negative dialectic” was to achieve revelation of the “conceptuality prevailing in the object itself”—that is, the concept which an “object has of itself,” of what, “left to itself,” the object “seeks to be” (Adorno). (Hazelrigg 2020, pp. 68-69),

The first quote is from Habermas ([1988] 1992, p. 123), while the last three are from Adorno ([1957] 1976, p. 69). See also Bonefeld (2012).

⁵¹ Günter Dux (a leading German social theorist whose works for the most part have not been translated into English – for an important example of translated work, see Dux [2000] 2011; also Niedenzu 2012 – and who studied sociology and philosophy in Frankfurt during the time when Adorno gave his 1967 lecture) dedicated one of his books (Dux

an odd reversal, serve the purpose of telling us more about a person assessing or passing judgment on an artist or a work of art, than about the artist or a work of art. Adorno also fulfills such a function, and occupies such a position. When verdicts are being passed on his work, they frequently (though evidently not always – *nothing* is foolproof!) tell us as much or more about the person passing judgment, than about Adorno. One reason for this is that his work and thought are difficult to understand, the rationale behind his analyses, diagnoses, and conclusions difficult to grasp – they require a particular commitment, effort, and dedication, and are never easy to appreciate or understand, nor meant to be – and his verdicts demand that we reconstruct how he arrived at them, within what kind of larger normative, analytical, and theoretical reference frame, as they typically do not coincide with and conform to conventional wisdom or the limitations of “common sense.”

One of the main problems with reading Adorno and transposing his writings and assessments to subsequent or later circumstances is that they criticize conventional assumptions; how, then, can conventionalist interpretations and applications do justice to what he was trying to get across? “Doing justice” is important in this, and to all his efforts: not to turn what we study and examine into a function of what today is called “desire” – to turn the world into a function of “us” – with all our limitations – but to let the world stand as it is, to face it on its terms, rather than on ours, and draw related conclusions. It is in this regard that Adorno’s *radical* thought is not just incompatible with, but precisely opposite to, *populism* and *extremism*, both in their right-wing and left-wing incarnations. He resisted his insights being “framed” in terms of political agendas, including when his own – leftist – students demanded that he support and join their cause. Populism and extremism are inversely related to the nature of social life in the modern age generally, and especially in the current century. Where willingness to face unpleasant and disturbing complexities, contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas is called for, willful and more or less aggressive determination to render the world simple again, even if only to be in a position to take advantage of it, will not be successful, and is far more likely to aggravate and drive the tension-ridden reality we all are part of toward, or beyond the “point of no return,” a prospect that appears to become more realistic with each passing day (e.g., Goodell 2018). The conditions that have emerged demand *rational* solutions on the planetary scale, which evidently have been making *irrational* responses more appealing, even irresistible to many. While right-wing populists and extremists see this as an opportunity to possibly get their way, at least for a while, and to the medium- and long-term detriment of all, left-wing populists and extremists appear to be motivated by the will to face the looming challenges constructively, on the assumption that their strategies will lead to qualitative and last improvements, and the formation of a political reference frame that is conducive to tackling impending and emerging problems in ways that are

2004) to examining the issue and prominent status in modern society of individuals’ actions and choices in everyday life being regulated by being told and frequently reminded that they “ought” to do this or that, but not the other thing, without reflecting on such imperatives and expectations: how we exist in a matrix of suppositions that steer our actions, desires, goals, and practices, without us being cognizant of this fact, or curious about its origins. According to Dux, normativity has to be reconstructed from knowledge of the real structures of society, which in turn are shaped by the market system, rather than conceived of in terms of abstract ethical principles; consequently, morality must be critically examined (in the sense of deconstructed), and justice clearly defined accordingly. On the need for intellectuals to resist the temptation to comply with the “ought,” see Demirović’s (1999) detailed study of the development of critical theory and its transformation into the Frankfurt School.

consonant with the values of the modern age. Yet, trends that have been underway in recent years suggest that both right-wing and left-wing proponents ignore the increasingly fundamental differences that separate both groups and their supporters, respectively, who will not disappear, or the majority populations who represent more or less insurmountable inertia and obstacles for both. What “Adorno” stands for, then, is uncompromising determination to illuminate the conflicting dynamics at play in what seems like a post-dialectical age, regardless of whether there will be a tangible payoff or not, since only such determination may retain the potential of the kind of fearless understanding of which humankind in the twenty-first century is most in need.

Finally, one of the main “criticisms” leveled at Adorno and the other first-generation critical theorists (except Marcuse) was and is that they were “too pessimistic.” Yet, optimism, at its core, is an artifact both of modern society and capitalism as ideologies – we are supposed to be optimistic, to hope that things work out – mostly to keep our eyes away from the reality of concrete situations, even though modern societies and capitalism have been running with things not working out as planned, but working for certain purposes, to the benefit of certain groups or individuals. Optimism and the prohibition against pessimism are a coping mechanism in a world in which we pre-consciously are cognizant of the fact – which we “are not supposed” to acknowledge – that we are never in control, that more or less anonymous forces (supported by certain types of human actors) are in charge and determine our fate: forces that require an uncompromising and probing look at how modern societies emerged, how they have been spreading, how they transformed our world in ways that we – born into this world – have great difficulties understanding, since we are its products and its perpetuators. Fascists and supporters of fascism recognize that they are not in control, but rather than accepting that the world in general is not conducive to humans being “in control,” they insist on *them* being in control, even though in terms of their very nature, the dimensions of politics, culture, economy, and society to a certain extent may be *influenced*, but are not *controllable* by us, even though – in the modern age – these dimensions are supposed to serve “our” interests, be modeled on “our” objectives and shaped by us, reflect and correspond with “our nature,” and be subject to “our” decision-making. Yet, society produces and sustains us, not vice versa, through everyday life, existing structures of inequalities, and systems of power, along with (increasingly bureaucratic) institutions and organizations, regardless of whether or not we acknowledge or resent this fact. Only on the basis of this realization can we begin to acquire the knowledge needed for us to be able to shape our collective fate. In order to do so, we must – interactively and intersubjectively – recognize that and how we are products of forces whose machinations that are difficult to grasp, and impossible to comprehend and transcend without the necessary and sustained collaborative effort, encouragement, and support. If the goal is to bring about lasting improvements in and of modern societies, we must accept that we are shaped by it in ways that demand the determined willingness and commitment to overcome our own, socially molded, inherently regressive selves.

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