Jana Goyvaerts
The Academic Voice in Media Debates on Populism

POPULISMUS Working Papers No. 12

Thessaloniki
October 2021

POPULIST DISCOURSE AND DEMOCRACY
POPULISMUS

Jana Goyvaerts

The Academic Voice in Media Debates on Populism

1. Introduction[1]

Populism has become one of the most hotly discussed topics in debates on the current state of politics. This is certainly the case in mainstream media, that report more and more on populism, often in a negative way (Herkman, 2017; Brookes, 2018; Brown and Mondon, 2020). Glynos and Mondon characterized this as 'populist hype' in 2017, stating that the rise of (right-wing) populism has been vastly exaggerated by politicians, media and academics, and at the same time the term 'populism' serves as a euphemistic label for racism, fascism, or nativism (Glynos & Mondon, 2016; see also Akkerman, 2017; Rydgren, 2017; Ziegler, 2018). Since then, the 'populist hype' certainly hasn't stopped; a very visible example is offered by *The Guardian* that devoted 'a six-month investigative series' to 'populism' in 2018, pertinently analysed and described by Brown & Mondon (2020; see also Brown et al., 2021).

Academics play an important role in the public debate, and when looking at the academic field of populism research we can see a similar 'populist hype'. In their introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Kaltwasser *et al.* (2017) described the enormous rise in academic books with populism in their title, a trend that has continued until this day with journals, conferences and working groups dedicated to populism popping up everywhere. A quick search on the Web of Science shows that the number of articles with 'populism' in their title, abstract or keywords has grown exponentially these last few years. From 1990 until 2014 there was a gradual growth, slowly rising from 21 articles per year in 1990 until 114 in 2014. Since then, the number almost doubled every year, with no less than 1434 articles published in 2020. Like the rising reporting on populism in (mainstream) media, this can only partially be explained by an actual rise in the activity of populist politics or parties. Recently, scholars are taking this increasing attention for populism as a moment to critically self-reflect, to describe the dynamics of these academic debates on populism and to warn against its possible implications (Jäger, 2017; Stavrakakis, 2017a; De Cleen, Glynos and Mondon, 2018; Dean and Maiguashca, 2020; Goyvaerts and De Cleen, 2020; De Cleen and Glynos, 2021). A key concept in these reflections is that of anti-populism, signalling and critiquing the predominant discourse where 'populism' is seen as the dangerous antithesis to liberal democracy (Karavasilis, 2017; Moffitt, 2018; Stavrakakis *et al.*, 2018). Used by Taguieff (1998) and Knight (1998) over 20 years ago, the

---

[1] Parts of this introduction are largely based on or taken from the book chapter 'Media, Anti-Populist Discourse and the Dynamics of the Populism Debate', written together with Benjamin De Cleen (2020).

term anti-populism is increasingly being used by academics and other intellectuals to criticize what they consider to be the mainstream anti-populist position, but also to turn this anti-populist position into an object of analysis in its own right (e.g. Stavrakakis, 2014; Jäger, 2017; Kim, 2018; Stavrakakis et al., 2018). If we compare the few studies that have looked at how mainstream media use the signifier 'populism', we can see media are largely part of this anti-populist hegemony (Bale, van Kessel and Taggart, 2011; Herkman, 2017; Brookes, 2018; Krämer, 2018; Goyvaerts and De Cleen, 2020). This illustrates how media and academics both play a role in the (anti-)populist hype and how their meaning-making practices influence each other.

Discourses about populism are thus constructed in different spheres that influence each other, yet empirical research that looks at the dynamics between them is still limited. This working paper seeks to develop a framework to conceptualize signification processes in different fields and their interrelations, highlighting the role academics play in the public debate. As visualized in figure 1, these different spheres can be seen as partly overlapping
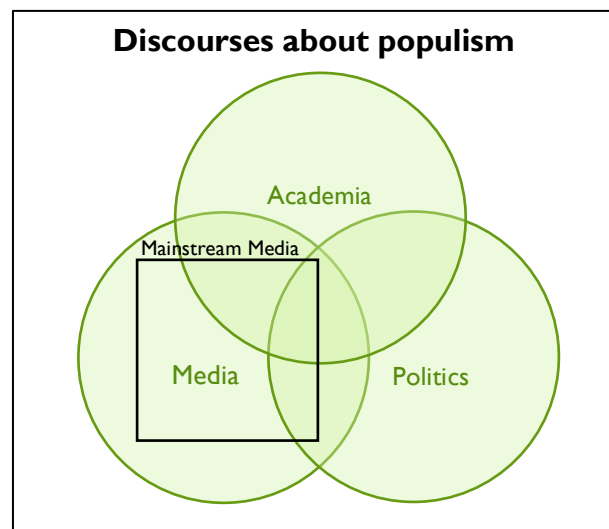

Figure 1

circles. In this paper, I look through the 'window' of mainstream media and focus on the role of academic actors within it. Media research is still limited in the research on discourses about populism, yet media are the most visual and present sphere in day-to-day life, and exercise an important agenda-setting function. According to the agenda-setting theory, coined by McCombs and Shaw in the 1970s, the media do not directly influence what people think, but they do influence what people think *about*: they set the public agenda (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Danesi, 2013, pp. 23–24). In that regard, we can see (mainstream) media as the central window through which most people are exposed to the other spheres of meaning-making, or indeed as the main manufacturers of public opinion. Media are not just neutral observers of society; the way they report on the world has profound performative effects. Habermas even described that in our current capitalist society, mass media define the way people look at society and paralyze critical thought (Habermas, 1974; Loisen and Joye, 2017, pp. 219–223). Critical media studies building on this theory have emphasized that media (and especially journalists) play an important role in hegemonic struggles (Hall *et al.*, 1978; Cammaerts *et al.*, 2016). This is especially important in the context of discourses on populism; news media and journalists are not 'neutral observers' when it comes to describing and defining populism,

since they have a particular relationship with democracy and political parties. How media use the signifier 'populism' reveals how they relate to democracy. In this regard it is especially interesting to study how then academics and journalists negotiate what exactly 'populism' means.

Throughout this article, I will develop this theoretical and conceptual orientation further, focusing on the academic sphere and how academics intervene in mainstream media. Bringing together discourse theory, populism studies and media studies, this article provides a theorization of how politics, academia and media come together and influence each other, and how meanings travel across these different spheres, become transformed, reinforced or don't get through at all. 'Populism' serves at the same time as a key concept and as an example to study a hegemonic struggle where media, politics and academia play a role. As a starting point, the visions of democracy that can be found in academic literature on populism will be discussed. If we look back to figure 1, this means critically assessing the upper 'Academic sphere'. We then move towards the media sphere and specifically focus on the upper right corner of the 'mainstream media' perspective, where the academic sphere enters. How academics intervene in mainstream media can happen in multiple ways, ranging from interviews with academics, over Cas Mudde's regular column in *The Guardian*, to more elaborate interventions, like *The Guardian*'s investigative series on 'The New Populism'. For this working paper I analyzed articles mentioning 'populism' in Belgian quality newspapers, building on the assessment of the academic field of populism research. How do these academic visions translate into the discourse of populism in (Belgian) newspapers? How is academic knowledge discussed by journalists? Which role do academics take up in the public debate?

2. The politics of populism research

Academic uses of 'populism' aren't neutral or innocent (Stavrakakis, 2017a). In fact, academic works on populism are usually either *for* or *against* populism (and, as discussed in the introduction, more often the latter). When 'populism' is seen as good or bad, this generally means good or bad *for democracy*. Almost all works on populism shortly reflect on the relationship between populism and democracy, and apart from these more implicit considerations, there are many books, book chapters and articles that explicitly theorize this link. In this section, the (normative) visions on democracy within the different strands of the academic populism tradition will be fleshed out. This will then serve as the basis for the next section to see whether we find the same visions when academics are featured in newspaper articles, and how these ideas are translated.

As Arditi writes when concluding a chapter on populism and democratic politics: 'people like Canovan, but also Worsley and Hayward, are right in proposing that any inquiry

about populism is at the same time an inquiry about democratic politics' (Arditi, 2005, p. 98). Arditi describes 'three possibilities of populism – as a mode of representation, as a politics at the more turbulent edges, and as a threatening underside' (p. 77). These three possibilities largely correspond to the overall approaches we can find in the literature on populism and democracy – ranging from populism as a stimulating force for democracy to describing it as democracy's greatest threat.

Most mainstream definitions of populism understand it as a threat to democracy - Moffitt (2018) states that anti-populism is the default position for the academy. A clear and well-known example is Jan-Werner Müller's book 'What is Populism?', where on p. 3 of the introduction he already writes that 'populism tends to pose a danger to democracy' (Müller, 2017, p. 3). Yet this doesn't always happen so explicitly. For example, in the *Oxford Handbook of Political Representation in Liberal Democracies*, there is a section titled 'Challenges to Representative Democracies: Populism' (Rohrschneider and Thomassen, 2020). Without even explaining it, this title suggests and assumes that populism is one of the main challenges to (liberal) democracy. On the other hand, there is an academic tradition that argues in favour of populism and considers it a positive force for democracy. This tradition, usually rooted in the works of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Laclau, 2005), often explicitly defends populism, emphasizing (and sometimes overemphasizing) its democratic potential (Maiguashca, 2019; Kim, 2021). A clear example of this is Chantal Mouffe's recent book *For a Left Populism*, where she explicitly develops a populist strategy for left-wing parties (Mouffe, 2018). In this paper, I discuss several key aspects of how the anti- and pro-populist academic traditions theorize the relation between populism and democracy. Of course there are authors that offer a more nuanced view or try to bridge this divide, but to facilitate the argument I will discuss the pro- and anti-populist perspective of each characteristic.

The status quo

When populism is opposed to or linked to democracy, this can largely be linked to one key difference: the evaluation of the status quo. Panizza writes in the introduction to his collective volume *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (2005b): 'this approach understands populism as an *anti-status quo discourse*' (Panizza, 2005a, p. 3, emphasis added). In fact, in most definitions populism is (in some way or another) described as being anti-status quo. Critique or support of populism then comes down to a critique or support of the status quo. A defence of 'democracy' against populism is often a defence of democracy *as it is*. A defence of populism, on the other hand, often accompanies a wish for a different kind of democracy. We can see this clearly in Nadia Urbinati's article *'Democracy and Populism'*. She makes a differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' populism, stating that in Western Europe we have mostly seen the latter. The reason she gives for

this, is that 'when it developed *from within* a democratic, or quasi-democratic, order, populism becomes unfailingly 'bad' or anti-democratic. Western Europe seems to prove that populism plays a democratic role only when and until a society is not democratic' (Urbinati, 1998, p. 112). In this reasoning, she starts from the presumption that all Western European democracies are in fact democratic enough, and populists couldn't possibly make them more democratic.

Scholars that are more 'pro-populist' on the other hand, are critical of the way democracy works in our current society. Panizza writes that 'populist practices emerge out of the failure of existing social and political institutions to confine and regulate political subjects into a relatively stable social order' (Panizza, 2005a, p. 9). He couples populism to a failure of traditional or other representative types of politics of democracy, as a political language with emancipatory potential. Chantal Mouffe goes even further in her *For a Left Populism*. She analyses the current situation as an undemocratic one: normally, in a liberal democracy, there is an agonistic tension between the 'liberal' and 'democratic' part. They are never fully compatible but keep each other in balance. Today, according to her, we live in a post-democracy, where there is no more tension, and the balance has flipped completely to the liberal side. Populism is then a form of resistance to restore the balance and bring back the democratic dimension of liberal democracy (Mouffe, 2018).

This can be linked to the tensions between different kinds of democracy, tensions that have been present since the earliest democratic theories. Especially after the French Revolution, when 'the people' entered democratic theories, two opposing modern traditions emerged: 'One that recognizes the importance and, sometimes, even idealizes the people and another that stresses the dangers involved in mass mobilizations and, often, demonizes the people' (Stavrakakis *et al.*, 2018, p. 15). A defence of democracy against populism is usually a defence of the liberal, parliamentary, competitive (see Strömbäck, 2005) and elitist (see Schumpeter, 1942; Baker, 2002) democracy we live in in most Western European countries. A defence of populism, however, is often at heart a critique of the workings of liberal democracy and is usually accompanied by a plea for a more radical or agonistic (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), deliberative (see Strömbäck, 2005) or even populist democracy (see Dahl, 2006).

Ratio and emotions
Apart from its relation to the status quo, there is a deeper epistemological difference between more pro- and anti-populist voices. Anti-populism and the related competitive visions of democracy are largely based on a positivist or realist world view. This is clearly present in for example Schumpeter's definition of democracy in his book *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*: 'The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for

arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote' (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 269; also see Ricci, 1970, p. 239). The 'institutional' representation is seen as fully representative of 'the people', based on the idea that it reflects the different 'objective viewpoints' from individual citizens, who vote individually and rationally based on their objective and rational self-interest. By voting, they give their trust and legitimation to the members of parliament they elect. An elected elite of professional politicians governs and their legitimacy is based on their mandate given to them by 'the people' as a collection of individuals.

This rationalist conception is sharply contrasted with a constructivist or poststructuralist vision of society, where people have no 'objective and rational' interests. Instead there is a constant negotiation of demands and interests. Politicians can bring demands together and create chains of equivalence (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Laclau, 2005), but can also create demands (or the perception of demands). Any representation is always necessary symbolic, people are not fully rational creatures, while fantasies and symbols play a crucial part in how they perceive the world.

Discussions of 'the populist threat against democracy' often describe populism as irrational, simplistic, and emotional, as opposed to rational and reasonable democratic debates (Goyvaerts and De Cleen, 2020, p. 88). Yet this central role of ratio in democratic theory has been a tool for excluding different groups (like women or non-Europeans) throughout democracy's history, as Eklundh prudently explains in her article on 'excluding emotions' (Eklundh, 2020). She explains that in classical democratic theories, and more specifically in populism studies, the 'strict divisions between the emotional and the rational are not simply analytical categories, but play a very strong part in exclusionary logics' (Eklundh, 2020, p. 120). There is a condemnation of moralism in most anti-populist approaches of populism, accusing populists of dividing 'the pure people' and 'the evil elite'. Yet this accusation itself is moralistic and divisive, as Kim (2021, pp. 6–7) describes, 'in positioning themselves as 'the good democrats' against 'the evil extreme right'' (Kim, 2021, p. 7).

This labelling of 'populism' as an appeal to emotion, and the connotation that this is bad for a rational and reasonable democracy, is also clearly present in how journalists talk about populism, as shown for example by the analysis of Brookes' work on uses of populism in the US and Australia (2018), and in my own previous analysis of Flemish news media (Goyvaerts and De Cleen, 2020). This is not surprising, considering this dichotomy between classical realist political theories on democracy and more critical poststructuralist epistemologies is visible as well in theories on the role of media and journalism in democracy. In classical definitions of journalism and democracy, media are

seen as an objective provider of information. They function as a mirror of society and as a watchdog, and monitoring the other powers and institutions to hold them accountable. Critical media studies have criticized this rationalistic view, emphasizing that media play a role in hegemonic struggles themselves (Cammaerts *et al.*, 2016). As Stuart Hall argued '[i]t is not the vast pluralistic range of voices which the media are sometimes held to represent, but a range within certain distinct ideological limits' (Hall et al., 1978, p. 61, see also Carpentier, 2005; Dahlberg, 2007; McQuail, 2010; Raeijmaekers & Maeseele, 2015).

The people

This different epistemology manifests itself clearly in the conceptualizations of 'the people' in the literature on populism.

In definitions that are critical of populism, the notion of 'anti-pluralism' is often a key characteristic. Populists, Müller states, 'hanker after what the political theorist Nancy Rosenblum has called 'holism': the notion that the polity should no longer be split and the idea that it's possible for the people to be one and -all of them- to have one true representative' (Müller, 2017, p. 20). In this conceptualization, where 'only some of the (morally just) people are really the people', this exclusionary and anti-pluralist claim is an antithesis of democracy, where all voices should be heard and taken into account. Populism, as inherently anti-pluralist and exclusionary, is thus directly positioned against democracy, since democratic parties are and need to be inherently pluralist and inclusionary. This anti-pluralism is central in other key definitions of populism as well: Taggart speaks of 'the heartland' as the key populist imagination, where a virtuous and unified people exists (Taggart, 2000), and in Mudde's definition populists consider 'the people' as an essentially homogenous group (Mudde, 2004). Mudde later argued with Rovira Kaltwasser there are 'inclusionary' and 'exclusionary' forms of populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013), but this is virtually incompatible with the centrality of a 'homogenous people' in his definition (Katsambekis, 2020).

When, on the other hand, populism is seen as a positive evolution for democracy (or even equated with democracy), 'the people' also take up a central role, yet within these theories it is not claimed that this represents every single person of the 'real people'. As Mudde describes, within more pro-populist theories the signifier 'the people' refers to a certain class segment, and serves as an emancipatory concept to include a part of the people that hasn't been heard (Mudde, 2004, p. 545). In her manifesto *For a left populism*, Chantal Mouffe doesn't oppose populism to (liberal) democracy, but to the neoliberal hegemony that we live in, where the rule of 'the markets' are prioritized over the rule of 'the people'. Populism can then serve as an emancipatory movement to give power back to the people (Mouffe, 2018).

Hence in most definitions, 'the people' in populist discourses are not 'all the people'. More anti-populist definitions take this as an indication that populism is antidemocratic since they don't include all the people, stating it is a misleading and undemocratic fantasy that someone can speak on behalf of 'all the people'. Scholars in the poststructuralist tradition might agree that populist politicians indeed create a fantasy, but would add that this is certainly not (necessarily) antidemocratic. This is, in fact, inherent to any political discourse and any democratic polity. Populist discourse may at least attempt to unite a larger segment of the population and restore democratic participation through, for example, fantasmatic logics (Glynos and Howarth, 2007). 'The people' is indeed constructed, but from a constructivist and discourse-theoretical perspective this is inevitable as any discourse will consist of constructions of realities, since there is no 'real people' and no neutral and objective reality that can be directly represented.

However, despite the centrality of 'the people' as a signifier, both definitions of populism give the people hardly any agency. The emphasis in both the anti- and pro-populist theories lies heavily on the construction of a people by the populist party, and mostly by a populist leader (Maiguashca, 2019). In their plea for a renewal of populism studies, Dean and Maiguashca pertinently state 'both camps identify and examine populism through a process of deductive theorizing, which […] tends to foreground the language of individual leaders or the slogans of groups' (Dean and Maiguashca, 2020, p. 19). The people thus mostly remain a passive subject, whether in the form of an irrational and emotional group or as an empty signifier, rather than an active and plural agent that can articulate its own demands.

Representation

Linked to the conception of 'the people', is that of representation. In most definitions of populism we find the idea of direct representation, meaning that the populist party (or more often the populist leader) directly represents the demands of a/the 'people', without intermediaries. However, the relation of this direct representation of 'the people' to democracy has different interpretations.

For Jan-Werner Müller, the concept of 'direct representation' (which he borrows from Nadia Urbinati) is deeply problematic. In his definition, populists claim to directly but symbolically represent 'the will of the people'. This representation is *direct*, so without intermediaries, and it is articulated through the populist leader. But more importantly, this direct representation is a *symbolic* one: it is not a 'real' or institutionally structured representation, unlike the 'actual existing representation in parliament', but a symbolic representation, without some kind of tangible or measurable input of the people. The 'popular will' populists claim to represent is seen as a fantasy, something unattainable (similar to the fantasy of a unified people, as described above). This is positioned against

'democracy' in general, but it is clear that Müller defends the liberal, parliamentary, competitive and elitist democracy discussed before. This is the same sentiment present in Schumpeter's definition mentioned earlier, where the 'institutional arrangement' takes up a central role. However, representation is in itself a key concept in any democratic theory, and thus it cannot be denied that this 'direct representation' is in some way linked to democracy. Müller makes this connection himself, when stating 'The danger to democracies today is [...] populism – a degraded form of democracy that promises to make good on democracy's highest ideal ("Let the people rule!")' (2017, p. 6). Müller implies populism is in a way *part of* democracy, as he describes it as 'a degraded form of democracy'. He further describes populism as 'something like a permanent shadow of modern representative democracy' (2017, p. 11), which is similar to what amongst others Cas Mudde and Margaret Canovan write. Canovan describes populism as a critique of the democratic limitations of liberal democracy (Canovan, 1999), Mudde states that populism plays into inherent limitations of liberal democracy (Mudde, 2004, p. 562). The more negative definitions of populism often describe populism as some sort of disease, a symptom of something profoundly wrong and festering (Dean and Maiguashca, 2020, p. 22).

More positive definitions of populism, however, suggest that populism is not a disease of liberal democracy, but a cure for the current state of it. Panizza couples populism to a failure of traditional or other representative types of politics of democracy, as a political language with emancipatory potential (Panizza, 2005a, p. 9). Mouffe writes we live in a post-democracy today, where there is no more tension between the 'liberal' and 'democratic' parts of liberal democracy, and the balance has flipped completely to the liberal side. This is made possible by 'post-politics', meaning the idea that we are increasingly governed by a supposedly a-political administration (Mouffe, 2018). The idea of a 'direct representation' brings back the voice of the people or the popular will, in a post-democratic context that is increasingly governed by a technocratic and supranational elite (Katsambekis, 2015).

However, as already signalled at the end of the previous part on 'the people', both traditions of populism research contain a strong focus on a leader figure that articulates (or claims to articulate) the demands of 'the people'. For anti-populist scholars this leader is often a dangerous demagogue, whereas pro-populist theories see the populist leader as an almost heroic 'saviour of the people'. This overemphasis on the (often male) leader figure has been criticized by feminist scholars, since it takes away the emancipating potential of communities and people (Maiguashca, 2019; Dean and Maiguashca, 2020).

3. Academic voices in media debates

Following this brief discussion of academic definitions of populism in relation to democracy, this paper moves on to look at how these interpretations are translated in the public debate through (mainstream) media. This focus builds on the idea that social scientists are not 'neutral observers' of reality, but they influence the world they describe. This idea is captured in Anthony Giddens' theory of double hermeneutics (Giddens, 1987), and has been applied to the concept 'populism' in earlier POPULISMUS working papers by Yannis Stavrakakis (2017b) and Anton Jäger (2016, 2017). They both discuss how 'populism' acquired a pejorative meaning throughout history, amongst others through the influential book *The Age of Reform* by Richard Hofstadter (1955). Jäger describes in detail how populism underwent a transformation through political and academic discourse, 'from a historiographical reference to a straightforwardly polemical concept in journalistic and academic discourse' (Jäger, 2016, p. 14).

Populist hype or hypes?

To get a deeper understanding of how this polemical concept is used today, and how the academic conceptions outlined above are represented in media, I will now look into the role of academics in the public debate on 'populism' in Belgian newspapers. Inspired by the idea of the 'populist hype' by Glynos & Mondon (2016), I wanted to get a broader overview of how much 'populism' is actually used in (Belgian) newspaper articles. Using Gopress Academic, an online database with all articles from Belgian newspapers since 1999, I searched for the articles containing populis* in every daily newspaper in Belgium and plotted these numbers per year.
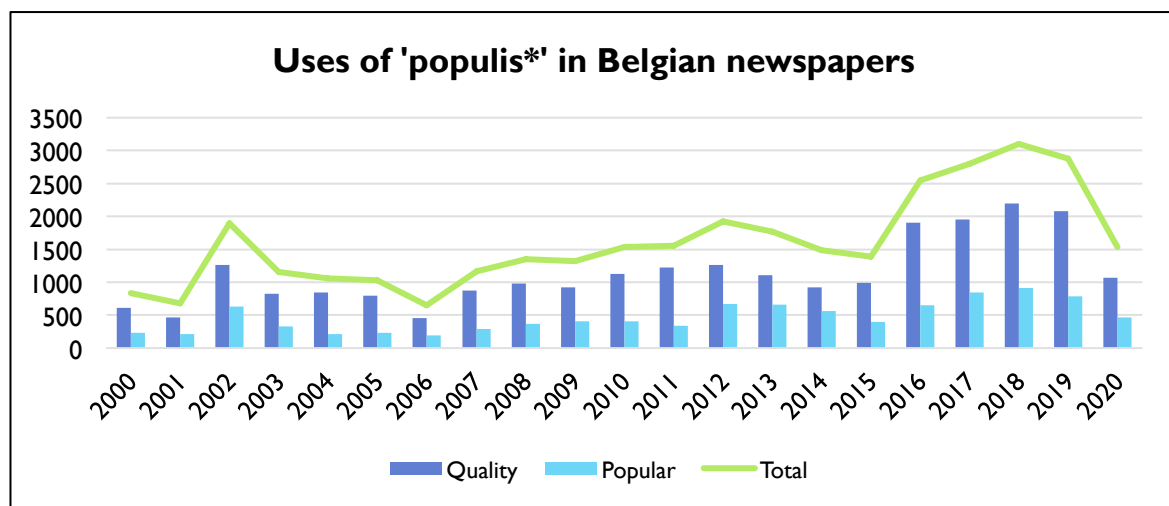

Figure 2

As figure 2 shows, there was a general rise in the number of articles mentioning populism since the early 2000s, quickly rising from 2016 onwards and peaking around 2018. This broad overview also shows some interesting and sometimes surprising fluctuations. There is for example a drop around 2014-2015, although that is the period based on which

Glynos & Mondon developed the concept of 'populist hype', and when for example Tony Barber summarized 2014 as 'a year in a word: populism' in an influential opinion piece in the *Financial Times* (Barber, 2014). The dip might be explained by the (bad) election results of Flemish radical right party Vlaams Belang in Belgium, indicating that the prominence of concepts like 'populism' is influenced by international but also local political events. When skimming the articles in 2012 to look for an explanation for the small peak that year, it appears that a very different sort of event triggered a sudden rise in uses of 'populism'. In his Christmas speech that year, the Belgian King Albert II sparked some controversy when he warned against 'populism' and drew parallels with the rise of fascism in the 1930s. This caused a lot of debate, with many politicians, academics and other opinion makers commenting through opinion articles in newspapers, and on Twitter (resulting in many articles summarizing the debates on Twitter). This hints to the existence of a debate between elite actors that happens partially detached from political events and electoral results.

What figure 2 also shows, is that the 'populist hype' isn't new. We can see a peak in reporting on populism in 2002, which is well captured in an opinion article in business newspaper *De Tijd* at the end of that year (Vanempten, 2002):

> 2002 was a year in which populism and right-wing extremism shook European politics to its foundations. Through populism, power in France and the Netherlands shifted from the centre-left to the conservative right. The political parties on the right side of the political spectrum skilfully copied the election themes of the extreme right and populists in a moderate form. This, in turn, was proven by the elections in Austria.

It seems that around 2002 there was already a 'populist hype', and if we look at academic literature, this is for example the year that inspired Cas Mudde to write his influential article 'A Populist Zeitgeist' (2004). Annie Collovald already signalled the dangers of this 'populist hype' in her book *Le "Populisme du FN", un dangereux contresens*, where she explains that Le Front National is labelled populist, whereas it's not their main characteristic. Her introduction starts with 'The presidential elections of 2002 showed that the term 'populism' has come to dominate political commentary, both journalistic and scholarly, to refer to the Front National and to similar phenomena which were previously thought of as belonging to the extreme right' (Collovald, 2004, p. 7, own translation). And in 2002 this wasn't new either: Taguieff already warned for the misuses of 'populism' and for anti-populism in 1998 (Taguieff, 1998).

Around 2002, four Belgian academics wrote a book entitled *Populisme*, denouncing populism as the main problem in Belgian politics (Blommaert *et al.*, 2004), and a group of journalists from the Flemish quality newspaper *De Standaard* wrote a book titled *Nieuw*

Radicaal Rechts in Europa (New Radical Right in Europe), a vulgarizing academic book describing the new 'trending' parties throughout Europe, including chapters on populism (Buyse, 2002).

To flesh out further how these debates work, I selected two time periods to investigate the role of academics and intellectuals in media debates on populism in more detail: 2002 and 2018. From a data collection of all articles from Belgian quality newspapers[2] from 2002 and 2018 containing the word 'populism' or derivatives, I have analysed the articles that featured academics. This could be interviews with academics, opinion articles written by them or shorter quotes or mentions within larger journalistic pieces. This resulted in a sample of 463 articles, 125 in 2002 and 338 in 2018. What follows is a critical exploration of the larger trends and specific impressions that were found in these articles: which academic voices and visions are featured in mainstream media? How are they handled and interpreted by journalists? Are they in line with the mostly pejorative visions in general media reporting as discussed in the introduction, or do they offer different points of view?

An elite debate

A first outcome is that the debate on populism is an elite one, that operates partially detached from reality and between a select group of academics and journalists. With 'elite debate' I do not mean that the debate is of an elitist nature, focusing on elitist subjects or using elitist language. The debates on populism are in their core non-elitist in the sense that they reflect about the people, what drives the people, etcetera. What I do mean is that it is an elite debate, conducted by elite actors.

This was already visible from the broader analysis if we look back at figure 2: the amount of articles containing 'populism' is much higher in quality newspapers than in popular, tabloid-like newspapers. An important reason for this is probably the higher amount of political news in quality newspapers (Boukes and Vliegenthart, 2020), but still the difference in number of articles is considerable. The elite nature of the discourses about populism becomes clearer when looking at the specific articles featuring academics. As a side note: it's not just an elite discussion, it's also very much a *male* elite discussion. Of all the 515 academics that were featured in the articles, 90% were male and only 10% were female.

---

[2] With quality newspapers, we mean the more 'highbrow' Belgian newspapers as opposed to popular, more tabloid-like press (Van Leuven, Deprez and Raeymaeckers, 2014). The choice to analyze quality newspapers was made after a first skimming of the articles. The articles of the popular newspapers were much shorter, and featured less academics. This is in itself an interesting outcome, which will be discussed in the next section.

There are a few academics that had a much higher impact on the debate than others. Figure 3 shows the distribution of articles per academic: one bar presents one academic, the height of the bar shows in how many articles they appeared in the dataset. It is a classic example of a 'long tail' graph: a few academics featured in
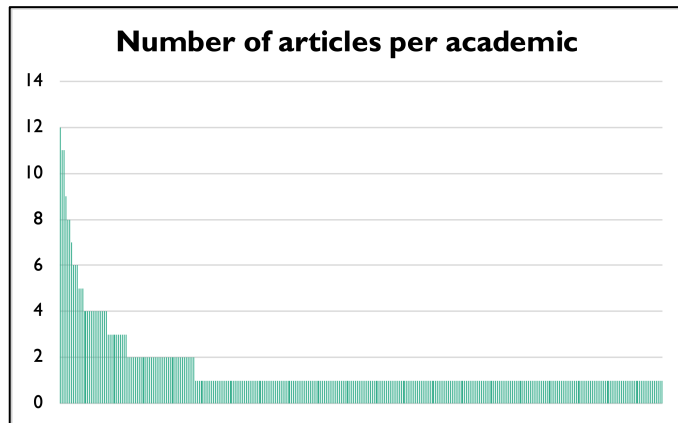

Figure 3

many articles, and many academics only appeared once. Amongst these few more prominent academics, some were more present because they had a regular column in which they often used 'populism', other more influential academics were often mentioned or quoted in articles. The more present academics look very differently if we compare the time periods however. In 2002, the most visible academics were mostly Belgian political scientists and linguists: Kris Deschouwer, Pascal Delwit, Jan Blommaert and Marc Swyngedouw, and one more recurring international scholar, French political scientist Guy Hermet. Guy Hermet still appeared once in 2018, but the other academics seemingly disappeared from the public debate on populism. By 2018, Cas Mudde (unsurprisingly) became the most popular scholar, closely followed by (Belgian) political scientists and sociologists Mark Elchardus, Carl Devos, Vincent de Coorebyter, and Chantal Mouffe. The rest of the more prominent academics show that the discussion has become much more international than in 2002: we see Yascha Mounk, Timothy Garton Ash and Jan-Werner Müller appearing multiple times. This shows 'populism' is being increasingly framed as an international trend, a sort of global and/or European 'populist hype'.

Apart from this relatively small club of influential academics, another distinct aspect of the elite nature of the debates were discussions amongst academics, journalists and/or politicians through opinion articles. A clear example of this happened in April 2002, when PhD researcher Patrick De Vos wrote an op-ed explaining the theories of Chantal Mouffe and Slavoj Zizek in relation to the debates on right-wing populism in Europe (De Vos, 2002b). This prompted a waterfall of responses and opinions: first, the then political editor-in-chief of (the originally socialist newspaper) *De Morgen*, Yves Desmet, wrote an editorial where he blatantly criticized the 'naïve progressive intellectuals' who are stuck in their ivory tower thinking the rise of right-wing populism is caused by a failure of the left and consensus politics (Desmet, 2002). He stated quite bluntly that the rise of right-wing populism was caused by immigrants and 'little cunt-Moroccans' ('kutmarokkaantjes' in Dutch) that stole the handbags of old ladies. That is the reality of the world we live in, he noted, further suggesting that those 'ignorant academics' close their eyes to the negative

13

side effects of a diverse society. This was not only a critique of supposedly left-wing academics, but a quite shocking and blatant example of the normalization of racism and xenophobia. The controversial opinion piece was followed by other op-eds, amongst others a response by researcher Patrick De Vos (2002a) (where he accused the editor-in-chief of 'anti-intellectual populism') in the same newspaper, and two more op-eds by academics in newspaper *De Standaard* where the criticism on ignorant, left-wing academics was countered (Loobuyck, 2002; *De Standaard*, 2002).

The content of this debate in opinion pieces amongst academics and journalists points to another important aspect of this elite discussion: there is a lot of talking about 'the people'. In the examples above, the discussion was about the interpretation of the rise of populism (and the radical right), and what 'the people' that vote for these parties actually meant. However, this is very much a debate *about* the people and the population, without actually engaging with them. This is part of a larger trend that Péter Csigo calls a 'mediatized populist democracy', where political actors, experts and observers speculate what 'the people' want and think, but this 'speculative process has detached itself from the real trends of public opinion formation' (Csigó, 2016, p. 4). This is similar to the position of 'the people' in academic theories of populism, where (despite their centrality in all definitions) they hardly have any agency (Maiguashca, 2019; Dean and Maiguashca, 2020).

Sometimes journalists briefly reflected on this, for example in *De Standaard* (Neefs, 2018), where a journalist started her article with:

> "Is this the tram to 'De Balie'?" The driver looks uncomprehendingly: "Which 'Balie'? There's a counter everywhere." "Theatre 'De Balie'," I clarify. For four days, thinkers, doers, artists and academics come together at the Forum on European Culture to talk about Europe, democracy, inequality, social problems and populism.

> "Never heard of it", the tram driver shrugs. It will be four days of talking about people like him, but at no time with him, I think. Isn't that the problem? Aren't intellectuals paving the way for populists? And with what story, with what arguments, can democrats reach 'the tram driver' again?

> In De Balie, I put the question to the Polish-Flemish philosopher, novelist and documentary maker Alicja Gescinska, who came there to debate about freedom.

After a brief reflection on why these high-level reflections about what 'the people' think are problematic, she quickly turns to an academic to discuss this at length. This talking about the people is especially problematic when they are seen as the cause of 'the dangerous populist wave' that is overflowing Europe. This can be linked to what Stavrakakis discussed as 'the discursive segment "reference to popular demands and 'the people' = populism = radical evil" [that] has been sedimented in many public spheres to

14

such an extent that one could argue that it has been *naturalized*' (Stavrakakis, 2017b, p. 2). Not only are 'the people' not involved in the discussion, but they are also seen as being culpable for the rise of populism (Maiguashca, 2019, p. 778). This is very similar to the different appreciations of ratio and emotion as discussed in the literature review, and goes back to the idea of the 'tyranny of the majority' where 'the people' are seen as an irrational mass, incapable of making their own decisions and endangering society and democracy (Eklundh, 2020). Two interviews from 2018 with non-populism experts clearly demonstrate this idea of an incompetent and simple 'people'. In one article, Belgian cybernetician Francis Heylighen linked 'our collective loss of the ability to concentrate' to the comeback of populism (Selfslagh, 2018), and in another Dutch psychiatrist Iris Sommer stated 'We all do ethnic profiling. But that does not have to make you a populist. It's about whether you also make the effort to think with attention and think logically about those associations' (Van Baars, 2018).

However, besides these reflections about 'the people', there were several reflections on the important role of intellectuals in the public debate as well. In an article on the role of academics in the public debate *in La Libre Belgique* (d'Otreppe, 2018), a quote by Richard Miller (a researcher at the think tank of the francophone liberal party MR) is telling:

> Richard Miller underlines the necessity of academic speech in a complex era, which is won over by populist and extremist discourses. "And this academic voice must also be expressed on social networks. While the latter have an inordinate influence, we cannot abandon them to their excesses. The intellectual must get his hands dirty."

Intellectuals, experts and academics are seen as crucial players in the public debate, both by themselves and by journalists. The irrational, emotional 'people' is juxtaposed to the rational and virtuous intellectual that can help elevate the plebs. Often the expertise of an interviewee is emphasized by listing all the accomplishments of that person, or they are even described as a 'Rockstar academic' (Haeck, 2018). Sometimes these listings are used to normalize quite problematic voices, or emphasize the academic (and thus neutral) role of political actors. An example is an interview with Paul Cliteur in newspaper *De Morgen*: he is described as 'philosopher of law' in the introduction, and introduced as 'Professor of Law at the University of Leiden' in the second paragraph. Only in the fourth paragraph the reader learns that he was the promotor of Thierry Baudet, the leader of far right party Forum voor Democratie (FvD) in The Netherlands, and that he is now the head of the 'Renaissance Institute', the think tank of the party (De Ceulaer, 2018).

The experience and expertise of academics are not only used to substantiate their claims but are also sometimes used by the journalists to give weight or even a different meaning to their own arguments. In a few cases, an academic was quoted in an article on a certain

contemporary topic and they were labelled 'populism expert', without the article or even the academic themself mentioning populism in any way. This happened a few times with Cas Mudde, sometimes even taking a statement he made on Twitter, and putting it in an article accompanied with 'political scientist Cas Mudde, who is specialized in populism, stated that…'. This immediately links the entire topic of the argument to 'populism', using the aura of academic expertise, without the intention of the quoted expert.

Different constructions of 'populism' over time

Apart from the elite character and the more structural aspects of how academics intervene in the public debate on populism, it is of course interesting to look at *what* they have to say. In general, the way populism was used by academics in newspapers, especially when discussed more elaborately, was very similar to the uses in the academic field. The general stance seems to be anti-populist, where populism is described as a big threat to (liberal) democracy, yet there are more nuanced or pro-populist voices present as well.

There seems to be a change in the use of the term 'populism' however, it is almost starting to lead a life on its own. When comparing the articles in 2002 and 2018, there is a clear evolution. Even academics that used it more carefully in the past (for example Belgian historian David Van Reybroeck, who wrote a book titled *A plea for populism* in 2011), or articles that voice pro-populist demands (and mention for example Chantal Mouffe), in 2018 almost always warn against 'the populists', which has become a symbolic term for everything that is bad, mostly related to the far right, anti-immigrant discourses, Brexit, Trump, etcetera. The anti-populist camp seems to increasingly win the hegemonic battle over the term populism, and academics seemingly contributed to the increasing pejorative conception of populism (Stavrakakis, 2017b). The transformation of populism 'from a historiographical reference to a straightforwardly polemical concept in journalistic and academic discourse' that Jäger described in 2016 has certainly continued.

In 2002, 'populism' was still used more carefully. It was already mostly linked to extreme right parties, but often to highlight the variation amongst the different far right parties. Many academics were interviewed in light of 'alarming new trends' in Europe, like the sudden rise to fame and election of Pim Fortuyn (who was assassinated in the same year) in the Netherlands, or Jean-Marie Le Pen reaching the second round of the French presidential elections, but the focus was more on the rise of the extreme and radical right. 'Populism' was used as an additional dimension, something else that was related to that rise but certainly not the same. However, 'populism' was also seen as an alarming new trend in itself, with a large focus on its allegedly personal and emotional style. An example of this are two influential Belgian books that were published in 2002 and 2004 (mentioned earlier in this paper). In 2002, Newspaper *De Standaard* published a book on *The New Radical Right in Flanders*, where populism is mentioned but not as the key

denominator for or characteristic of this trend (Buyse, 2002). In 2004, a group of 4 academics published the book *Populisme* on the alarming new 'populist' trend, but the book itself focuses mostly on the mediatization of politics and the loss of civil society (Blommaert *et al.*, 2004).

Another example of this differentiation of populism from the far right and the focus on its problematic style, can be found in most articles on Pim Fortuyn. 'Populism' was often used to highlight the difference between this flamboyant Dutch populist leader and the more traditional far right party Vlaams Blok in Flanders, which was described as not, or less, 'populist'. Fortuyn was often described as someone who stirs things up in politics, but says some reasonable things behind his extravagant façade. We start to see how the legitimization strategies of the far right through the label populism started to take place in this context, something that Collovald already warned for in 2004 (Collovald, 2004; Brown and Mondon, 2020).

In 2018, 'populism' seems to have become one of the main terms to label 'the rise of the far right', which is often overstated and overemphasized. Brown and Mondon (2020, p. 10) describe this aspect as the amplification of the far right. Similar to what Brown and Mondon saw in *The Guardian*, 'populism' is characterized as a European or worldwide problematic trend. The term 'wave' came back multiple times in the analysis, along with 'an era of populism', 'the rise of populism' or even 'populist regurgitations'. There are also, in general, more articles where populism is mentioned in the dataset (looking back at figure 2), and this seems to be accompanied by a more explicit and at the same time banal 'anti-populism'. 'Banal', in the sense that populism is often implicitly mentioned, 'thrown around with abandon' as Bale et al. (2011) put it. It is often casually mentioned when summing up 'dangerous' or 'difficult' trends, almost always without defining what is meant with populism. 'Populism' became a trending concept, and undoubtedly this was not only driven by an intentional and ideological 'anti-populism' (see Goyvaerts and De Cleen, 2020 for a more extensive reflection on these dynamics). But there is certainly also a very explicit anti-populism, in the sense that populism is often labeled as the worst possible danger for democracy. A striking example of this is an op-ed by Maarten Boudry, a philosopher (and self-proclaimed 'skeptic'), where he extensively discusses that 'we shouldn't proclaim the end of democracy', that not all is bad in the world, but then ends by writing 'But then again, I don't want to downplay everything. There are causes for concern with the rise of populism, and the shocks of globalization' (Rabaey, 2018).

Nuances and critical reflections

As discussed in the previous paragraphs, academic voices in media debates largely followed the lines and arguments of the academic debate (and the general stance in media reporting on populism, see Bale, van Kessel and Taggart, 2011; Herkman, 2017; Brookes,

2018; Goyvaerts and De Cleen, 2020). The predominant position is anti-populist, nuanced by pro-populist and critical voices. But not all anti- and pro-populist voices align as easily with the definitions of democracy as described in the literature review. As Yannis Stavarakakis described, 'both (pro)populist and anti-populist discourses can acquire 'progressive' or 'reactionary', democratic or anti-democratic forms' (Stavrakakis, 2017b, p. 3).

For example, there were quite some academics who voiced a more reactionary pro-populist opinion, emphasizing that 'the populists' dare to say what the people really think, even when they voice often racist and exclusionary statements. They depart from a similar conception of democracy as the anti-populist academic tradition, and are likewise largely based on a rationalistic or objectivist world view. For example, xenophobia and racism are seen as a natural or even rational response to immigration, and when people vote for populist parties this is supposedly based on their objective self-interest. This line of thinking legitimizes racism and xenophobia, and takes away responsibility from far right politicians that encourage and amplify such exclusionary ideas through their discourse. Examples in the dataset include Forum voor Democratie (FvD) associated philosopher Paul Cliteur who was mentioned earlier (De Ceulaer, 2018), or demographer Eric Kauffman stating that the two main problems of our time are 'politicians who deny the discontent of the people and the resistance of the white people who are afraid of losing their world. The former causes the latter to curve' (Abels, 2018).

On the other hand, there were progressive and more radical voices that expressed an anti-populist opinion. They problematized the current state of politics, accusing politicians of being managers instead of governors, stating we live in an undemocratic technocracy. An example is an interview with American sociologist Stephanie Mudge on the decline of the Swedish social-democrats. She states 'The social democrats have primarily heralded their own downfall by placing the interests of financial markets above the interests of citizens', and adds she wants to correct the idea of a 'non-ideological left' and neoliberalism as a break with ideology (Bahara, 2018). This is very similar to, for example, Chantal Mouffe in her *For a Left Populism* (2018), where she denounces the 'third way' and 'the end of ideology' as detrimental to democracy. The difference with the Laclauian populist tradition, is that these academics then mention that populism is definitely not the right answer to this, that they take advantage of it and are part of the problem. To go back to the example of the interview with Stephanie Mudge, she does not suggest populism is a solution, but that 'populist antimigration parties' are a wrong solution that emerge from the failure of the left. Another example of this was an interview with economist Jacques Sapir in l'Echo, who wrote the book titled *The economy versus democracy* on the dangers of technocratic governments, emphasizing that this causes the

18

dangerous rise of populist politicians (Gobin, 2002). However, it does seem that most academics here actually mean the far right when they mention 'the populists'. If we consider populism as an empty signifier, it seems it is being increasingly filled with meanings related to the far right, to a point where we can almost speak of a conceptual closure.

Yet this tendency in itself was also criticized in some articles. It was surprising to see quite a few critical reflections on discourses about populism, acknowledging the problematic implications of anti-populism and the conflation of populism and nationalism or the far right. Already in 2002, Harvard psychologist Jaap van Ginneken signalled the misuses of populism (Nolens, 2002):

> Much, if not everything, has to do with language: our conversational behaviour, the evolution of our vocabulary. Words and expressions such as 'dioxin chicken' and 'more blue on the streets' express a certain idea, but also act as a catalyst for change. On the Radio 1 news, I heard 'the populist Pim Fortuyn' mentioned, as if his populism were an objective fact.

Both in 2002 and 2018, in multiple interviews and opinion articles academics reflected on the importance of the correct use of populism, and indicated it is often used to say something else entirely. These more nuanced statements were not always welcomed by journalists. In interviews they often kept pressing their academic interviewees to take a more clear-cut position. In an interview with philosopher Akeel Bilgrami in *De Morgen* in 2018, Bilgrami tried to focus on the problem of anti-populism and its implications, yet the journalist keeps asking him throughout the entire article to give a definition of populism. When Bilgrami finishes an argument that it's problematic that both right- and left-wing populists are condemned as similarly dangerous politicians, the journalist asks 'but isn't the truth always somewhere in the middle, and not at the extremes?', maintaining the argument that centrist parties are the solution to problem 'populism' (Visscher, 2018). Critical nuances and voices are there, and there are academics that try to add counterweight to the often oversimplified anti-populist discourses. Yet the format of a relatively short newspaper article and the often anti-populist stance of journalists doesn't make it easy to stand their ground.

4. Discussion

In this paper, I examined the conceptual debates over 'populism', focusing on how academic definitions translate into the public debate through mainstream media. Starting with a critical reading of the academic populism traditions, I discussed how these definitions are usually for or against populism, and this implies that populism is good or bad for democracy. Subsequently I discussed how these academic definitions were

presented in the media based on a discourse-theoretical analysis of Belgian newspaper articles featuring academics in 2002 and 2018. In general, the anti-populist academics dominated the analysed articles.

When looking at the academic uses of populism, anti-populist definitions are accompanied by a defence of a liberal, elitist democracy, and/or a defence of the status quo. Definitions that defend populism are on the other hand more critical of the current status quo and how liberal democracy works today, and claim populism might be a stimulating force towards a more radical or agonistic democracy. This was not always similarly visible when academics entered the media sphere. There seemed to be a more ambivalent relationship, with for example academics arguing against the status quo and technocracy, but at the same time condemning 'the populists'. This might be explained by a growing conceptual closure of the meaning of populism, where it has come to almost exclusively mean 'the far right'. This becomes clear when we compare the two periods that were analysed. Where populism was still defined as a political trend or force in itself in 2002, by 2018 it seemed to have become synonymous with radical right-wing parties. This might explain why even more progressive academic voices still condemn 'the populists', considering they often mean the radical right. But of course it is interesting in itself that populism is equated with the radical right, and (perhaps more importantly) that the term 'populism' is used to refer to those parties. The anti-populist hegemony seems to have strengthened, and is accompanied by an almost 'banal anti-populism', meaning populism is often implicitly mentioned, assuming it means 'danger to democracy'.

Apart from its relation to the status quo, pro- and anti-populist academic voices also differed on a deeper epistemological level. Most anti-populist theories are based on a rationalistic conception of reality, where the 'irrational populists' are placed against 'the responsible democrats'. Pro-populist theories are usually more constructivist or poststructuralist of nature, contesting the idea of 'rational behaviour' and 'objective choices' a citizen can make, instead arguing emotions and fantasies play a crucial role in political discourses. When looking at how academics entered the public debate in newspaper articles, the rationalistic conception was the most prominent, especially in the way scholars were brought into the debate. Academics were often portrayed as rational and high-level intellectuals, and juxtaposed against the emotional and short-sighted people. This is very similar to the moralist condemnation of 'the people' in most ideational definitions of populism, as Kim describes, 'in positioning themselves as 'the good democrats' against 'the evil extreme right'' (Kim, 2021, p. 7).

This translated into the discourse about 'the people'. As we saw in the academic literature, both pro- and anti-populist definitions give the people hardly any agency, and 'the people' mostly remain a passive subject of the populist party's or leader's discourse

(Maiguashca, 2019; Eklundh, 2020). This was mostly visible in the nature and architecture of the debate on populism. When looking at the larger journalistic trend in figure 2, it's already clear the debate mostly happened in quality newspapers. Zooming in, the dataset contained multiple debates amongst academics, journalists and politicians through interviews and opinion pieces. These debates often included reflections on 'the people' that vote for 'the populists', and were filled with assumptions on their motives. This stayed a debate *about* the people, often *without* them. As discussed in the previous paragraph, academics were presented as rational and high-level intellectuals, and their important role in the public debate was regularly emphasized.

These are all examples of the elite nature of the discourse about populism. This happens almost detached from reality, with academics, journalists and politicians referring and reacting to each other. This is well-captured in Péter Csigó's concept of a 'neo-popular bubble' (Csigó, 2016), which is made up of academics, journalists, politicians and other professional producers of discourse about 'the people', who speculate on what it is the people think and want and about how they relate to politics, but end up referring mainly to each other (Csigó, 2016; Goyvaerts and De Cleen, 2020). Yet this detached 'bubble' does have an influence on society, when thinking back to the concept of double hermeneutics (Giddens, 1987; Jäger, 2016; Stavrakakis, 2017b). When looking at what type of academic discourses influenced the public sphere through mainstream media, the analysis in this paper highlighted the dominant trend of anti-populism (that increased over time). Yet there were also nuanced and critical voices, often explicitly questioning this anti-populist hegemony. This is interesting when we look at it from the theoretical framework of Daniel Hallin. In his book *The Uncensored War: the Media in Vietnam*, Hallin (1989) criticized the dominant idea that 'the media' put an end to the war in Vietnam with their critical coverage, stating that actually, the media defended the status quo for a long time. He shows that from the start, more general news articles actually reproduced the hegemonic discourse of the American army, not critically opposing it. It was only slowly and through op-eds and editorials that the criticism seeped through. In a way, this process is similar to the media response to 'populism'. What Yannis Stavrakakis called the 'mythologization of populism' (and the dominance of anti-populism) seems to be sedimented if one looks at the general 'banal' negative uses of the word, that became more visible when comparing 2018 to 2002, and the often explicit anti-populist voices that strengthen this mythologization. At the same time, a 'de-mythologization' might be taking place. Similar to what we recently see in the academic field of populism research, discourses about populism and the role of academics and journalists were increasingly put into question. This shows again the importance of studying discourses *about* populism, its implications and normative effects (De Cleen, Glynos and Mondon, 2018). If we consider the impact the general anti-populist academic stance has had on the general meaning of

populism, we might hope the recent rising interest in tracking the uses of populism will help in this de-mythologization process. This paper showed the important role of academics in the public debate; and that journalists often accentuate this. The idea of double hermeneutics also means we can be aware of how we influence the society we observe, and that we can use this to have a positive impact. Yet at the same time, this analysis showed the elite nature of the debates on populism, both in academia and the media. This implies that we also need to be self-critical, and try to step out of the speculative 'neo-popular bubble'. How can we, as academics, give 'the people' more agency and actively include them in our research? This is, in my opinion an important aspect that the growing field of 'discourses about populism'-research needs to take into account as well.

Bibliography

Abels, R. (2018) 'Witte meerderheid? Straks is iedereen beige', *De Morgen*, 22 November, p. 10.

Akkerman, T. (2017) 'Authoritarian Nationalism, Not Populism Is Real Threat to Democracy', *Social Euope*, 9.

Arditi, B. (2005) 'Populism as an Internal Periphery of Democratic Politics', in Panizza, F. (ed.) *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. London, UK: Verso Books, pp. 72–98. Available at: http://www.versobooks.com (Accessed: 15 March 2021).

Bahara, H. (2018) 'Toen links zich overgaf aan het neoliberalisme, dreven ze weg van de achterban', *De Morgen*, 8 September, p. 76.

Baker, C.E. (2002) *Media, Markets, and Democracy*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press (Communication, society, and politics).

Bale, T., van Kessel, S. and Taggart, P. (2011) 'Thrown around with abandon? Popular understandings of populism as conveyed by the print media: A UK case study', *Acta Politica*, 46(2), pp. 111–131. doi:10.1057/ap.2011.3.

Barber, T. (2014) 'A year in a word: Populism', *Financial Times*, 29 December. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/eea3ccb8-85e5-11e4-a105-00144feabdc0.

Blommaert, J. *et al.* (eds) (2004) *Populisme*. Berchem: EPO.

Boukes, M. and Vliegenthart, R. (2020) 'A general pattern in the construction of economic newsworthiness? Analyzing news factors in popular, quality, regional, and financial newspapers', *Journalism*, 21(2), pp. 279–300. doi:10.1177/1464884917725989.

Brookes, S. (2018) 'What do we mean when we talk about populism? Local politics, global

movements and "the people" in political coverage of the 2016 Australian federal and United States presidential elections', *Media, Culture & Society*, pp. 1–18. doi:10.1177/0163443718781987.

Brown, K. and Mondon, A. (2020) 'Populism, the media, and the mainstreaming of the far right: The Guardian's coverage of populism as a case study', *Politics*, p. 0263395720955036. doi:10.1177/0263395720955036.

Brown, K., Mondon, A. and Winter, A. (2021) 'Liberalism, Populism and Euphemisation in the Guardian', in *Capitalism's Conscience 200 Years of the Guardian*. London: Pluto Press, pp. 274–291. Available at: https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745343358/capitalisms-conscience/.

Buyse, A. (ed.) (2002) *Nieuw radicaal rechts in Europa*. Antwerpen: Houtekiet.

Cammaerts, B. *et al.* (2016) *Journalistic representations of Jeremy Corbyn in the British Press: from" watchdog" to" attackdog"*. London: LSE.

Canovan, M. (1999) 'Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy', *Political Studies*, 47(1), pp. 2–16. doi:10.1111/1467-9248.00184.

Carpentier, N. (2005) 'Identity, contingency and rigidity: The (counter-)hegemonic constructions of the identity of the media professional', *Journalism*, 6(2), pp. 199–219. doi:10.1177/1464884905051008.

Collovald, A. (2004) *Le populisme du FN, un dangereux contresens*. Bellecombe-en-Bauges: Croquant (Savoir/Agir, collection de l'association raisons d'agir).

Csigó, P. (2016) *The Neopopular Bubble*. Central European University Press.

Dahl, R.A. (2006) *A Preface to Democratic Theory*. Expanded ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dahlberg, L. (2007) 'Rethinking the fragmentation of the cyberpublic: from consensus to contestation', *New media & society*, 9(5), pp. 827–847.

Danesi, M. (2013) *Encyclopedia of Media and Communication*. University of Toronto Press. doi:10.3138/9781442695528.

De Ceulaer, J. (2018) '"Ik heb compassie met Geert Wilders"', *De Morgen*, 23 June, p. 30.

De Cleen, B. and Glynos, J. (2021) 'Beyond populism studies', *Journal of Language and Politics*, 20(1), pp. 178–195. doi:10.1075/jlp.20044.dec.

De Cleen, B., Glynos, J. and Mondon, A. (2018) 'Critical research on populism: Nine rules of engagement', *Organization*, 25(5), pp. 649–661. doi:10.1177/1350508418768053.

De Standaard (2002) 'De linkse intellectueel als pispaal', 2 May.

De Vos, P. (2002a) 'Die bloedmooie Chileense laat u groeten, meneer de hoofdredacteur', *De Morgen*, 2 May, p. 25.

De Vos, P. (2002b) 'Rechts populisme en het radicale centrum', *De Morgen*, 23 April.

Dean, J. and Maiguashca, B. (2020) 'Did somebody say populism? Towards a renewal and reorientation of populism studies', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 25(1), pp. 11–27. doi:10.1080/13569317.2020.1699712.

Desmet, Y. (2002) 'Over kut-Marokkaantjes, hondendrollen en Jean-Marie Le Pen', *De Morgen*, 24 April, p. 32.

Eklundh, E. (2020) 'Excluding Emotions: The Performative Function of Populism', *Partecipazione e Conflitto*. doi:10.1285/l20356609V13I1P107.

Giddens, A. (1987) *Social theory and modern sociology*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

Glynos, J. and Howarth, D. (2007) *Logics of critical explanation in social and political theory*. London: Routledge.

Glynos, J. and Mondon, A. (2016) 'The political logic of populist hype: The case of right-wing populism's "meteoric rise" and its relation to the status quo', *POPULISMUS Working Papers* [Preprint], (4). Available at: https://www.academia.edu/30703329/The_political_logic_of_populist_hype_The_case_of _right-wing_populism_s_meteoric_rise_and_its_relation_to_the_status_quo (Accessed: 15 November 2017).

Gobin, G. (2002) 'Les économistes contre la démocratie?', *L'Echo*, 18 October.

Goyvaerts, J. and De Cleen, B. (2020) 'Media, Anti-Populist Discourse and the Dynamics of the Populism Debate', in *Perspectives on Populism and the Media*. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, pp. 83–108. doi:10.5771/9783845297392-83.

Habermas, J. (1974) 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)', *New German Critique*, (3), p. 49. doi:10.2307/487737.

Haeck, B. (2018) '"Het centrale probleem is dat we onze welvaartsstaat niet kunnen betalen"', *De Tijd*, 12 May, p. 33.

Hall, S. *et al.* (eds) (1978) *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. London: Macmillan (Critical social studies).

Hallin, D.C. (1989) *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*. Univ of California Press.

Herkman, J. (2017) 'Articulations of populism: the Nordic case', *Cultural Studies*, 31(4), pp. 470–488. doi:10.1080/09502386.2016.1232421.

Hofstadter, R. (1955) *The Age of Reform: from Bryan to F.D.R.* London: Jonathan Cape.

Jäger, A. (2016) 'The Semantic Drift: Images of populism in post-war American historiography and their relevance for (European) political science', *POPULISMUS Working Papers* [Preprint], (3).

Jäger, A. (2017) 'The semantic drift: Images of populism in post-war American historiography and their relevance for (European) political science', *Constellations-an International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*, 24(3), pp. 310–323. doi:10.1111/1467-8675.12308.

Kaltwasser, C.R. *et al.* (2017) 'Populism: An Overview of the Concept and the State of the Art', in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, pp. 1–27. Available at: http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780198803560-e-34 (Accessed: 12 March 2018).

Karavasilis, L. (2017) 'Perceptions of "Populism" and "Anti-populism" in Greek Public Discourse during the Crisis: The case of the website "Anti-news"', *Politik*, 20(4). Available at: https://tidsskrift.dk/politik/article/view/101535 (Accessed: 12 March 2018).

Katsambekis, G. (2015) 'The Place Of The People In Post-Democracy. Researching "Antipopulism" And Post-Democracy In Crisis-Ridden Greece.', *POSTData: Revista de Reflexión y Análisis Político*, 19(2), pp. 555–582.

Katsambekis, G. (2020) 'Constructing "the people" of populism: a critique of the ideational approach from a discursive perspective', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, pp. 1–22. doi:10.1080/13569317.2020.1844372.

Kim, S. (2018) *Populism and anti-populism in the 2017 Dutch, French, and German elections: A discourse and hegemony analytic approach*. POPULISMUS Working Papers.

Kim, S. (2021) 'Taking stock of the field of populism research: Are ideational approaches "moralistic" and post-foundational discursive approaches "normative"?', *Politics*, p. 026339572110070. doi:10.1177/02633957211007053.

Knight, A. (1998) 'Populism and neo-populism in Latin America, especially Mexico', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 30(2), pp. 223–248.

Krämer, B. (2018) 'Populism, Media, and the Form of Society', *Communication Theory*, 28(4), pp. 444–465. doi:10.1093/ct/qty017.

Laclau, E. (2005) *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Verso.

Loisen, J. and Joye, S. (2017) *On Media & Communication: An Introduction to Communication*

Sciences: Theory and Research. Eerste druk: 2017. Leuven Den Haag: Acco.

Loobuyck, P. (2002) 'Beklaagde, sta op', *De Standaard*, 27 May, p. 9.

Maiguashca, B. (2019) 'Resisting the "populist hype": a feminist critique of a globalising concept', *Review of International Studies*, 45(5), pp. 768–785. doi:10.1017/S0260210519000299.

McCombs, M. and Shaw, D. (1972) 'The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), pp. 176–187.

McQuail, D. (2010) *McQuail's mass communication theory*. Sage publications.

Moffitt, B. (2018) 'The Populism/Anti-Populism Divide in Western Europe', *Democratic Theory*, 5(2), pp. 1–16.

Mouffe, C. (2018) *For a Left Populism*. Verso Books.

Mudde, C. (2004) 'The populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition*, 39(4), pp. 541–563.

Mudde, C. and Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2013) 'Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America', *Government and Opposition*, 48(2), pp. 147–174. doi:10.1017/gov.2012.11.

Müller, J.-W. (2017) *What Is Populism?* Penguin UK.

Neefs, E. (2018) 'Democratie per app, neen bedankt', *De Standaard*, 22 June, p. 12.

Nolens, D. (2002) 'Jaap van Ginneken over het vormen en misvormen van opinies', *De Morgen*, 4 September, p. 30.

d'Otreppe, B. (2018) 'Les recteurs doivent aussi encourager le pouvoir', *La Libre Belgique*, 4 June, p. 7.

Panizza, F. (2005a) 'Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy', in Panizza, F. (ed.) *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. London, UK: Verso Books, pp. 1–31. Available at: http://www.versobooks.com (Accessed: 15 March 2021).

Panizza, F. (2005b) *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. Verso.

Rabaey, M. (2018) 'Maarten Boudry verstrekt een tegengif voor de doemscenario's van "apocaholici": "Verkondig vooral niét het einde van de democratie"', *De Morgen*, 23 June, p. 58.

Raeijmaekers, D. and Maeseele, P. (2015) 'Media, pluralism and democracy: what's in a name?', *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(7), pp. 1042–1059. doi:10.1177/0163443715591670.

Ricci, D.M. (1970) 'Democracy Attenuated: Schumpeter, the Process Theory, and American Democratic Thought', *The Journal of Politics*, 32(2), pp. 239–267.

doi:10.2307/2128653.

Rohrschneider, R. and Thomassen, J. (2020) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Representation in Liberal Democracies*, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Representation in Liberal Democracies*. Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198825081.001.0001.

Rydgren, J. (2017) 'Radical right-wing parties in Europe', *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(4), pp. 485–496. doi:10.1075/jlp.17024.ryd.

Schumpeter, J.A. (1942) *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*. 1. Harper colophon ed., [Nachdr.]. New York, NY: HarperPerennial.

Selfslagh, S. (2018) 'Doet google ons geheugen krimpen?', *De Morgen*, 29 January, p. 16.

Stavrakakis, Y. (2014) 'The Return of "the People": Populism and Anti-Populism in the Shadow of the European Crisis', *Constellations*, 21(4), pp. 505–517. doi:10.1111/1467-8675.12127.

Stavrakakis, Y. (2017a) 'Discourse theory in populism research Three challenges and a dilemma', *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(4), pp. 523–534. doi:10.1075/jlp.17025.sta.

Stavrakakis, Y. (2017b) 'How Did "Populism" Become a Pejorative Concept? And Why is this Important Today? A Genealogy of Double Hermeneutics', *POPULISMUS Working Papers* [Preprint], (6). Available at: http://www.populismus.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/stavrakakis-populismus-wp-6-upload.pdf (Accessed: 18 November 2021).

Stavrakakis, Y. *et al.* (2018) 'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 17(1), pp. 4–27. doi:10.1057/s41296-017-0142-y.

Strömbäck, J. (2005) 'In Search of a Standard: four models of democracy and their normative implications for journalism', *Journalism Studies*, 6(3), pp. 331–345. doi:10.1080/14616700500131950.

Taggart, P.A. (2000) *Populism*. Buckingham [England] ; Philadelphia: Open University Press (Concepts in the social sciences).

Taguieff, P.-A. (1998) 'Populismes et antipopulismes : le choc des argumentations', *Mots*, 55(1), pp. 5–26. doi:10.3406/mots.1998.2343.

Urbinati, N. (1998) 'Democracy and Populism', *Constellations*, 5(1), pp. 110–124. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00080.

Van Baars, L. (2018) 'Je kijkt niet met je ogen, maar met je hersenen', *De Morgen*, 27 December, p. 13.

Van Leuven, S., Deprez, A. and Raeymaeckers, K. (2014) 'Networking or Not Working?:

A comparison of Arab Spring coverage in Belgian newspapers and TV news', *Journalism Practice*, 8(5), pp. 552–562. doi:10.1080/17512786.2014.894325.

Vanempten, J. (2002) 'Van links via populisme naar rechts', *De Tijd*, 28 December, p. 128.

Visscher, M. (2018) 'Historici zullen kapitalisme zien als bron van populisme', *De Morgen*, 6 December.

Ziegler, T. (2018) 'The Populist Hoax – Getting The Far Right and Post-Fascism Wrong', *Social Europe*. Available at: https://www.socialeurope.eu/the-populist-hoax-getting-the-far-right-and-post-fascism-wrong (Accessed: 1 August 2018).

Jana Goyvaerts is a PhD researcher at the Department of Communication Studies of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), and a member of the Research Groups DESIRE and ECHO. Her research focuses on discourses about populism and on how the meaning of populism is constructed by journalists, politicians, and academics.

www.populismus.gr

POPULISMUS: POPULIST DISCOURSE AND DEMOCRACY

Populism is dynamically and unexpectedly back on the agenda. Latin American governments dismissing the so-called "Washington consensus" and extreme right-wing parties and movements in Europe advancing xenophobic and racist stereotypes have exemplified this trend. Emerging social movements and parties in Southern Europe that resisted the administration of the global financial crisis as well as the Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders presidential candidacies in the US have also been branded "populist". The POPULISMUS research project (2014-5) involved a comparative mapping of the populist discourse articulated by such sources in order to facilitate a reassessment of the category of "populism" and to develop a theoretical approach capable of reorienting the empirical analysis of populist ideologies in the global environment of the 21st century. Building on the theoretical basis offered by the discourse theory developed by the so-called "Essex School", POPULISMUS endorsed a discursive methodological framework in order to explore the multiple expressions of populist politics, to highlight the need to study the emerging cleavage between populism and anti-populism and to assess the effects this has on the quality of democracy. Through the dissemination of its research findings and the continuation of its activities we anticipate that the synthetic analysis of populist discourse it put forward and the emerging evaluation of populism's complex and often ambivalent relationship with democracy will advance the relevant scientific knowledge, also enabling the deepening of democratic culture in times of consecutive crises.

ARISTOTLE
UNIVERSITY OF
THESSALONIKI
SCHOOL OF
POLITICAL SCIENCES

OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME
EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING
investing in knowledge society
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS
MANAGING AUTHORITY
European Union
European Social Fund
Co-financed by Greece and the European Union

NSRF
2007-2013
EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND