This workshop seeks to bring together scholars working on populism or related themes to reflect on their own work and its relation to populist hype. Following Glynos and Mondon, the term refers to an inflationary use of the label populism, across scholarly, mass media and political arenas, simplifying and homogenizing an array of politicians, parties, and movements, whether as populist or anti-populist. In light of the recent populist hype surrounding the surprise elections of Trump, Duterte, and Brexit to name but a few, we invite critical reflections on the way populism is utilized in politics, media, and academia.

We suggest three sets of questions for the workshop:

1. How can we justify our particular scholarly uses of “populism” in the light of the hype surrounding it? Can populism still be a productive analytical concept especially compared to related concepts such as democracy, technocracy, and liberalism?
2. What impact has the populist hype had on both academic debate and political discourse? For example, has the populist hype led scholars and other commentators to rally around the political status quo? Did it distract attention from other political projects such as the climate movement, feminism or decolonization?
3. What happens after the hype subsides? Does populism become normalized and fundamentally change politics? Or does the political system instead tame populism?

Organizers and contact: Stephan Ritscher and Daniel Matthews-Ferrero.

The workshop is hosted by the inter-disciplinary Centre for Citizenship, Civil Society and Rule of Law, which studies political concepts in the world. This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research & Innovation programme.
The populist hype and the mainstreaming of the far right by Aurelien Mondon

The essence of contemporary populism. The rise of anti-liberal populist rationality in Israel, 2000-2020

Rami Kaplan (Tel Aviv University)

The past decade has seen a wave of rightwing populism gaining momentum globally. Yet the constitutive features of this “populism” remain obscure and contested, not least thanks to the hype surrounding the phenomenon. Based on my study of populist rationality, mobilization, and policymaking in the mature case of Israel, this paper seeks to separate the hype from the analytic crux of populism.

Leading ideational definitions (Mudde 2017; Müller 2017) posit that populism is a “thin ideology” (or discourse, frame, style), which parties from right and left use to reframe their basic agendas in terms of a Manichean struggle between the “pure” people and the corrupt elite. In my opinion, this definition captures an important shared feature of populisms of all stripes. However, the reduction of populism to its Manichean aspect overstates the irrational roots of populist mobilization, thus risking both misrepresentation and patronization of the populism spreading worldwide. In contrast, this paper discerns—and argues for the definitive importance of—sophisticated forms of rationality informing rightwing populist strategies and mobilization.

The rising anti-liberal populism (ALP) has an important intellectual aspect whereas, ironically, it adopts the “critical theory” that has traditionally informed the radical left. Critical theory is designed to uncover and thus emancipate from tacit forms of control, oppression, and marginalization and the knowledge structures that justify and normalize them. ALP has reformulated and turned the critical-theoretical style of thought against its original carriers: liberal intellectuals, politicians, activists, and public officials who promote progressive ideas and values.

More substantially than a “corrupt elite,” the left is perceived as a powerful informal network (e.g., the “deep state”), which controls society by seizing the justice system, state agencies, academy, education, the media, and cultural production. As a remedy, the populist consciousness posits the need in a Gramscian “war of position” against the entranced liberal elite, whereas the right is re-constituted as no longer a conservative but revolutionary, counter-hegemonic force emancipating the oppressed people from the tyranny of the powerful few.

I develop this argument based on Israel, where ALP rose to power earlier than most other places (2009). I trace the process whereby the ALP rationality has been adopted by elements in the right, the post-1990 conditions favoring this turn, the movement inside and outside formal politics articulating it, and the distinct policymaking style of populist in power. Israel also provides a thrilling example for how resilient liberal democratic institutions keep the ALP attack in check, for now (cf. Hungary).
Talking ‘with’ and ‘about’ the far right: how the populist hype means we do both

Katy Brown (University of Bath)

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

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

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

“The Opponent Is Always Populist”: On the Usage of Populism in the Macedonian Political Discourse

(Dimitar Nikolovski, Institute of Advanced Studies Kőszeg)

In the past 10 years, the populist hype has not avoided the post-Yugoslav space. Every leadership that does not follow liberal democracy is designated as populist by both domestic and international critics, the United States and European Union in particular. For this paper, I look into the usage of the term in the Republic of North Macedonia, and what kind of space it takes in the Macedonian political discourse.

First, I give a historical overview of the usage of the term and outline the boom around 2010, when it was mostly used to describe the rule of the then incumbent conservative VMRO-DPMNE party. Then, I use several case studies of civil mobilization to portray and map the contemporary usage of populism in the country: the left/liberal Colorful Revolution movement (2016), the right wing Unified for Macedonia movement (2017), and both left and right mobilizations around the referendum for the name change (2018). Within these three cases, I analyze discourse at three levels: the media commentator, the political party, and the activist. For the first level, I look at the columns appearing in the four biggest media outlets in the country. For the political party, I look at documents, press conferences, social media, and statements made in official communication by political parties and coalitions. For the activists, I use materials from my fieldwork and interviews with activists from the above mentioned protests cycles, where I include the question: “What is populism and who is a populist?” Finally, I compare how populism is used with other, related terms, such as authoritarianism, democracy, (il)liberalism, and fascism.

My findings show that populism is, similarly to fascism, used exclusively negatively by media commentators, mainstream political parties, and political activists. In this case, the opponent is populist, and populism is understood as lying and making promises that cannot be kept. On the other hand, the term is embraced and used positively by certain leaders of radical political parties: Levica (the Left – radical left) and Rodina (Homeland – radical right). In this case, the organizational/strategic approach to populism is predominant, i.e. seen as a tactic used by political leaders and parties in order to achieve electoral goals.
Rethinking the concept of populism today through a review of Latin-American academic literature

Felipe Linden (École des hautes études en sciences sociales)

“Populism” is a central category in Latin-American political and social sciences, especially in Brazil and Argentina. During the first half of the 20th Century, the continent experienced ambiguous and complex political experiences in a period of modernisation and emergence of the masses in a political system of limited democracies with restrictive participation. The concept of “populism” is far from being consensual among the Latin-American scholars who have written on the subject between the sixties and seventies – Francisco Weffort, Octavio Ianni, Gino Germani, Ernesto Laclau and others –, they themselves recognise the ambiguity that makes the phenomenon almost elusive. However, the political movements and regimes around the charismatic leadership of Perón and Vargas were often characterised as an political anomaly specific to underdeveloped countries and their particularities, therefore not reducible to classical European analytical frameworks. In our current “populist hype”, most of these rich academic works are often forgotten. This is one of the main problems of today’s conflation of debates on populism, according to Benjamin De Cleen & Yannis Stavrakakis, as the category of populism was reduced to a particular European experience, ignoring the Latin-American experience and the intellectual context in which they were interpreted. The paper aims to contribute to the debate on populism beyond the “hype” reviewing and analysing the main features of the Latin-American works mentioned above. Rather than restraining the analysis of this intellectual context to understand Latin-American political movements of the last century with a merely historical curiosity, we intend to show how these various definitions of populism, although it was seen as a regional phenomenon, can help us to understand some persisting difficulties around the debate on populism until today – notably its relations with other concepts like nationalism, democracy, demagogy etc. – and how it can give us clues towards a more productive analytical concept.

Lessons from the Brazilian Populist Hype, 70 years later

Thomás Zicman de Barros (Sciences Po Paris) with Sebastián Ronderos (University of Essex)

Although the “populist hype” may seem to be a contemporary phenomenon, historical inquiry shows that similar processes have happened in the past. The paper claims that an analysis of these historical experiences can teach important lessons for scholars to deal with the current “populist hype”.

Our work focuses on the Brazilian “populist hype” in the beginning of the 1950s. We develop a crossed analysis of then thousand news articles from eight different Brazilian newspapers and the main academic publications on the matters published during the fourth republication period (1946-64). In this process, we explain how the term “populism” was introduced in the Brazilian political lexicon in the context of the 1950 presidential election in reference to figures such as Getulio Vargas and governor Adhemar de Barros. As we show, in a couple of months “populism” went from being an undictionaryed term with almost no occurrences in the press to becoming the word of the moment, appearing in hundreds of headlines. Moreover, the ordinary use of the term in the press strongly influenced the intellectual production on the topic, notably by authors such as Hélio Jaguaribe and Francisco Weffort. It meant that the term populism acquired a negative connotation in academia. As we show, although there were some disputes between political actors on whether populist was a laudatory or pejorative term, throughout time the strength of “anti-populist” mainstream press succeeded in making the negative connotation of the word hegemonic.

We list four main lessons we can learn from the study of the Brazilian “populist hype”. First, in general terms it teaches us the complex and permanent interaction between academic and non-academic discourses in the production of meaning. Second, in a more specific dimension, it shows how the “hypes” themselves
constitute key moment in fixating signification. Third, it indicates the need for studying the role of key discursive actors in particular historical contexts in the production of meaning. Fourth, it throws some light on the path dependence from this previous “populist hype” present in contemporary use of a term – for example, to study presidents Lula and Bolsonaro as “populist”.

**Carl Albert and the Populist Roots of American Liberalism**

*Jeffrey Bloodworth (Gannon University)*

As a political phenomenon, the “Populist Hype” is real. From Brexit and Erdoğan to border walls and Bernie Sanders, observers dub most every movement and personality that deviates from the mainstream “populist.” Ubiquitous, nebulous, and protean, populism, nevertheless, remains a useful scholarly category. My paper, “Carl Albert and the Populist Roots of American Liberalism,” reveals the term’s usefulness as an analytical concept and demonstrates that populism can, at times, be tamed once brought into the political mainstream.

Speaker of the House during Watergate and Majority Leader during Vietnam and the Great Society, Albert was a powerful national political figure. Hailing from Bug Tussle, Oklahoma, he was born in a populist stronghold and in the immediate aftermath of the Movement’s zenith. Reared in this milieu, Albert’s worldview was always animated by a “people versus the powerful” formulation. After a hardscrabble childhood, he parlayed a preternatural gift for public speaking into a Rhode’s Scholarship and an elite education. Elected to Congress in 1946, he served in leadership for two decades and came to embody postwar American liberalism. But he, along with scores of other rural, populist Congressional Democrats, imbued midcentury liberalism with their populist worldview. In this way, late nineteenth century populism laid the intellectual and political infrastructure for twentieth century American liberalism.

In the American context, populism remains a crucial category for understanding the political past. In Michael Kazin’s estimation, populism is a long-lived style of political rhetoric that conceives ordinary people as a “noble assemblage” battling a self-serving elite for democratic renewal. Christopher Lasch goes even further than Kazin by postulating that populism represents the “authentic voice of democracy.” Though populist movements abound across the globe, they possess particular authority in the American context. Indeed, the American Revolution’s legitimating mythology, popular sovereignty, invested all rightful power in “the People.” Though the Founding Fathers believed elites would interpret popular sentiment, the terminology’s logic entailed that the “people’s will,” deciphered by the masses, would reign supreme in American politics. Equipped with this imprimatur, populist insurgents see themselves as the rightful inheritors of the Revolutionary tradition and, according to Lasch, are grounded in the “democracy of Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln.”

My paper depicts the populist impulse and how it informed and shaped twentieth century American liberalism. In so doing, it demonstrates the utility of the “populist” terminology and how the impulse can sometimes be tamed when brought into the political mainstream.
Day 2, Thursday 14 January

10.30 – 12pm  Keynote:  Technopopulism. The New Logic of Democratic Politics by Christopher Bickerton

1.30pm – 3pm  Session 3: After Populism – New Political Formations

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, La France Insoumise and the normalization of populist ‘mood’ in French left party politics

Armando Vittoria (Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II)

Universal or not, populist wave is undoubtedly forcing left-wing parties to reconsider their standings, programs and organizational models. To someone, not only mainstream left parties but also new ones would be even flattening on the key-issues of far-rights’ agendas (Han 2015; Schumacher and Van Kersbergen 2016). The way progressives are copying with post-modern stage is a challenge for the political theory. Scholarship seems to be quite split even on the recognition of a structural left-side populism, definitively acknowledged by the mainstream literature (Mudde 2016; Mouffe 2018), but differently considered by the studies focusing on populism’s socio-economic and cultural rooters (Gydron and Hall 2017) - and someway witnessed by several western experiments refusing a populist torsion in left politics: from Sanders’ grassroot movement in the States up to Costa’s government in Portugal.

By this side, French political stage looks very interesting. La France Insoumise and its atypical leader, Mélenchon, represent a stimulating case-study to analyze how nationalism’s revival is nesting inside left parties’ stances, especially by the sides of personalization (Calise 2011) and communication (Engesser et al. 2017). Really, FI is an useful observation point to investigate the role played by an excessive and/or hyped use of populism as political category in left politics almost in two directions: in a general sense, it could help to set up how much populism is becoming a catch-all label used by scholar to analyze other concepts that cannot (or want not to) be described, as democracy backslidings or technocracy advancing in a big western country, as France; on a second side, Mélenchon’s party, populist or not, shows atypical forms of organization and political messaging itself suggesting a ‘superstructural’ use of progressive messages, up to normalize into an all-populist dimension its power to critic capitalism and society of commodification.

But, may we consider FI just a left-populist party or does it represent an atypical (also in the leadership) anti-establishment party? What kind of influences does its leadership disclose? Last, also considering the ‘perfect storm’ had hit French left after 2017 general election, does FI’s experiment represent just a blend between old and new left platforms, or its populist mood is ‘structurally’ modifying the values and the organizational model of French left, normalizing it in a post-modern sense?

Paper outlines in three parts. The first one will introduce background, research question and design. In the second one, using Manifesto Project’s data, FI’s agenda will be stressed by the sides of anti-immigration, welfare chauvinism and working-class protection policies, and it will be outlined the role played by leadership in inoculating populism in party politics. Last part of the paper shall be reserved to address the research question and to conclusions.
Beyond the Wave, the Sea: Re-Assessing The Southern Europe’s Populist Upsurge

Arthur Borriello (Université libre de Bruxelles)

The paper re-assesses the relation between the Great Recession and the rise of populist parties in the South of Europe. Based on a constructivist conception of crises and a “thick” definition of populism, it argues that the management of the economic crisis in Southern Europe provoked a populist upsurge: the rise of several social and political movements framing the crisis situation as an oligarchic overtake of democracy. This short-term crisis, however, only played out as a catalyst of previously existing trends, i.e. the long-term erosion of party democracy and the disintermediation of Western societies, which gives contemporary populism its contemporary organisational form, alongside adjacent political phenomena such as technocracy and radical right. Overall, the paper advances an explanatory model that replaces the relation between crisis and populism – conceived of as political, performative, and discursively mediated – within its structural pre-conditions. In doing so, it aims at providing a synthetic and steady explanation of the contemporary rise of populism in Southern Europe and to distinguish it from the more pervasive ascent of radical right parties across the Old Continent.

Together Without Consensus: Populism, Liberalism and Class Politics in Pakistan

Salman Hussain (York University)

Populism has become a ubiquitous term today, used to explain away the varied historical and economic processes, and sociocultural identities, that often uneasily converge together in democratic politics. In such analyses, “ordinary” people are celebrated as the leaderless agents of recent popular movements – right-wing populist campaigns as well as those led by a mix of “apolitical” citizens – which helped topple military-backed regimes in North Africa and propelled the rise of nationalist figures elsewhere (Choudhry 2019; Curtis 2017; Douzinas 2013). History and class, Marxian concepts traditionally used to explain political movements, have taken a back seat in these analyses as these uprisings have simplistically been characterized as spontaneous, classless, apolitical, and so on – that is, without any organized leadership (in party-form) or a clear political agenda for change (Mishra 2016; Mbembe 2016; Azzellini and Sitrin 2013).

This paper critically examines the relationship between democracy, class politics and protest movements. It contributes to the debate on populism by questioning the absence, or rather the inattention to, the study of history and class in the analysis of recent protest movements and electoral politics. Drawing from historical and ethnographic research on political movements in South Asia, specifically from the research conducted on the Lawyers’ Movement for the Restoration of Democracy and the Rule of Law (2007-09) – a protest movement led by middle-class professionals and human rights activists against military rule in Pakistan – the paper interrogates the role of middle-class civil society in protest politics and suggests that popular protest movements are often a historical product of a tenuous hegemony of particular classes in the civil society.

The paper makes use of the Gramscian notion of “hegemony” (1971) to further suggest that singular attention to and scholarly discontentment with populism has obscured how liberal legal language of human rights, social justice and transparency has successfully hegemonized twenty-first century popular movements mobilized by the middle-classes in postcolonial states.
Political Masculinities and Performative Populism in Nigeria: Locating Feminist Resistance

Ololade Faniyi (University of Ibadan)

Nigeria’s post-1999 democracy has been widely undemocratic, and research has presented findings that suggest that Nigerians seem to prefer actors with populist posturing than liberal democratic tendencies. This lends credibility to assumptions that populism has emerged as an underlying ideology from the failings of quasi-democratisation in Nigeria. Power in Nigeria is inherently masculine, and gender equity is paradoxically promoted through front men’s standpoints, giving rise to ingrained gender disparities. These masculine stances reinforce heteropatriarchal, cultural, and class privilege, which they take full advantage of to sustain conservatism, traditional gender roles, capitalist economy, and oligarchical traditions. This phenomenon opens up an analytical space for studying the intersection of masculinity and populism in Nigeria. From the 1970s, two ideologies existed in Nigeria, elite nationalism and urban populism. Functional elites spearheaded elite nationalism. While at local-urban levels, populism was effective in using ethnic ideologies against federal elites, resulting in the intensification of tribalism. In the current Fourth Republic with the dominant two-party system, there is no observed political-ideological difference, even though there is politicised antagonism created in rhetoric and texts by political players from the “opposing” parties, All People’s Congress (APC) and People’s Democratic Party (PDP).

Within this false illusion of ideological binaries, ethnic, religious, gender, and class position remain significant factors of differentiation and conflict. The paper assigns rhetoric and texts of two front men at national and state levels, APC’s President Muhammadu Buhari and PDP Oyo State Governor, Seyi Makinde, as populist charismatic performances that centre reactionary governance which does not articulate or aim to stir intersectional approaches. Engaging their live/recorded broadcasts and communicative texts; this article adopts a superordinate intersectionality framework in analysing discursive construction of populist masculinities, along the axes of gendered hierarchies, class system, age stratification, and ethnic structuring. Adopting critical discourse analysis methods, this paper also shows how the shared centrist-right populist performance seemingly guards against “feminised masculinity” and overt feminisation of culture and politics. Ultimately, this article attempts to answer the question of the lasting tendencies of Nigeria’s populism. Centring the rising feminist resistance to the “poison” of populism, this article maps out the strategies with which Nigerian feminist voices reimage politics of emotion and care for the 99%

Populism and Gender

Juliane Lang (University of Giessen)

The description of far-right groups in recent years with the concept of right-wing populism is insufficient - not only, but also with regard to different gender-political dimensions of the phenomenon. Rather, what is commonly understood by right-wing populism is to be understood as a communicative style that repackages well-known ideas - and succeeds in doing so (see: Reinfeldt, 2000, Nicht-wir und die-da, Braumüller). This communicative style is particularly cultivated by far-right groups that have either emerged or reoriented themselves in the past 10-15 years. The ‘softer’ designation as right-wing populism makes them appear less radical. And it allows the actors to enter into new alliances and to engage in strategic piracy of themes and terminology.

Parallel to the success of those ‘new’ far-right groups in Europe and the USA, the visibility of a) women and queers in their ranks and b) the gender conservative to anti-feminist agenda of those groups is increasing. The visibility of both female actors and gender-political topics is therefor currently experiencing increased interest from the media and academia, especially the mobilizations against ‘gender’ from Christian and far-right groups is the content of current publications and research projects (e.g. Dietze/ Roth, 2020, Right-Wing Populism and Gender, transcript).
Naming the phenomenon of new far-right groups as right-wing populism depoliticises their gender political agenda in several ways - and reproduces the phenomenon of the "double invisibility" of far-right women. Women only seem to be conceivable as actors in the ‘softer’, pre-political realm of right-wing populism. And at the same time, the attacks on “gender” and gender mainstreaming launched by those groups are thus emptied of their political, often völkisch content.

**A populist rebellion against godless elites: anti-gender campaigns in contemporary Europe**

*Elżbieta Korolczuk (Södertörn University & University of Warsaw)*

Is the term populism still useful in a world where so many different phenomena are referenced as populist? Should scholars still employ populism as an analytical concept given that it can be defined as a discourse, political style, ideology or simply a disregard for liberal democratic norms? In the presentation I will make a case for usefulness of the concept of populism understood as a thin-centered ideology dividing society into two antagonistic camps – “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite” – and fetishizing the will of the people (e.g. Mudde 2004, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: 8, Stanley 2008) in analyzes of the recent wave of anti-gender campaigns in Europe. The campaigns against gender (often termed “gender ideology”) constitute a coordinated effort of religious fundamentalists, ultraconservative civil society organizations and think tanks, as well as right-wing politicians, to oppose progressive cultural and social changes (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017, Korolczuk and Graff 2018). Specific targets include the efforts to stop ratification of the Istanbul Convention, opposing the rights of LGBT community and women’s reproductive rights.

This paper examines a growing opportunistic synergy between ultraconservative groups opposing “gender ideology” and the right-wing parties. The analysis of the Polish case shows that this synergy between anti-gender movement and right-wing populists plays out on two distinct levels: ideological/discursive and strategic/organizational. Since populism is not a robust ideological project, it readily feeds on ideas, narrative structure and arguments promoted by the anti-gender ultraconservative movement, often in an opportunistic and selective fashion. Simultaneously, the actors behind anti-gender campaigns use the organizational resources that right-wing parties offer, especially in contexts such as Poland where the latter are in power. What facilitates this collusion is the fact that the ultraconservative critiques of “gender” have been framed in populist terms. The movement presents itself as a necessary and courageous defense of “the people” (often in their private roles as parents) against powerful and foreign “liberal elites,” with “gender ideology” emphatically identified as a modern version of western colonialism.
Day 3, Friday 15 January

10.30am – 12pm  Session 5: **Rethinking Populism / New theoretical venues**

**Populism as a political logic and a discursive repertoire – debating the ontological and ontic dimension of populism**

*Marina Vulovic (University of Helsinki) and Emilia Palonen (University of Helsinki)*

Populism, both as an analytical and a political concept, is widely contested in current scholarship. While some studies focus on the ideological “core” of populism, others try to investigate how it entangles with other projects, such as nationalism. However, fleshing out the meaning of populism as an ontological category, and its manifestations and sedimentations on the ontic level of social and political practice, has been neglected. Building on recent debates between Brubaker on the one hand, and De Cleen and Stavrakakis on the other, particularly on the relation between nationalism and populism, we put forward a conception of populism both as an ontological concept and as a “discursive repertoire”. The former is based on Laclaeu’s (2005) understanding of populism as a political logic that (re-)draws political frontiers between an “us” and a “them”. The latter relies on the specific historic discursive and material sedimentations that De Cleen and Stavrakakis have already fleshed out in their research. By doing so, we attempt to bring in more clarity into a concept, the particular meaning of which has been the subject of great debate in recent scholarship. We maintain that thinking of populism in its ontological and ontic dimension solves many a conundrum when it comes to debating the “core” of populism, that is, articulating it as a logic that draws frontiers between “the people” and “the elite”. We argue that populism, as an ontological category, does not essentialize the “us” (the people) and the “them” (the elite). On the contrary, it is more fruitful to conceptualize populism as a political logic with a particular form, not a particular content (Palonen 2020, *Populist manifesto*). This means that populism as a political logic is necessary for any political project or ideology, be it democracy, authoritarianism, nationalism, racism etc. In turn, populism as an ontic category should be conceptualized in light of what De Cleen and Stavrakakis have argued, namely that populism is a “discursive repertoire with its historically sedimented significations”. These sedimented significations are anchored by the nodal points of the people and the elite and have informed much of the way we think about populism in modern times, especially about populism as a family of political parties.

**A Case for Political Stupidity**

*Yonathan Listik (University of Essex)*

The mainstream response to current phenomena such as the election of Trump, Duterte and Bolsonaro is the diagnosis that democracy is in crisis. Typically, this crisis is presented as an external disruption that undermines what would otherwise be a reasonable political regime. My article proposes to challenge the account that the current challenges to democracy are disruptions of its natural development. This assumption masked a deeper repressive and undemocratic tendency inherent in political philosophy: the polis is the public
realm of intelligence where those capable of making decisions grounded on reason are free while those lacking
the capacity to participate [the idios] are to be safeguarded in private realm.

More specifically, considering intelligence is equivalent to economic thought, economic expertise
guarantees legitimate power against democratic will. Power resulting from ‘proper’ economic intelligence, i.e.,
grounded on technics and social management, is always legitimate. The people is challenged as the principle of
the democratic ethos itself. It becomes contingent or even an impeding factor for the proper implementation of
societal rationality, i.e., to the proper management of society.

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

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

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