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Benjamin Krämer | Christina Holtz-Bacha [eds.]

Perspectives on Populism and the Media

Avenues for Research

Nomos

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Introduction: Populism and the Media—A Matter of Perspective

Benjamin Krämer

One might almost write a parody of introductions to publications on populism and the relationship between populism and the media (at least coming from certain lines of research): The concept of populism is ill-defined and controversial but somehow involves the distinction between "the people" and the elite; populism is on the rise—the usual examples being Trump and Brexit—or there is a "populist Zeitgeist;" populism is a threat to liberal democracy; populists are skilled communicators, on the screen, by instrumentalizing the press, and by their particularly effective use of online channels.

Concerning the problem of defining populism, it has, of course, some relevant implications to define populism either as an ideology, style, discourse or frame, but for most purposes, researchers should simply pick one. Many arguments have been made in favor of the various definitions, and it seems that lengthy discussions of the concept of populism itself and the corresponding literature all too often still replace the development of substantial theories.

However, concerning these assumptions often found in introductions of texts on populism, I would also insist on a number of caveats. Populism is often defined with regard to the distinctions it makes or the antagonisms it creates. It is often said that populists can make "vertical" and horizontal" distinctions (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) between the people and elites, but also between the people and outgroups. However, the notion that exclusion of outgroups is "horizontal" can appear somewhat euphemistic. In the case of right-wing populism, this tends to confirm the ethnopluralist line of argument that parts of the radical right have developed to set themselves apart from the most openly racist and white supremacist ideologies: that they do not assume a hierarchy among cultures and ethnic groups but simply want to keep them separated. In reality, right-wing populists mostly do not strictly adhere to the idea that migrants and "their culture" are on par with natives. And even in the absence of any hints to the superiority of the ingroup, full citizens (even if they are sometimes members of declining classes or disadvantaged in other ways) with voting rights are opposed to

non-citizens without the same rights, sometimes illegalized and often poorer. The clientele of right-wing populists is thus comparatively privileged and profits from the exclusion of foreigners from their country's wealth and welfare system and the cheap labor of others abroad (and, even if they may be disadvantaged in other ways, supporters of right-wing populism mostly do not share the discrimination that members of minorities already face, even in the absence of discriminatory communication and measures by right-wing populists). It would therefore often be more adequate to call the kind of exclusion or antagonism inherent in right-wing populism "downward" instead of "horizontal" (as Casullo, in this volume, does when she describes populist politics as "punching upwards" and "downwards").

Even if we aim to reconstruct how right-wing populists frame some of the distinctions inherent in the worldview as "horizontal," we have to make sure not to uncritically commit ourselves to this description, which is questionable from a perspective of social theory. This can also be true of the "vertical" antagonism constructed in different types of populism. Certainly, those identified as elites by populists tend to be more privileged and powerful than many others. However, populist communication is not always in line with how a more nuanced analysis of social structure would define elites. For strategic or ideological reasons, populists may consider some groups to be powerful and antagonize them even if their members do not actually belong to the most privileged and influential groups in society. For example, journalists who belong to certain minorities are mostly not part of an absolute cultural elite, even if they work for major outlets. However, right-wing populists may depict and attack them as allegedly powerful propagandists with a presumed agenda that seeks to prioritize minorities over the majority of ordinary and decent native people and with an almost absolute cultural hegemony. Scholarship should neither simply adopt this definition of an elite nor the simple assumption of a liberal hegemony. Instead, it should carefully analyze the resources and power of actors and the struggles over symbolic dominance, the anti-populist stance of many mainstream media but also the continuities between influential discourses and populist ideologies and the powerful backlash against an assumed liberal hegemony.

That people voted for Trump and Brexit out of an anti-establishment and nativist motivation is as true as it is true that they had many other reasons and followed traditional cleavages and party affiliations. More populist politicians, movements and measures may be found in Chavism and Hindu nationalism, the politics of the Orbán government or the Polish PIS party and their behavior towards the judicial branch, the media, uni-

versities, etc., or, if one remembers, Berlusconi or Haider. Or, speaking from a perspective of the West or Global North, if we look a bit further, we find that people on Chinese social media have appropriated a right-wing populist discourse in an astonishingly prototypical, albeit somewhat paradoxical way (Zhang, 2019).

While most of the above actors would not use the label "populist" for themselves, there have been theoreticians of populism and activists that have actually embraced the concept (Iglesias, 2015; Mouffe, 2018). Even if one ultimately believes that even the most well-intentioned populist politics will lead into illiberalism, authoritarianism or flirts with dangerous nationalism, one cannot simply brush aside all attempts to establish a systematic conception of populist democracy. In the present context, I would consider these affirmative conceptions of populism as a borderline case because they use the idea of populism reflexively and reflect on the contingency of the construction of "the people" instead of essentializing the popular will. I will focus on the more anti-pluralist, authoritarian varieties of populism.

Engesser et al. (in this volume) follow a complementary logic in their analysis. They explain the use of populism—in a somewhat thinner but substantial, ideological sense—by political actors in the media and by journalists themselves in terms of a country's political culture, in particular the prevalence of authoritarian attitudes. Furthermore, they include context factors at the organizational level and the level of the news story.

And maybe criticism of the definitely less tolerant, emancipatory and egalitarian types of populism should not only be based on abstract arguments concerning their compatibility with liberal democracy, as important as they are. An encompassing criticism should also point to actual actions of such populists and the consequences of their rule, for example, the real restrictions of the freedom of expression or of the independence of the jurisdiction. For example, Just and Crigler (in this volume) analyze populist paths towards authoritarianism, in particular the attacks on the free press and the courts, which ultimately undermine the whole constitutional structure. Holtz-Bacha (in this volume) further explores the restrictions of media freedom enacted by populists and discusses the findings and explanations that point to a correlation between populism and infringements of media freedom.

A more complete picture would include the merits and failures of economic populism, the discrimination inherent in welfare chauvinism and ultimately, the experiences of minorities under right-wing populism and those types of left-wing populism that cling to certain inequalities. Whether in power or not, right-wing populists in particular incite hatred,

violence and suppression, which can be easily forgotten if one does not keep in mind what "illiberalism" actually means in practice. In a second step, these consequences can then be related to claims of exclusive representation, the essentialist definition of the "people," etc. However, such consequences should maybe be attributed to the nativism, racism, sexism, classism, etc. of populist actors rather than to a populist conception of democracy alone.

The idea that populists are skilled communicators often seems rather tautological: If they are successful, at least according to some standard, then they must be good communicators. First, they are not always successful. They may have the most social media followers, appear frequently on television, or they or their allies may even own media conglomerates. However, this does not necessarily lead to political success, to vote shares that are proportional to the likes and shares or to the airtime, and populist governments are sometimes quite unstable.

Second, how can these alleged communicative skills be defined and their effects be separated from external factors? The clientele is often more enthusiastic than people affiliated with other parties once the issues owned by the populists are present in public discourse and the debates sufficiently emotionalized (which is not only achieved by the populists themselves but often with crucial support by political opponents and the media). Some political milieus feel empowered by the existence of populist leaders and parties who speak to long-existing grievances and thus reinforce the communicative effort of these actors via interpersonal and social media communication or collective action such as demonstrations.

Third, it can be easier for populists to communicate publicly than for other political actors. They often campaign based on one or a few issues. They can be more provocative than others who have traditionally sought to avoid controversy because they appeal to more moderate parts of the public and to voters who value a more decent and civilized style or simply to more diverse segments of the population with diverging attitudes.

Finally, some explanations of the communicative and political success of populists are overly techno-determinist (Hatakka, 2019, p. 15). They neglect the social-structural preconditions and existing predispositions, the middle-term discursive opportunity structures and the communicative activities of the followers of populists, the general political and overall culture, the strategies of competitors and the traditional media in favor of a fascination for bots, paid targeted advertising or filter bubbles. This is not to say that these new socio-technical structures are irrelevant. They act as multipliers of communicative efforts if an enthusiastic clientele can easily join, if communicative strategies fit the functionalities of major social me-

dia platforms, and if campaign funds can at least be converted into exposure if not electoral successes, bypassing the traditional media.

As I deconstructed some typical theses on populism in this introduction to the introduction to this volume, I already pointed to alternative perspectives that at least complement existing ones. The whole volume aims to add more perspectives to the study of populist communication. In the remainder of this introduction, the title of this volume, "Perspectives on Populism and the Media," will be elaborated on a bit further. First, scholarly discussions of populism will be reviewed with regard to their contributions to a communicative understanding of populism. This will also allow the authors of the individual contributions to dispense with lengthy discussions of definitions and basic approaches.

A second part reconstructs the perspectives of social actors in different fields and the perspectives of populists on these fields. This may contribute to an explanation of the conflicts arising between populists and non-populist political, media or academic actors.

1. Scholarly Perspectives

Although it has become a cliché by now, it is to a certain degree correct that research on populism has been dominated by discussions about the definition and in particular about the genus of populism. Scholarly perspectives on populism also differ with regard to the role of communication and the media. While research in the field of media and communication obviously emphasizes this aspect (to the degree that it can be overly media-centric), large parts of the literature, notably in political science and sociology, neglect the communicative aspect of populism or address it at a very abstract level. In the following, different perspectives on populism are briefly reviewed, and the (possible) role of the media is discussed.

Definitions of populism can be roughly classified into four categories:

First, as *ideology*—a concept that has otherwise rarely been used in mainstream communication research! Of course, it is not meant in a radically critical way. But it is used in a more substantial way than just, for example, as a variable measuring someone's position on the left-right axis. The use of the concept of ideology emphasizes the content of beliefs and communication—what is being thought and said about society, social groups, politics, etc.

If literature on ideologies is cited, research based on this perspective on populism usually refers to Freeden (1996; 1998), who follows a morphological approach to ideologies. In particular, he uses the concept of "thin ideology" adopted by many scholars in this tradition (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008). Ideology is analyzed as a structure of related concepts. In the case of populism research, the elements are often emphasized over the structure, leading to a rather additive instead of relational understanding of populism. It is then typically defined as the combination of anti-elitism, people-centrism or popular sovereignty, homogeneity of the people and often exclusion of outgroups. In a strictly additive logic, these elements could be combined freely, leading to subtypes of populism defined by specific permutations (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

In Freeden's original logic, ideologies define contested political concepts such as "freedom," "equality," etc. in their specific way by relating them to other concepts. In this perspective, ideology is a constellation, not a list of concepts. Applied to populism, popular sovereignty (which is a concept common to many ideologies) has to be understood in a specifically populist way, by relating it, for example, to ideas of elite rule, a homogenous people and thus a predefined popular will, the exclusion of outgroups, and vice versa. And we would have to ask whether and how a specific populist ideology or all populist ideologies define concepts such as freedom, the rule of law, equality or the public sphere, and how the populist understanding of popular sovereignty is different from conservative, liberal, socialist, etc. ones.

Ideational approaches to populism have the advantage of working at different levels of attitudes and communication (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017): personal worldviews of political leaders and ordinary citizens, communication by politicians, journalists and ordinary social media users, etc. A clear and predefined list of ideological elements makes populism easy to measure reliably and comparably by means of surveys and content analyses.

The downside of this rather formal conception is that it may make populism appear more static, consistent and explicit than it can be in individual cases (and the media may contribute to the idea of a unitary and widespread populism by using this category indiscriminately). Studies in this tradition acknowledge the "fragmented" communication of populism (Engesser et al., 2017). However, the approach is more suited to assess the general prevalence of populism in the political field, in populations or in the media than to analyze specific worldviews, the specific meaning given to different concepts and the nuances of communicative style. Furthermore, this approach treats populism as something that is given and mainly

transmitted, not constituted in communication (see Hatakka, 2019, for a critical assessment of this communicative approach). In some cases and for certain purposes, it may be a good approximation to treat a specific variety of populism as consolidated (e.g., the type of right-wing or left-wing populism prevalent in a country in a period of time and held in a similar way by substantial parts of the population and certain main political actors). Under different circumstances or when other research interests are pursued, such an ideal-typical and static approach would be inappropriate. Then, the dynamics and the performative character of discourses have to be considered.

Second, as *discourse.* The discursive approach is most often associated with the work of Ernesto Laclau (2005) and Chantal Mouffe (2018), who have analyzed the general logic of populism by which historically contingent unfulfilled demands in populations are articulated in a way that treats them as equivalent with regard to an antagonism between the people and the elite.

Authors following the discursive approach have also emphasized the role of anti-populist discourses and how not only "the people" but also "populism" is an empty signifier that can then be used by technocratic, neoliberal, etc. elites against democratic demands, equating populism with right-wing populism, irrationality, irresponsibility, radical euroscepticism, etc. (Stavrakakis, 2014). Goyvaerts and De Cleen (in this volume) add to the analysis of anti-populist discourses by providing new insights from an empirical analysis, by reflecting on the role of the media in democracy and by highlighting the connections between media, political and academic discourse about populism.

Even proponents of this perspective on populism have criticized its highly formalized conception, which has even been emptied further by Laclau to the degree of becoming coextensive with any form of democratic movement (Stavrakakis, 2004). Stavrakakis (2004) therefore recommends striking a balance between a formal and an "ontic," more substantial conception of populism which allows for the analysis of specific meanings in political struggles and to grasp the emotional intensity and redemptive character (Canovan, 1999) of populist politics, which can be absent from other movements that function according to a logic of equivalence in the broadest sense.

Hatakka (2019) specified the populist discursive logic with regard to the media, actors, and communicative practices that contribute to the constitution of chains of equivalence. In particular, he acknowledges the contribution by critics who, for example, scandalize racist remarks by politicians of

populist parties. If the parties or their leadership do not strictly distance themselves from the remarks, or if parts of the base insist that they should own up to them, their implications become part of the chain of equivalence underlying the populism of that party. Thus, not only party officials but also journalists, fringe parts of the party base that, for example, organize themselves online, critical civil society activists, etc. can contribute to what a populist discourse constitutes as legitimate demands of "the people." He emphasizes that "a distinction must be made between what populist parties or organizations try to communicate and what their communication articulates after the communication has gone through a series of discursive negotiations in the public sphere" (Hatakka, 2019, p. 35).

Third, as *style*. Style is a concept that may readily come to mind when talking about communication. We might think about styles of speech, styles of writing, appearance and manners. Style has been defined very differently in populism research. One perspective actually emphasizes this aspect of habitus, (gendered) bodily performance, leadership style, ritual and symbolic action (e.g., Casullo, 2019; Filc, 2011; Moffitt, 2016) or language, rhetoric and argumentation (e.g., Ernst, Blassnig, Engesser, Büchel, & Esser, 2019; on the different aspects of style, see also Ekström, Patrona, & Thornborrow, 2018).

For example, Campus (in this volume) analyzes the commonalities and differences between female populist leaders. Some but not all present themselves as the "mother of the nation." Those who emphasize motherhood can thus soften their "tough" policy and conform with traditional gender roles. Other roles, Campus argues, such as the "everyday celebrity," are open to male and female populist leaders.

Another perspective defines style more abstractly as a general logic or form of political practice, as discussed above with regard to the discursive approach. A performative perspective that combines both approaches to discursive style (Moffitt, 2016; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014) reminds us that political communication is not only descriptive or evaluative in a strict sense but also constitutive—an aspect often overlooked in traditional research on political communication. The claim to represent some political entity (such as "the people") is neither a description nor an opinion but the attempt to assume a certain role and to be recognized for this role, and it contributes to the constitution of that entity, its recognition as a meaningful category and as a unity—as something one can belong to—and to defining who belongs to it and who does not. The question is then by what communicative means that can be achieved and when it is successful and unsuccessful.

Stylistic approaches may risk overemphasizing the form or politics and neglecting policy, as difficult as it may be to distinguish between the two. For example, populists might manage to define different economic policies in terms of the basic antagonism between the people and the elite. However, economic and social policy may be a breaking point for some populist movements, in particular those on the political right. They cannot completely escape established cleavages; citizens may demand a clear position on such issues, and the media may criticize them for their unclear position. Other left-wing populist movements or governments clearly define themselves and seek legitimacy through their economic and social policy (see Casullo, in this volume, on such discourses).

Fourth, populism as a *strategy* is often discussed as another approach. However, although this approach may seem natural in the field of populism and the media, it is often not elaborated very explicitly. As one of the exceptions, Weyland (2001) describes populism as "as a specific way of competing for and exercising political power" (p. 11), rather opportunistic in terms of policy but a strategy that strives for the support of unorganized masses by means of highly personalized leadership.

Another understanding of populism as a strategy seems implicit in studies that seek to quantify the amount of populism inherent in the communication of mainstream parties. Some ways of referring to the people that are measured as an element of populism in such studies are not necessarily comparable to the illiberal and anti-pluralist construction of a popular will.

Nevertheless, it is certainly not completely wrong that, out of opportunism, some mainstream politicians have styled themselves as outsiders to the political establishment and legitimized their positions in terms of what ordinary people want instead of through abstract criteria. Furthermore, turning "old-fashioned" right-wing extremism or socialism into right-wing and left-wing populism has certainly benefited many parties and politicians. However, it is not always completely clear whether this is the result of an explicit strategy that has been actively pursued by party leadership.

The concept of strategy implies a certain amount of calculation and a lack of commitment to the content of communication. But insights into the actual beliefs of actors or into processes of strategy formation are rare, and studies based on observations in party headquarters, interviews of decision-makers or strategy papers would be fruitful. (Similarly, we cannot be sure whether concepts of "fake news" or the distinction between misinformation and disinformation are completely adequate if we cannot assess the actual belief of communicators.) We might therefore also opt for concepts that are based less on intention and beliefs and more on communication,

such as the concept of discourse (as discussed above) or framing (Aslanidis, 2015)–or "ideology" if it stands for what is being communicated.

In the light of the strengths and shortcomings of the different approaches, it may also be useful to differentiate between varieties of populism that are conceived more and less adequately by the different perspectives: 1. a "banal," strategic or tactical populism, in particular among politicians of established parties, that somewhat essentializes the democratic foundation of some policy or their overall work and seeks to profit from diffuse distrust of elites by claiming that the politician is not really part of the establishment; 2. a populism that emphasizes the populist logic over specific policies: the process by which different demands can be articulated to form a popular opposition to elites or by which a popular will can be constituted and expressed most directly, in particular via new online tools ("technoplebiscitarianism," Gerbaudo, 2014; see also Hartleb, 2013); 3. a highly personalized populism that emphasizes the direct and affective relation of a charismatic, eccentric, entertaining, provocative or otherwise extraordinary leader with the people; and 4. a populism defined by its particular hostility towards certain elites and outgroups in which the populist element as such may be overshadowed by other ideological aspects such as nativism or nationalism (on the differences and connections between these and populism, see Betz, 2017; de Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017), reactionary opposition to liberalization, etc.

The media can play different roles for each type: 1. as the ordinary platform for political communication on which the tactical populism can be performed; 2. as alternative platforms for a popular movement or even the essential basis for what is considered as a new democratic practice; 3. as channels for the seemingly direct contact between the leader and the people, and 4. as actors that are at the same time instrumentalized to draw attention to one's radical agenda and antagonized as "enemies of the people," or as institutions that have to be controlled in a new authoritarian political order.

2. *Perspectives in Society*

Apart from the diversity of academic perspectives, another pluralism of perspectives can be found outside the field of research. Different actors or communicative acts view or construe society differently, sometimes in line with populist antagonisms, sometimes in clear opposition to them.

Although some effort has been put into the classification of parties and political leaders as populist or non-populist, or the measurement of their degree of populism, we will not review these sometimes controversial attempts here. We will only note that researchers have increasingly also considered further groups of actors or communicative practices as potentially populist. Complementing the analysis of the supply side, populist attitudes in the general population have been analyzed (for an overview and comparison of measurements, see Bergman, 2019; Castanho Silva, Jungkunz, Helbling, & Littvay, 2019). However, ordinary citizens do not only form their opinions or worldviews and vote accordingly or not; they also communicate publicly and via different media channels themselves. In particular on social media, but also in letters to the editor and on other platforms, they can express themselves in populist ways. However, researchers have mostly focused on social media communication by parties and political leaders and have relatively neglected other types of organizations, more informal associations (such as in online forums, Hatakka, 2017) and the online practices by ordinary citizens, in particular if they go beyond formalized reactions such as likes and shares (Krämer et al., in prep.).

Most importantly in the present context, the role of the media as populist actors has been increasingly explored theoretically and empirically. It is essential to distinguish different ways in which the media can be populist or contribute to the success of populist movements or the cultivation of populist attitudes and worldviews. Otherwise, discussions can be fruitless if one side focuses on one dimension of the relationship, and another side has other dimensions in mind (Krämer & Schindler, 2018). For example, media outlets or individual journalists may evaluate populists and populist politics very critically while at the same time reproducing the populist framing of issues. They may act as populist representatives or mouthpieces of the popular will themselves or simply cover populists' actions extensively due to their news value.

Similarly, the relationship between populism and popularity, the popular and the majority of the population has to be treated in a sufficiently nuanced way. Some specific types of populism thrive on entertainment and celebrity. This is, for example, certainly an aspect of Berlusconism and Trumpism. An elective affinity has also been assumed between populism and certain popular media formats such as talk shows or the tabloid press. However, this relationship has not always manifested at a quantitative level; applying formal, "thin" definitions of populism, it is not necessarily more frequent in these formats (Akkerman, 2011; Rooduijn, 2014, but see Wettstein et al., 2018). Still, it can be argued that certain ways of performing tabloid journalism and political talk are populist (cf. Krämer, 2014).

Tabloid media can cover the most diverse issues and events from a presumed perspective of ordinary people or of an imagined ingroup and present them as a danger or annoyance without openly expressing a direct antagonism with elites and outgroups. Reports can also simply play into existing preconceptions of privileges of those groups and injustices against "normal" citizens without passing the threshold of what standardized analyses would classify as a "manifest" populist message. Similarly, talk show hosts, among many other styles of moderation, can adopt the role of an advocate of the "ordinary citizen" and demand that guests stick to "commonsense" conceptions of reality.

Thus, there can be an affinity between the popular and populism. However, as I have argued elsewhere (Krämer, 2016), the relationship is not straightforward. Populism is not necessarily popular, and it is not very fruitful to define it as simply any attempt at being popular. Furthermore, popular culture is a highly differentiated category and for many actors and artifacts, it is difficult to find a connection with the core of populism. Conversely, even if we might expect right-wing populists to emphasize traditional and folk culture, the attempts to connect with such symbols of cultural identity have not always been popular (De Cleen, 2016). Other right-wing populists seem to cultivate a popular, rather ahistorical, informal and consumerist instead of traditionalist aesthetic.

Naerland (in this volume) reviews the literature on the relationship between populism and popular culture. Furthermore, he points to an aspect that has been neglected so far: the role of popular culture for identities which then form the basis for the antagonism inherent in populism (see also Campus, in this volume, on further aspects of the popularization of populist leadership).

In general, the aesthetic and symbolic dimension of populism requires further analysis, in particular its relationship with the aesthetic schemata and stylistic predispositions of certain milieus. Some authors have started to integrate the literature on social-structural conditions of the rise of populism and on individual predispositions into their discussion of media effects (Hameleers, Reinemann, Schmuck, & Fawzi, 2019)—however, without considering aesthetic dispositions in the broadest sense. Nevertheless, the vast literature on the relationship between populism and class, gender and other dimensions of social status and on dispositions that may explain people's affinity to populism (such as authoritarianism) still waits to be synthesized with the literature on the role of the media and discursive opportunity structures, and both lines of research have rarely taken concepts

and theories from cultural sociology into account (see Koppetsch, 2019[1], for one of the few exceptions referring to Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the cultural aspects of social class).

As an important step, Reinemann (in this volume) presents a multi-level model that includes the different ways of processing of populist messages in different channels, based on certain predispositions in a structural context that includes, for example, political opportunity structures and economic and cultural developments.

We may also assume that a right-wing populist milieu has emerged (Krämer et al., in prep.)—a segment of the population with a set of similar social positions, lifestyles and, of course, worldviews. They do not only form a dispersed group with common characteristics but an actual milieu in the sense of a social environment and network of relationships. Its members are not only connected because they tend to live in certain areas, work in certain professions and concentrate in certain families and networks of friends and acquaintances. They can also be related via social media, follow each other and common sources, gather in online groups and forums, engage in typical communicative practices and organize or join further political collective actions. The right-wing populist milieu is thus a political-communicative one in the sense of Weiß (2009). It is also held together by common symbols and aesthetics which, for example, manifest in visual and linguistic styles of social media posts and also account for the perception of right-wing populist politicians as charismatic and authentic (on the construction of authenticity in the performance of populist leaders and movements by means of truth-telling and disruptive performance, see Sorensen, 2018).

Other parts of the population are clearly anti-populist, while some segments probably range in between, sharing a "banal populism:" politically disenchanted, feeling neglected by the political elite, maybe longing for strong political leadership, but without the more radical views of the populists in the narrow sense. In particular, most academics and journalists in many countries certainly do not share (authoritarian and, in particular, right-wing) populist worldviews due to their social background and the socialization in their fields. However, this does not mean that there are no affinities between journalistic practice and populism (as expressed by the

1 Koppetsch's work has been retracted due to lacking references. A new edition will probably be published. I also share the strong criticism by Biskamp (2019, see below) and others, but I would nevertheless emphasize Koppetsch's rather original contribution with regard to a Bourdieuian perspective on populism.

concept of media populism) and between certain academic milieus and populism (such as an affinity towards left-wing populism from non-authoritarian to authoritarian that may be more frequent among social scientists and theorists, a scientistic skepticism towards the deconstruction of gender and other social categories not too different from right-wing populism that is probably more common among natural scientists and engineers, and finally New Right or Alt-Right intellectualism in small parts of academia, etc.).

We should also not forget that many populist leaders have an academic or otherwise rather elitist background themselves. What may be dismissed as just another absurdity in populist worldviews, populists' acclaim of elitist leaders, actually reveals their understanding of representation. Although it is not without contradictions that politicians with an upper-class background attack "the elites" and imitate certain styles of the popular or rural classes, populist representation is not about representativity but about the perceived extraordinary capacity to intuit, embody and enforce the popular will. What creates this perception is not a characteristic of the leaders themselves but a relationship and performance (as the corresponding approach to populism has emphasized): The leaders able to act in a way that is taken by their followers as a sign of a particular talent or determination by their followers and as a perfect expression of what they feel. This does not only include uncompromising claims and provocative statements which signal the necessary courage and willpower, but sometimes also humor, the ability to entertain, or to earn money (humor is also an important factor in the dissemination, euphemization and normalization of right-wing populist ideologies, see Wagner & Schwarzenegger, in this volume). In the eyes of their followers, this shows that these leaders are clever and ready to do what pleases their audience instead of being distant and arrogant like other elites. The habitus of both the populist leaders and their followers repels other milieus that are then quick to equate populism, popularity, oversimplification, bad taste, etc., sometimes even to the degree that they disregard the actual radicality of the actual populist ideology and focus on superficial style and manners.

The differences between populist and non-populist perspectives create all kinds of tensions and conflicts, which will be discussed in the following section. There is no clear opposite of populism. Neither elitism, liberalism, pluralism nor technocracy are polar opposites of populism in every respect or even cover every non-populist perspective. There are countless ways to see the world from a perspective that is not first and foremost populist. However, a few generalizations may be possible if we oppose populism to the logic and worldviews that are typical in certain social fields.

3. Differences of Perspectives and Conflicts

Due to the unique populist perspective on society and politics, populist and non-populist actors can not only enter into conflict, but this difference of perspective can lead to particular dynamics and reveal blind spots in the respective worldviews.

In democratic political systems, established non-populist parties not only compete with populist ones for votes but also with regard to the very construction of the political space in public discourse. Populist parties have to engage in classical party competition if they have not yet been able to transform the system in their favor. And if they have, they will continue to use the communicative frames of traditional competition and campaigning to maintain their democratic legitimacy. However, in the case of the most illiberal populists, it would be quite consistent with their ideology to eliminate political competition, rely on a claim of sole representation and erect a Bonapartist or state-party system legitimized by occasional acclamation. However, in many political systems, populist groups are smaller opposition parties or junior partners in coalitions and therefore have to reconcile their acceptance of party competition with the claim that all established parties are the same and illegitimate. This can lead to internal struggles over collaboration with these parties, but this populist view of the political also poses a challenge to those parties and the media: Do they explicitly or implicitly accept the populist framing which supposes a dichotomy between populist and established parties? They have to reject the antagonisms communicated by populists and insist on a liberal or pluralist consensus while, at the same time disputing the populist claim that they do not really offer voters any real choice and real political alternatives. However, some established actors can break with that consensus, adopt populist communication themselves, normalize the populists and collaborate with them.

Journalists are then often confronted with a similar difference of perspectives—at least if they aim to adhere to the norm of neutral and balanced reporting. They have to decide how they construct the political field and how they deal with populist criticisms of journalism that sometimes amounts to hateful and even physical attacks. Populists often count independent journalists among the elite and accuse them of opposing or misrepresenting the "true" will of the "true" people (a view of the media that can be termed *anti-media populism*, Krämer, 2018b). Increasingly, not only the journalistic coverage of populists but also the actual perspective of journalists on this relationship is being investigated empirically, both by means of interviews (Stanyer et al., 2019) and in content analyses of jour-

nalistic meta-discourses on that relationship (Krämer & Langmann, in prep.; McDevitt & Ferruci, 2017).

Researchers see their practice as an observation of nature or society conditioned on their own perspectives and methods but usually not congruent with a populist view of society (and maybe of nature). Even the academics who embrace populism as a viable political strategy will take a different perspective on society than most actual populist movements, due to political differences (such as left-wing versus right-wing populism) and because they reflect on the contingency of perspectives and the problem of essentialized views of society and politics. Populists often portray researchers, at least in some fields, as elitist and conspiring ideologues who seek to impose their worldview on the population. For example, scholars in fields as different as climate research and gender studies are accused of indoctrination disguised as research (see Krämer & Klingler in this volume).

Thus, populism presents itself differently from different perspectives—such as a political, journalistic, scholarly, etc. one—and differs from the usual perspectives of actors in those fields. It poses a challenge to them because it also exposes and sometimes exploits the blind spots of the practices in those fields.

In journalism, this blind spot may be the construction of a legitimate political spectrum and the definition of "balance." The definition of the "sides" of an issue, the selection of speakers and the resulting boundaries of discourse are mostly based on implicit practical rules, and even if they are being discussed internally, we rarely find any public explanations and arguments.

Sometimes, the boundaries of discourse and of the spectrum of "non-extremist" positions are defined rather narrowly, and populists do not always easily fit in. It can then be different for media outlets to justify the differential treatment of populist and other actors, and journalists are not always well-equipped to counter the criticism by populists or free speech advocates.

Sometimes, this spectrum is defined rather broadly, and the argument by more radical actors that they should be present in a pluralist and fair discourse is readily accepted. However, this can lead to a paradoxical situation where anti-pluralist actors can instrumentalize democratic and journalistic norms against journalism and demand more extensive and positive or at least uncritical coverage. Given the chance, the same actors may ultimately strive for strong control of the media. At least, they can sometimes achieve being covered as one whole side in a controversy, with all other political camps representing the other side. This gives them a lot of atten-

tion and power to define the framing of a discourse and the rules of the debate.

Sometimes, the inclusion or exclusion or the equal or unequal treatments of populists also leads to a Trojan horse situation or a *sorites* (heap) paradox. If parties or politicians gradually change their position or reveal their character over time, (seemingly) non-populist actors can establish themselves in public discourse and the political system, and it is difficult not to cover them the same way as before once they turn out to be more authoritarian-populist. For example, parties and politicians may start off as liberal, conservative or socialist reformers and gravitate towards right-wing radicalism, authoritarian socialism, etc. (this does not mean that isolated malicious actors single-handedly turn parties into right-wing populist ones, but that parties that have been increasingly open to authoritarian populism or related ideologies can continuously shift in that direction, which is often reflected in their leadership at a given point, and that such shifts are sometimes ignored or euphemized by the media for years or even decades) As we are reluctant to say that adding one grain at a time will suddenly turn something that is not a heap into a heap, it will be difficult not to invite certain politicians to talk shows anymore or to radically change the way they are covered because one feels they have become too radical overnight.

Similarly, there is sometimes no clear definition of the neutral ground and normative commitments in journalism, i.e., of those foundations of the journalistic construction of reality that are not treated as controversial and are not covered as opposing claims by different actors that are up for debate. For example, should climate deniers by given the same chance to speak as climate researchers? Should racist worldviews be presented in talk shows like any other position? Is it "objective" to present demands of certain left-wing populists as "radical," should other actors be cited if they make such claims, or is such a label uninformative and misleading? And is "populist" an epithet or a neutral concept? Some media outlets and journalists have clearly positioned themselves with regard to some of these questions, while many others solve such problems on the spot or do not disclose their general policies with regard to such issues.

Whether journalists are representative of the whole population has sometimes been a concern in research and in the field but has also been addressed by certain populists. In general, journalists are not representative of the respective general population. In particular, neither the social-structural basis of populist movements nor the minorities that some of them wish to exclude are represented proportionally in journalism. This can create blind spots where certain perspectives remain invisible, in particular as

journalism positions itself as "neutral," not linked to any particular social position.

However, while some critical researchers and journalists have drawn attention to the representation of marginalized groups, right-wing populists are preoccupied with presumed biases against their camp (often connected to earlier discourses on alleged biases of the media against right-wing actors and policies; Major, 2015). Some journalists have also publicly asked themselves whether the success of right-wing populism is due to the perspectives of working-class, rural populations and otherwise "ordinary people" being insufficiently represented in the media. They often seem to imply, for example, that the working class is essentially white, follows heteronormative ways of living, etc., or that "ordinary people" are more concerned or affected by migration than by racism. Some left-wing populists demand the representation of indigenous and other minorities in the media and support community and alternative media, but others only consider the media mainly as mouthpieces or as stages for themselves. Their idea of the media is not about participation or even descriptive representation but mainstream.

Therefore, Holt (in this volume) reviews the discussion about whether right-wing outlets can be called "alternative media," a term that has often been reserved for more inclusive and emancipatory outlets. However, if we define alternative media strictly relationally, as an alternative to a (perceived) mainstream, then we can analyze and differentiate how they actually react to other media and affect them, how they construct that mainstream, what kinds of criticism they express, etc., as Holt argues.

In research, one blind spot is the closure of controversies, the point of *blackboxing* (Engelhardt & Caplan, 1987; Latour, 1999, p. 304), and the end of reflexivity. Methods and findings are potentially open to doubt and revision (which is of course one of the Mertonian norms, see Merton, 1942), and procedures of investigation and analysis can in principle be applied to the research process itself (as different schools in the sociology and history of science have shown). However, in order to function, research has to commit itself to certain assumptions that are not being questioned at a given moment, and self-reflection must not lead into an infinite regress. However, despite the seeming clarity of logic, scholarly definitions, the scientific method or other methodological principles, the rules of when and how networks of theoretical assumptions and methodological and epistemological principles are being questioned and revised can never be entirely codified and differ according to contexts and actors.

Populists can then disregard the conventions and the state of research and question and use some of the principles of research against research.

For example, if social scientists and all kinds of intellectuals and cultural authorities discuss and sometimes criticize the motives and interests of others and demonstrate the social relativity of their beliefs, why not scrutinize their motives? And if it is the essence of scientific practice to question previous assumptions, why not doubt all research findings, in particular those with important social and political implications? Right-wing populists, for example, question the validity of research in climate research and gender studies and point to the alleged ideological motives of researchers in both fields (see Krämer & Klingler, in this volume). The problem with this criticism is that it is selective and asymmetrical (it cherry-picks and is not equally self-reflexive and -critical) and does not follow a clear sense of what is fruitful skepticism and of degrees of confidence in scientific findings and assumptions. However, these attacks constitute a challenge for science communication that is then forced to provide explanations which seem to imply that research practices and findings should not be questioned.

We might say that in politics, there is a blind spot concerning the foundations of political legitimacy. Decisions are being made following certain procedures in the name of a population. But why these procedures, and in whose name? And haven't these procedures somehow replaced actual representation and the expression of a common will? Populists ask such questions—or at least imply that there might be a problem—and propose particular answers: It is "the people" that is to be represented (and they point to an actual dilemma of how a definition of "the people" can itself be legitimized democratically, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014). Their answer is that "the people" is to be defined as the underprivileged or non-elite and/or an *ethnos* (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014). And they would indeed claim that procedures get in the way of real representation.

However, the populists' answer often misrepresents the sense of those procedures. As far as they fulfill their function, they enable fair representation or constitution of a political will which cannot be reduced to the mere expression of some essential interest of the (ordinary) people or the identification with a political leader that embodies the will of the whole of the people. However, factually, the fairness of the political process is never accomplished as long as minorities can justifiably claim that purportedly universal rights and equal chances are withheld from them and that the seemingly general will excludes their perspective. The answer to this can, again, be populist contestation, but with the risk of essentializing the newly constituted "people" and excluding further groups and demands. This way, populism can empower or exclude minorities from the political process, vindicate their rights or infringe on their rights by creating

unchecked power based on an exclusive or overly generalized claim of representation that negates differences in interests and perspectives.

Like journalism, populism also reveals the contingency of how the political field is usually described. Instead of drawing the traditional distinctions between left and right, populists declare that the established parties are essentially the same, and the main conflict should be between those above and below. They also question the definition of what is "extreme" and "normal" and the neutrality of political rules and procedures that (allegedly) work against them.

Populism, as it were, reveals the aspects of an economic and politic system, of other fields and of an overall social order that are often swept under the table or remain unfulfilled promises: The idea of political rule based on the popular will and strong representation; the prospect of stability and prosperity that is supposed to legitimize the combination of capitalism and liberal democracy; the promise of social security, social justice and advancement, of wealth and consumption; meritocracy and the rewards for hard labor. However, some forms of populism also bring ethnocentrism and nationalism, racism and sexism to light that is inherent in overall political culture. If people feel that certain promises have not been fulfilled, they can draw radically opposing conclusions, some of them resulting in very exclusive and discriminatory politics. Populist reactions to such grievances frame them in terms of an antagonism between the ordinary people and the elite.

However, is there a "populist moment" (Mouffe, 2018, p. 9) that can be transferred from one type of populism—exclusive, discriminatory, authoritarian—to a more benign one that surfaces people's "true" or well-understood and diverse grievances that have only been displaced or projected onto certain scapegoats? Or would a complete conversion of worldviews be necessary, from anti-elitism based on conspiracy beliefs to structural criticism, from exclusive to inclusive solidarity, from conceptions of justice based on inherited status and a person's productivity to justice based on equality and needs, from ingroup centrism to a decentering of perspectives, from resentment to revolt against an economic system or a post-democratic state (Fassin, 2017), etc.? However, populism may make it harder, not easier to develop a well-founded criticism of elites (including those in the media) if such criticism can be mistaken for authoritarian and exclusive populism, and if such populists can feel vindicated by discourses that seek to use some populist moment.

Populist discourses are thus a challenge to political communication, science and intellectual communication, journalism and other fields (for example, to religion as populists often enter into conflict with the estab-

lished churches, the arts as populists may attack an elitist or liberal art world, or even sports if populists claim that some sportspeople are out of touch or use their fame for the wrong political purposes). This challenge cannot always be addressed with the cognitive and symbolic resources of these fields, as populism touches on the *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 147-148) of the respective fields, questions some of the conceptions that usually go unquestioned in those fields.

Koppetsch (2019) has described (right-wing) populism as a heresy against dominant "truths" and views. Despite the criticism of her diagnosis of a cosmopolitan liberal hegemony (Biskamp, 2019, who also strongly criticizes other implications), her use of Bourdieu's concepts in the analysis of populism is generally rather fruitful. Not only may his theory of symbolic struggle in different fields (with the differentiation between different poles of fields, between orthodoxy, heterodoxy and *doxa*) allow for a more nuanced view of how dominant ideologies and discourses are (ultimately also more nuanced than Koppetsch's own analysis). His multidimensional description of social structure (Bourdieu, 1979) also provides useful distinctions between fractions of classes (such as the new and old, or ascending and declining petty bourgeoisie), which may be very helpful to understand the social-structural causes of populism and appeal of populist discourses to different groups (and thus resolve some of the controversies surrounding its social-structural basis and the role of cultural versus economic explanations).

Finally, Bourdieu's theoretical analyses on representation and the constitution of political entities (e.g., Bourdieu, 1981a; 1981b; 1984; 2001) may also be helpful in the analysis of populist politics and communication.

4. Paradoxes of Populist Communication

The populist perspective on society is one that claims to view it from below, in a critical manner, uncorrupted by power and free from the indoctrination by the ruling elites and their spokespersons and propaganda channels. However, populism not only reveals some of the conflicts and paradoxes inherent in present social structures but has paradoxical implications itself, in particular in its more illiberal and anti-pluralist forms.

Populists sometimes make use of arguments that appear constructivist or relativist or resemble ideological criticism: Others act the way they do because of their cultural background, their elite status or because they are ideologically indoctrinated. These populists, in contrast, are critical, free

thinkers and authentic rebels, beyond the mainstream. However, these attitudes turn out to be rather asymmetrical. The organized skepticism is not directed against one's own worldview; the contingency and performativity of one's claim of representation are not reflected. Evidence is cherry-picked, and reasoning is motivated by the desire to confirm or defend one's ideology, ignoring contradictions and changing commitments (for example, using the "lying press" and "fake news" as source as long as some information fits one's worldview, Holt & Haller, 2018). Criticism sometimes descends into generalized mistrust and conspiracy theories brought forward from an absolutist perspective.

At other times, statements are kept strategically ambiguous (Hatakka, Niemi, & Välimäki, 2017; Wodak, 2015), and the most controversial commitments and offensive statements are avoided: One is just asking questions, starting a debate. And who would be opposed to asking critical questions and open debates, in particular in journalism?

If, however, these attempts are being rejected and criticized, populists often claim an underdog position and victim role. Even governing politicians, extremely wealthy individuals or those in privileged positions in the established media such as editors in chief or columnists maintain that they are being oppressed, never oppressors, and that through the suppression of their voice it is the voice of ordinary people that is being suppressed.

Authoritarian populists exhibit a tactical (or—according to the most charitable interpretation—unintentionally paradoxical) relationship with liberal and pluralist norms. While they tend to deny the pluralist and liberal preconditions of a democratic process, they appeal to such norms when they are themselves concerned or if it fits their strategy and ideology. For example, right-wing populists claim that their freedom of expression is being restricted, that they are not represented fairly in the media, that they are the true protectors of minorities such as Jews or of gender inequality against Islamic antisemitism or Arabic patriarchy (on such paradoxes, see, e.g., Farris, 2017; Krämer, 2018a; Moffitt, 2017). Fawzi (in this volume) relates three dimensions of certain anti-pluralist populist ideologies—anti-elitism, homogeneity of the people and exclusion—to populist criticism of the media. She emphasizes how populists turn normative expectations towards the media against them and that this amounts to a use of double standards in a strategic attempt to generally delegitimize the media.

Given that the distinction between the people and others is very sharp and that all power and all rights ultimately have to serve only one group, authoritarian populist ideologies as such do not seem to imply any restrictions to othering, exclusion and antagonism. If populists claim to have the highest democratic legitimacy, that they represent everyone except the peo-

ple's actual enemies, are there any criteria inherent to their ideology as to what means are not justified by their ends? This leads us again to the question of populist practice—not only the discursive and governmental practice of populist leaders but also of ordinary followers. Can we discern any clear norms of what is legitimate political action? What motivates and what restricts more extreme and even violent behavior?

Every ideology has its corresponding political practice (or we may even define conceptions of the "right" political practice as part of ideologies), ranging from revolution, direct democracy, civil disobedience, the election of representatives, buying organic and fair-trade products, to paramilitary training. This includes mediated practices: studying Marxist political magazines, creating memes, reading a conservative newspaper, trolling and "owning the libs" on social media, establishing and following social media accounts for demonstrations, sending messages to elected officials or forwarding chat messages with racist jokes to relatives. But what is the practice of populism? Apart from the performance of leaders with their different styles, the practice of followers may only be, in the most extreme case, to wait for such leaders and to elect and acclaim them. For many, political agency and efficacy are experienced and often (re-)discovered through the actions of leaders or organized movements but may not be exercised in other ways. At least for certain types of populism, the political practice of its adherents would then be the culmination of representative democracy: to let oneself be represented in the most emphatic way, without a sense of real difference between the representatives and the represented and without the need for the latter to act themselves.

Frank (2017) criticizes this Schmittian idea of identity and emphasizes the enactment instead of the representation and delimitation of the people. However, his example of agrarian populism with its cooperative and deliberative practice, its political education and creation of institution is rather atypical if compared to the recent varieties of populism this introduction focuses on. Nevertheless, his article is one of the few that focuses on the practices of citizens.

However, some followers are more active for various reasons, including a situation where they feel that their anti-elite, anti-establishment and possibly also anti-outgroup attitude is not really represented by any leader, movement or party, or that they are not yet sufficiently potent. Populist parties and movements also organize demonstrations and protest, and right-wing populist citizens engage in all kinds of online activities, liking and sharing posts by parties, creating new material and sometimes also attacking opponents and members of minorities. Haller, in this volume, synthesizes the main strategies of right-wing populist online communication,

including the strategies of involvement and mobilization. At least in the case of right-wing populism, this level of activity is somewhat at odds with the ideology that has been combined with the populist antagonism: conservatism (Siri, 2015). This ideology would ideal-typically be associated with a tempered approach to politics, a (petty-) bourgeois style, an appeal to traditions, trust in authorities and the defense of the status quo, not with street protest and rebellion.

The right-wing populist citizen is forced, as it were, by the decline of order and of the nation to become active instead of simply working honestly, enjoying the fruits of one's labor and everything else one is entitled to, simply conducting oneself well and entrusting one's representatives with everything else. In principle, however, right-wing populist citizens would probably prefer to consume the political performance of their "true" representatives and not to lead a life that is politicized throughout but live "freely"—unrestricted, for example, by environmental regulation, "political correctness," etc. Only the way of life of the others has to be strictly regulated.

The authoritarian attitudes and prejudices against outgroups can lie dormant in better times. In times of a perceived crisis, even of a final battle against the demonized elites and racialized outside threats, some citizens' conservatism has to become rebellious, and the authoritarian and discriminatory attitudes are activated. These citizens may then also join forces with those right-wing groups that align their lifestyle more strictly with their ideology, such as the more *völkisch*, fascist, neo-nazi, new right and/or religious-conservative movements. Together, they form a coalition of a populist extreme right.

Thus, the political practice of populism may be characterized, somewhat paradoxically, as vicarious political action, possibly mass protest, offline and online acclamation, and vernacular creativity but usually not the politicization of the whole way of life (Krämer et al., in prep.).

5. Implications for the Scholarly Perspective

What do the above remarks imply for a scholarly perspective on (authoritarian and particularly exclusive) populism? This academic perspective cannot simply reproduce the perspective of a majority that is not affected by discrimination, of an elite that can adapt to or resist authoritarian policies more easily, or of a liberal elite that looks down on the popular base of some populist movement. Furthermore, researchers should not simply reproduce the distinctions made by populists (e.g., between the people and