Chapter 1 Introduction - Discursive Approaches to Populism across Disciplines/ Michael Kranert (University of Southampton)

'How can you spot a populist?' asked the website of the British newspaper *the Guardian* in December 2018 (Rice-Oxley and Kalia, December 03, 2018), introducing its readers to the complexity and ambiguity of the matter. This is but one example of a broader discussion of the meaning and evaluation of 'populism' that is so widespread in politics, media and academia these days. At a time when protesters against the 'Islamisation of the occident' in the streets of Dresden have shouted 'Wir sind das Volk' ('We are the people') and the newly elected British Prime minister Boris Johnson spoke from a lectern announcing 'The People's Government', the use of the keywords 'populist' and 'populism' has become a daily occurrence (see **Kranert, Chapter 2 in this volume**), and in academia publications with 'populism' in the title are reaching a new peak.

This volume contributes to this debate by presenting a cross-disciplinary and international conversation about the discursive nature of 'populist' politics. Its chapters are based on the idea that language and meaning making are central to politics. Political discourse analysts assume that politics is a performative act and the main tool of politicians is language This sentiment, though certainly not shared by everyone interested in researching politics, has had a significant influence on thinking about populism. Ostiguy (2017, 74), for example, stresses that 'populism as an ideology can only be studied through discourse.'

Political discourse analysis is part of a broader cross-disciplinary project called discourse studies (Kranert and Horan 2018, 4). For decades now, the connection between semiosis and power has been approached from both a social and a linguistic perspective. The social sciences have long focused on discourse as a social practice of meaning making which is shaped and shapes power structures in society. These paradigms have undergone a linguistic turn towards the analysis of social reality as constructed in language, while linguistics took a discursive turn, moving from a structural analysis of language to the question of language use in context.

These two strands have recently been brought together by efforts to establish Discourse Studies as a 'fully fledged field in which a number of currents meet' (Angermuller, Maingueneau, and Wodak 2014, 3). Here, the concept of 'discourse' has become a common denominator for theoretical and empirical research and allows an exchange between these different traditions, similar to the concept of 'gender' in 'gender studies' and 'culture' in 'culture studies' (Angermuller 2014, 18). The core assumption of the field is the (post)structuralist idea that reality is accessed and formed through language. While physical objects certainly exist without language, they only gain meaning through discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 8–9).,

This volume brings together researchers who share 'discourse' as a common denominator in their effort to understand the phenomenon of 'populism' in its different shapes, forms, geographies, and from different disciplinary backgrounds. It therefore gives credit to the variety and context dependence of both populist discourse and its analysis, and introduces the reader to a broad toolbox of discourse analytical theories and methodologies to grasp the wealth of discursive phenomena in populist discourse in future research. Although it cannot possibly be representative of this complex field, the aim was to sample the broadest possible representation of ideas on populism, on discourse as well as on the geographical and political location of the research.

In this introduction, I will give a very brief but by no means all-encompassing overview of the variation of the research object of populism across disciplines as well as approaches to discourse within the cross-disciplinary project of discourse studies.

Table 1.1 gives an overview of the disciplinary, methodological, political and geographical context of the different contributions. The final section of this introduction will introduce the core problems that structure the volume.

Populism – approaches to a complex phenomenon

'Populism' as a political phenomenon and as an academic concept is by no means new. Since the beginning of the 20th century, it has been a highly contested political term often used to stigmatise political opponents, but also seen as inspiring democracy. Other than referring to the specific movements of the 19th century, however, Brubaker (2019) shows that academic publications on populism as a more general political phenomenon only appear in the 1950s, cumulating in a first peak of populism research focused on the first waves of populism in Latin America, which were interpreted as a reaction to modernization (Germani 1975). By contrast, the current wave is sometimes seen as a resistance against 'neoliberal, post-democratic forms of governance' (Stavrakakis 2014, 507). The obvious question is, do the various political movements and forms of rhetoric covered in academic research under the label 'populism' really belong together, and if so, how?

A common ground can be found in the basic distinction in populist discourse between 'the people' and an 'Other' that is often described as 'the elite'. Both categories are somewhat abstract and need to be filled with meaning and analytical purpose in a particular context. 'The people' are not a new political category specific to populist discourse. On the contrary, this category has been enshrined as the origin of all political authority in secular democratic societies. The category is based on the idea of a unified and homogeneous body of a sovereign people – a construction that has always been problematic.

Canovan (1981, 298) already stresses that despite 'the people' as a common core of populist discourses, they cannot and should not be reduced to it. Kaltwasser et al. (2017, 1) seem to contradict this as they are warning that the wealth of literature on country specific incarnations of populism means 'that populism literature is not as cumulative as it should be, and it is prone to exception fallacy'. From a discourse analytical point of view, this is a problematic positivist assertion, as political discourse is of course dependent on local context, political institutions and political cultures (Kranert 2019a). But even as a phenomenon that transcends the political coordinates of left and right as well as national political cultures, populism is still dependent on a particular political group. The wealth of populist phenomena analysed in the chapters of this volume underline this critical point.

In the following sections, I will briefly introduce some approaches and problems in populism research. I will point out different understandings of 'populism' as well as their overlaps and situate the chapters in the volume within this debate.

Disciplinary affiliations	Methods and theoretical approaches	Political spectrum	Geographical location
Political science (Baysha, Cadalen, Gaul) **Linguistics** (Demata, Deumert, Issel-Dombert, Kantara, Knoblock, Kranert, Fenton-Smith, Schoor) **Education** (Brandmayr) **Gender Studies** (Kahlina) **Sociology** (Venkov, Mabandla) **Journalism** (Kelsey)	**Anti-colonialism/ Decolonisation** (Mabandla & Deumert) **Argumentation Analysis** (Fenton-Smith) **Critical Discourse Analysis** (Demata, Gaul, Kahlina, Schoor, Brandmayr, Knoblock) **Conversation Analysis** (Kantara) **Corpus linguistics** (Demata, Kranert, Knoblock) **Essex School of Discourse theory** (Baysha, Cadalen, Venkov) **Frame Semantics** (Knoblock) **Interpellation** (Brandmayr) **Multimodality** (Issel-Dombert, Brandmayr) **Political Myth** (Kelsey)	**Right wing** (Baysha, Brandmayr, Gaul, Fenton-Smith, Kahlina, Knoblock, Venkov) **Left-wing** (Cadalen, Demata, Issel-Dombert) **Transcending left-right** (Kantara, Kelsey, Kranert, Schoor) **Anti-colonialism/ Decolonisation** (Mabandla & Deumert)	**Australia** (Fenton-Smith) **Austria** (Brandmayr) **Bolivia** (Cadalen) **Bulgaria** (Venkov) **Croatia** (Kahlina) **Ecuador** (Cadalen) **Greece** (Cantara) **Germany** (Kranert) **Netherlands (**Schoor) **South Africa/ Pan-African context** (Mabandla & Deumert) **Spain** (Issel-Dombert) **Sri Lanka** (Gaul) **Ukraine** (Baysha) **UK** (Demata, Kelsey, Kranert, Schoor) **USA** (Knoblock, Schoor)

Table 1.1: Contributions and their disciplinary, methodological and political contexts

Populism as an ideology: The Ideational Approach

The ideational approach to populism originates from studies of new right-wing parties in Western Europe, which frame their politics as 'people' against 'elites'. While 'populism' was originally an academic term referring to single political movements rather than to a broader political phenomenon, the ideational approach aimed to produce a generic definition. Mudde (2007, 23) calls populism a thin-centred ideology: Whereas full-blown political ideologies are formed of normative ideas and specific ways of transforming societies according to them, thin-centred ideologies lack this feature and are often combined with features from political ideologies such as neo-liberalism or socialism. Mudde (2017) suggests three elements are central to populist ideologies, all of which are based on a moral divide:

(1) 'the people' as a homogeneous and morally 'pure' group that is defined by populists according to the target community of their politics;
(2) 'the corrupt elite' as the anti-thesis of 'the people'
(3) the general will that is '[b]ased on a kind of vulgar Rousseauian argument […] that politics should follow the general will of the people' as they, by definition morally pure and homogenous, are in possession of common sense (Mudde 2017, 33).

The issues of the ideational approach are well known. Firstly, the notion of thin-centred ideologies is vague. Their combination with elements of other ideologies makes a methodological operationalisation difficult, as it would lead us back to the question of distinguishing populism from non-populism. The ideational approach also allows only a limited understanding of 'the people', an understanding that is one-dimensional and not empirical. Populism research needs to take into account other elements of populist politics that are not morally defined, such as 'the people as democratic souvereign' and 'the people as a nation'. This would need a clearer understanding of how categories are constructed and performed in political discourse itself, yet the ideational approach adopts a very positivist manner in that it treats ideas as given and does not reflect on their creation and reproduction. Such reflection is a core element of the discursive approaches showcased in this volume.

A final issue is that populism in this approach seems to be treated as pathological phenomenon that threatens liberal democracy or is at best ambiguous to democratisation, while a discourse theoretical approaches such as Laclau's (2005, 13) reject 'an approach to populism in terms of abnormality, deviance or manipulation'. This issue is particularly addressed by **Mabandla and Deumert (in this volume)** who show that 'populism' in the South African context 'is woven into the texture of resistance politics'. In this context, populism has a different, de-colonial and anti-colonial meaning.

Populism as political style and repertoire

While sharing Mudde's (2007) minimal definition of populism, approaches to populism as political style or political repertoire assume that politics is performed and semiotically constructed. Moffit and Tormey (2014) argue the concept of style can help analysing phenomena that are normally subsumed under the concepts ideology, discourse or organisation, concepts that in their view lack the performance element of politics and do not take into consideration that political performance creates political beings.

The idea of populism as a political style amongst others, such as technocratic and authoritarian, enables us to analyse populism as part of mainstream politics, because it captures the situated appearance of populist features in the behaviour of politicians – they can slip into and out of it. It also

links politics to entertainment, especially as populism can be seen as 'the media-political form par excellence' (Moffitt 2016, 77).

The analysis of populism as political style has adopted arguments from the socio-cultural approach, which sees populism as a relational concept between political leaders and their social basis. Ostiguy (2017, 73–74) suggests that the core element of this populist relationship between leaders and the social basis is identity creation rather than contesting world views. This relationship is formed through 'low appeals', i.e. the use of supposedly bad manners in accent, body language, taste and performance. This creates a rapport between populist leaders and their followers. Based on this, **Kantara (in this volume)** analyses how populist style appears in TV interviews between mainstream party-political leaders and TV journalist. Her analysis shows how conversational violence (Luginbühl 2007) as part of the populist style is normalised in these interviews.

More comprehensive than the stylistic approach is the idea of populism as a repertoire. Brubaker (2017) argues that repertoire can be taken as a broader concept in populism research: Style only captures discursive, rhetorical and stylistic elements of populism and neglects ideological commitment, policies and organisational practices. These can be grasped with the metaphor of repertoire that, in Brubaker's view, has three useful implications: It suggests that there is a set of historically established, standardized elements of political discourse known to political actors. Treating these elements as a repertoire construes different occurrences of populist politics as belonging together by family resemblance: Not all of them will share the same elements and, more importantly, elements on their own might not be seen as populist. Instead, it is their link to the core element of populism – the claim to speak on behalf of 'the people' – that makes them populist. Finally, the repertoire metaphor 'suggests a way of responding to the claim that populism is ubiquitous (and therefore cannot serve as a useful analytical category). For while the populist repertoire is chronically available in contemporary democratic contexts, it is not chronically deployed.' (Brubaker 2017, 362)

Brubaker (2017) suggests five central elements of a populist repertoire: Populist politics reacts to the depoliticisation, i.e. the removal of spheres of life such as the economy or the life risks from democratic decision making, with antagonistic re-politicisation, blaming 'the elites' for the abdication of national sovereignty and a lack of political alternatives. This element is relevant for both left-wing and right-wing populism. Directly following from this idea is the element of economic, security-related and cultural protectionism, which offers people a protection from a crisis supposedly caused by 'the elites', a crisis that is constructed through the exaggerations and distortions of populist rhetoric. Another element of the repertoire leads us back to the idea the high-low axis in politics, which Ostiguy (2009) describes as fully independent of the left-right axis. The low dimension of this axis is more than language, taste and performance, it also has conceptual and strategic elements such as anti-political correctness and the devaluation of complexity through rhetorical practices of simplicity, directness and anti-intellectualism. The finale two elements are radical majoritarianism and anti-institutionalism

Various problems have been identified in the idea of populism as a political style. Weyland (2001) criticizes the concept as too wide and running the risk of hindering a distinction of populist and non-populist politics. Wodak (2015, 3) warns that the danger of populism lies in its integration of form and content, so to see populism only as a political style risks to downplay the ideological substance of populist movements. While this would suggest that the rethinking of populism as a political repertoire could potentially solve that problem, it could be argued that the original critique of the concept of 'interpretative repertoires' suggested by discursive psychology (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 147) applies here as well: It lacks empirical support and, as practitioners of critical discourse analysis have suggested, neglects the of analysis of linguistic form, which is central to meaning making. Various chapters in this volume attempt to rectify this problem: **Schoor (in this volume)** employs a

multidimensional approach to the analysis of political discourse that links the concepts of populism, elitism and pluralism. On the basis of political speeches from Britain, the United States and the Netherlands, she demonstrates that politicians of various political affiliations draw on that continuum, a result that suggests that populism is indeed a part of a general political repertoire. **Kahlina (in this volume)** supplies further evidence by analysing how ethno-nationalism and heterosexism are part of the populist repertoire. In her analysis of discourses driven by the campaign group Behalf of the Family (OBF) in Croatia shows how these elements tie in with the other elements of a populist repertoire suggested by Brubaker. **Gaul (in this volume)** demonstrates how the repertoires of populism and authoritarianism are interlinked and how populist style draws on local political resources.

Populism from a poststructuralist discourse theoretical perspective

Poststructuralist approaches to populism grew out of the critique of sociological modernisation theories which analysed populism in Latin America from the 1940s to 1960s as a result of the transition from a traditional to an industrial society (Germani 1975). In his alternative interpretation, Laclau describes populism as a logic of the political, a logic that is central to our understanding of politics: 'Populism starts at the point where popular democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc.' (Laclau 1977: 173)

Laclau (2005) takes Saussure's identity/difference nexus as a starting point to explain the reality of political antagonisms. Based on Saussure's paradigmatic and syntagmatic axis in signification, his discourse theory suggests two major logics in discourse: In the logic of difference, individual political demands create different signifiers and increase the complexity of the political. As long as these diverse demands can be successfully made in an administrative way, this is a successful logic. If, however, more and more political demands are neglected, a logic of equivalence is necessary. This logic simplifies the political space by finding equivalences between demands and common signifiers to make these demands heard. Therefore, this logic is often a reaction to a dislocation or crisis.

A populist logic leads to an internal antagonistic frontier separating 'people' and power. Here, 'the people' act as a nodal point, 'a point of reference around which other peripheral and often antithetical signifiers and ideas can become articulated' (Stavrakakis 2017, 528). 'The people' therefore acts as an empty signifier that represents the equivalential chain to keep this political discourse unified; it is a structuring signifier of populist discourse.

This formal poststructuralist theory of populism has several advantages: It does not presuppose a moral element like the ideational approach does and is not based on a priori assumptions about the definition of 'the people' and 'the elite' or their ideological aims. Despite being highly abstract, it is a useful theoretical approach for discourse analysists as it is based on semiotics, hence it is compatible with their assumption about the discursive character of reality. It also suggests a discourse theoretical explanation of the 'us and them' construction that is a core element of the theory of ideologies as group phenomena developed within CDA (van Dijk 1998, 67) and generalises the idea of semantic battles as a central mechanism of political discourse (Kranert 2019a, 101–68).

This volume offers various contributions employing poststructuralist discourse theory to discuss populism. **Baysha (in this volume)** uses it to enquire how the Euromaidan attempted to articulate itself as a group representing the whole of Ukraine, demonstrating how strong appeals to morality and the dichotomy of good and evil led to the intensification of the conflict. **Cadalen's (in this volume)** comparative empirical study demonstrates that populist discourse as a strategy creates *a people* that is strongly linked to local political structure and discourse history. **Venkov (in this volume)** offers an important theoretical contribution as he aims to extend PDT to make it more empirically fruitful. He sees it as well equipped to understand the ontology of the political, i.e. the constitution of the political

in discourse, but argues that it poses a difficulty understanding the ontic level that is based on politics as complex interaction of subjects. It is therefore necessary to introduce the analytical concepts of discursive social actor, discourse circulation and access to discourse. This allows him to reframe accounts of populist discourse that see it as either disillusion of the masses or malicious propaganda: An important reason might be the weakening of liberal political hegemony because of wider access to political discourse.

Political Discourse: Concepts, methods, approaches

As a linguistic discourse analyst and sociolinguist, I tend to approach the concept of discourse from its origins in linguistics, so these introductory remarks on political discourse will move from discourse as language use to discourse as knowledge systems structured by power. I will first introduce Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Discourse Linguistics (DL) as linguistic approaches to language in context and demonstrate the advantage of combining them with methods from corpus linguistics and multimodal discourse analysis as well as ideas on narrative. Argumentation analysis will be discussed as a separate strand, as it is independently used by scholars of rhetoric in both political science and linguistics. A further linguistic approach necessary to capture the increasingly mediated world of politics is the analysis of talk in interaction. I will finally turn to post-foundational discourse theory, and show how this is also in need of drawing on both social science and linguistic methodologies to capture political discourse empirically. Throughout the text, I signpost where these various permutations of discourse theory and discourse analysis are represented in this volume.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Discourse Linguistics

The difficulty with CDA as a central element of Discourse Studies is how to categorize it. Is it a method, methodology, theory, school? The difficulty arises because it is an overarching term for a broad variety of analytical methods and approaches. Van Dijk (1993) describes it as 'at most a shared perspective on doing linguistics, semiotics or discourse analysis'. This shared perspective is based on an interest in natural occurring language use in context. CDA investigates language as a form of social practice, which implies that language use and situative, institutional and social context are in a dialectic relationship – language shapes context, context shapes language (Fairclough and Wodak 1997).

Wodak and Meyer (2009a, 3) explain that CDA is in 'theory as well as methodology […] eclectic, both of which are integrated as far as is helpful to understand the social problems under investigation.' Therefore, under the umbrella of the term CDA, we can find a broad theoretical spectrum from Marxist dialectics to cognitive linguistics (see Wodak and Meyer 2009b). The analyses can focus on cognitive and interactional strategies as well as on argumentation and multimodality.

Parallel to debates in CDA is the development of German politico-linguistics , which originated in reflections on the language of National Socialism. Central concepts such as genres of political discourse, catch terms (Schlagwörter) and argumentative topoi are now integrated into a framework known as Discourse Linguistics (DL) (see Kranert 2019a, 9–15). In contrast to CDA, DL has a slightly more positivist approach to research and sees the notion of critique developed by CDA as problematic: CDA could, in Wengeler's (2011) view, run the risk of being circular as their determination to start with what is assumed as a social wrong might predetermine the results of the research.

However, these dividing lines seem to wane. **Issel-Dombert (in this volume),** for example, draws on discourse linguistics as a 'linguistic response to current social challenges and issues', and applies it to the populist discourse produced by the Spanish party Podemos. Her contribution introduces the model *TexSem* (Gardt 2012) developed within Discourse Linguistics, and employs it to demonstrate the intertextuality between the election manifesto of Podemos and the IKEA catalogue as an anti-elitist strategy.

A methodology that is often combined with CDA is Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) (Partington, Duguid, and Taylor 2013). Akin to CDA, this is not a single method or theory, but 'utilizes a collection of different methods which are related by the fact that they are performed on large collections of electronically stored, naturally occurring texts' (Baker et al. 2008, 274). Although in its mother discipline, corpus linguistics, the aim of electronic analysis and quantification has sometimes been to produce a more 'objective' analysis or to 'avoid human bias in an analysis' (McEnery, Xiao and Tono 2006: 6), this has always been questioned by discourse analysts on the basis of their constructivist epistemology. However, even without buying the positivist notion of a corpus-assisted analysis bypassing intuition and bias, corpus approaches have clear advantages: They make larger text corpora manageable, provide tools to analyse linguistic patterns in them and give discourse analysts a new tool for data access as well as for triangulation. **In this volume**, **Knoblock** as well as **Demata** employ corpus tools to access their complex data, while **Kranert** presents a fully developed longitudinal study utilising corpus statistics in combination with a concordance analysis to study the use of 'populism' and 'populist' in German and British political discourse.

A further way of expanding critical analysis of discourse is the development of tools to analyse multimodal discourse (Kress and Leeuwen 2006). This is particularly relevant in an age of rapid media change where multimodal representation of discourse has become dominant through the use of online platforms. **Brandmayr (in this volume),** combines multimodal analysis with the discourse theory of interpellation to gain insights into how populist politics is done online.

An element long-side-lined in discourse analysis is the analysis of narratives and political myths. These are central to political discourse as they 'condition the public to the powerful symbols used by politicians' (Bennett 1980, 168). Political myths and narratives are now researched in terms of their integration into the argumentative structures of political discourse (Kranert 2018), but also in terms of being part of the available structures that are used in journalism to interpret the world (Kelsey 2015). **Kelsey (in this volume)** analyses the example of the 'Intellectual Dark Web' and its underlying archetypal populism, showing how a monomyth forms a cohesive narrative that overarches what seems to be a complex and diverse conversation between various public figures who relate to the concept of the intellectual dark web. The metaphor of murmurations turns out to be analytically helpful to describe these functions, as it grasps both the shared recurring patterns of narratives as well as their transformation over time.

Argumentation Analysis and Rhetoric
The analysis of argumentation patterns forms a central part of the discourse-historical approach (DHA) (Reisigl and Wodak 2009), but was also further developed in the German tradition of politico-linguistics (Klein 2000; Wengeler 2016; Kranert 2019a). The focus of the analysis lies on argumentative schemes called topoi that are not always explicitly communicated but necessary to understand the argument. They allow the transition from the data to the conclusion.

Argumentation is also relevant to the rhetorical analysis of political speech – a method that has recently become influential in political science, where Martin and Finlayson (2008) have developed a research programme called Rhetorical Political Analysis (RPA). While discourse analysts are interested in the linguistic mechanisms constructing social reality, political scientist mainly focus on how political thinking depends on ideas and concepts, and their historical forms.

In this volume, Fenton-Smith draws on argumentation theory for his analysis of Australian right-wing populism, focusing on one particular element of rhetoric and argumentation: the persuasive power of definitions, combining insights from studies in rhetoric and political science to distinguish different functions and mechanisms of persuasive definitions in the political discourse of Pauline Hanson.

Talk in interaction

Parallel to CDA and discourse theoretical approaches in Europe, sociologists in the US developed approaches to discourse from the philosophical tradition of pragmatism: ethnography, interactionism (Goffman 1981) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967). These methodologies aim to study individuals' experiences from their own perspective, using observation to understand what speakers are doing. Even more focused on the language is Schegloff and Sacks's (1973) version, which researches conversational organisation in detail in order to understand patterns of relations between individual interactants.

Conversation analysis and interactionist sociolinguistics have a distinct advantage for the analysis of political discourse: They are concerned with naturally occurring discourse interactions and take an emic perspective by analysing the orientations of the discourse participants themselves. This is particularly relevant in a media driven age where political discourse is often observed by voters as being co-constructed by politicians and media professionals in conversation. **Kantara (in this volume)** applies conversation analysisto political interviews in Greece to gather evidence for the idea of populism as political style in mainstream politics, especially conversational violence in news interviews.

Post-foundational discourse theory

While the linguistic approaches above started out from discourse as language use and moved, through contact with post-structuralist ideas, toward the idea of discourse constructing the social, the origins of post-foundational discourse started from an ontological question: What is society? Laclau and Mouffe (1985), as two of the main proponents of discourse theory, begin their answer with a critique of Marxism: They moved against the economic determinism of Marxism and produced an approach to the social as discursive construction.

Drawing on Gramsci's idea of hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) dismiss the Marxist theory of the economic base determining the social superstructure along with the idea of an objective class based society and argue that identity is not class based but a result of discursive struggles. They conceptualise the discursive struggle by deconstructing Saussure's structural semiotics that assumes meaning as a fixed network, demonstrating that meaning can not be fixed, as the signifiers tend to glide and are therefore always contested. Thus, discourse theory understands the social as discursive construction that cannot ever be finished or total. 'Discourse'*,* in this approach, is a structured totality that results from the practice of articulation: the formation of a network of signifiers to make meaning (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 105). Nodal points are signifiers used to order other signifiers in an equivalential chain and attempt fix their meaning. Nodal points are often floating signifiers: In linguistic terms they are concepts whose meaning is heavily contested, e.g. 'democracy' or 'freedom'. To gain hegemony, political actors attempt to stabilise a discursive system (for example liberal, representative democracy) by redefining signifiers in a way that public views are made compatible with the interests of the ruling group. However, there will always be resistance to these redefinitions, therefore discourses can never be a totality and are always just partially structured.A further insight from discourse theory is that discourse produces social positions – an idea Laclau and Mouffe borrowed from Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation.

It has always been a major criticism of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory that it 'is short on specific methodological guidelines and illustrative examples' (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 8). Therefore, a combination with empirical methods is necessary. **Brandmayr (in this volume)**, for example, combines discourse theory with elements of critical discourse analysis and multimodality to understand populist discourses online and to draw conclusions for political education. **Cadalen (in this volume)** draws on interview material from his research in Ecuador and Bolivia to understand the

dependency of the discursive construction 'the people' on local political, institutional and ideological contexts.

Populist discourses: Core questions

Having situated the chapters both in the discussion on populism as a research project as well as the theoretical and methodological map of discourse studies, I will now briefly introduce the core questions that guide research on populist discourse at the moment and how they structure this volume.

Populism and Nationalism

Populism and nationalism are closely related both as academic concepts and as elements of political discourse, where right-wing politics is often called both 'nationalist' and 'populist'. Employing methods of corpus assisted discourse analysis, **Kranert (in this volume),** demonstrates a shift in the semantic prosody of the terms 'populist' and 'populism' in the German and British press between 2012 and 2017 from a stigma term for rhetorical policy-making in all ideological quarters towards a name for right-wing nativist politics.

Populism and nationalism share 'the people' as a central signifier that is highly ambiguous (Mény and Surel 2002; Brubaker 2019). Mény and Surel (2002) distinguish three main meanings in populist discourse:

- Common/ordinary people;
- Sovereign people as demos;
- Bounded/distinct people as ethnos;

Similarly to populism, nationalism has been conceptualised as a thin-centred ideology: Different varieties of nationalism depend on the meaning produced through the combination of nationalism with other political signifiers such as liberty or democracy (Freeden 1998). Populism and nationalism with their central shared signifier are therefore easy to link; however, they draw on that signifier differently (Brubaker 2019, 7). De Cleen (2017, 342) argues that a clear distinction between nationalism and populism is necessary in order to also grasp non-nationalist populism: Populism uses people-as-underdog and nationalism uses people-as-nation. However, the co-articulation of these concepts produces a multi-layered meaning of 'people' (de Cleen 2017, 347; for an empirical example in the UK and Germany see Kranert 2019b). This leads Brubaker (2019) to the conclusion that populism and nationalism are analytically distinct but not independent of each other, and it is this interdependence that explains the productivity of the signifier 'the people'. The co-articulation is not merely contingent, but constitutive for populism, as its discursive construction of the political realm need both a vertical and horizontal dimension (see also Stavrakakis 2017).

In this volume, Baysha, Gaul and **Demata** all demonstrate this constitutive link between populism and nationalism in politically and geographically very different case studies: **Baysha** analyses the populist discourse of the Euromaidan in Ukraine employing a post-foundational framework. She demonstrates how the signifier of a 'Ukrainian people' is constituted in political discourse – and how it was read as nationalist discourse by the opponents of the Maidan.Using CDA, **Gaul** analysis the populist-authoritarian discourse of President Mahinda Rajapaksa (2005 - 2015), arguing that it relies on the Sinhalese nationalist framework. **Demata** demonstrates how Jeremy Corbyn's populist includes a nationalist element.

Populism and Post-truth

The new wave of public and academic debate on populism occurred alongside a debate about so-called 'post-truth' and the question about the links between the rise of online media, manipulation of the public debate and right-wing populism. 'Post truth' was named word of the year 2016 by the

Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford English Dictionary 2016), and the link to populism was made in various press releases, e.g. 'In the era of Donald Trump and Brexit, Oxford Dictionaries has declared "post-truth" to be its international word of the year.' (Flood, November 15, 2016)

The question that needs to be asked of course is whether this is a new development. Both Orwell's ideas on doublethink and newspeak in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell 1949) and research on propaganda are much older (e.g. Herman and Chomsky 1988). Furthermore, Hannah Arendt already pointed out in 1977 that 'no one has ever doubted that truth and politics are on rather bad terms with each other, and no one, as far as I know, has ever counted truthfulness among the political virtues.' (Arendt 1977, 227)

Discourse analysists have a longstanding interest in the linguistic construction of reality and the mechanisms of propaganda. On a more social and structural level, Foucault (2001, 130) was interested in the politics of truth in a society and the mechanisms of producing and sanctioning knowledge. While Foucault analysed this for the age of mass communication, arguing that news media are under the control of political and economic apparatuses, Harsin (2015, 329) argues that the relationship between institutions of society and discourse circulation can change, especially with changing technology such as social media. However, the development of 'regimes of post-truth' is also driven by the fragmentation of news sources, by user generated content, but also content targeted through algorithms on the corporate-political level. Bratich (2004) saw this regime change arrive before the rise of social media with the 'War on Terror', whose propaganda was not one big lie repeated, but the use of many little lies: 'The retractions, prevarications, withdrawals, and recontextualizations come so quickly and without fanfare that "truth" is a difficult value to hang one's strategy on.' (Bratich 2004, 237)

Four chapters in this volume approach questions of truth, post-truth and populism in a different way. **Knoblock (in this volume)** is interested in the reception of political communication and the audiences interpretation of vagueness. She analyses unscripted, unprompted online exchanges about Trump's announcement of a Muslim ban in the 2016 presidential election campaign. Analysing fillers of semantic slots that were modified when commenters discussed Trump's statement, she demonstrates how audiences interpret political discourse based on their own values and reinterpret vague comments.

Based on the psychoanalytical theory of Carl Jung, **Kelsey's (in this volume)** discourse-mythological approach (DAM) focuses on archetypal narratives used to share values, morals and ideals in politics. He argues that archetypes are products of a combination of neurological and cultural-behavioural patterns. These archetypes provide cohesive narratives to pitch the people against the elite, transcend the left left-right spectrum and are deeply engrained in (political) cultures. Using the phenomenon of the Intellectual dark web, Kelsey demonstrates that the Web 2.0 is a particularly effective means for the dissemination of such narratives.

Brandmayr (in this volume) asks why populist messages are reaching people more easily on Facebook. Drawing on Althusser (1971), he argues that Facebook is a place of subjectivation. He analyses the discourse on willingness of Muslims to integrate in Austria and suggests that the idea of social media as filter bubbles is too simplistic. Rather, to explain their role in political discourse, it is important to understandhow individuals become social and political subjects. He shows that images and videos on social media link the subject that constitutes itself to discourses because of the vagueness of collective symbols.

Venkov (in this volume) discusses the rise of populist political dynamics in liberal democratic states as the by-product of a more politically emancipated citizenry due to a restructuring of the circulation of discourses. He argues that there is a shift in the dynamics of how ordinary people acquire politicised identities, which he grounds in the advent of new media. He warns us that the results of this process

might be beyond just "more populism"; instead, we might be witnessing a break up of the hegemonic grip of the post-war liberal-democratic consensus and a retrenchment of liberal values.

Populism and the political space

In Western liberal democracies, political discourse is traditionally characterised by the left-right metaphor, which is a core part of the political repertoire. However, its exact meaning has always been vague and relative to a political culture as well as the historical frame of reference. Ostiguy (2017) suggests to add a high-low dimension to the analysis of political space in oder to understand populism as a relational concept between political leaders and social basis with the low dimension describing anti-elitism and transgression.

Populist movements restructure political competition and therefore the political space, but this research area has attracted too little attention so far. Roberts (2018) analyses this restructuring in the 1990s and early 2000s in Latin America, where left-wing populist leaders challenged hegemonic neoliberal policies. He sees a similarity in southern Europe after the 2008 financial crisis: As the centre-left moved towards austerity, emerging left-wing movements avoided self-identification with the party-political left in order to have a broader appeal, adopting citizenship identities and promising restoration of power to the people.

In this volume several contributions are looking at left-wing populism **(Demata, Issel-Dombert, Cadalen)**. **Demata** discusses the discursive strategies of Jeremy Corbyn and argues that he identifies 'the people' by social class and age, constructing the antagonism against the elite in political and economic terms. He also shows that Corbyn's discourse contains strong elements of nationalism.**Issel-Dombert** demonstrates how the election manifesto of the Spanish left-wing party *Podemos* imitates the *IKEA* catalogue to align themselves with 'the people' and construct the people-elite distinction.In a comparative study of Ecuador and Bolivia, **Cadalen** demonstrates how left-wing populism as a strategy differs depending on the details of the ideological basis of the populist movements as well as the institutional and cultural context. He also argues that in the transition from opposition to government, populist discourse needs to adapt, a process that is still governed by the political context of the movement.

Most approaches to populism see it, in one way or another, as part of mainstream politics: The idea of a populist repertoire is interesting here as it combines style, discourse and ideology, while the postfoundational approach sees populism as a general political logic. Mudde's (2004, 550–51) suggests Tony Blair's rhetoric as a good example for mainstream populism as, for example in the struggle with the Countryside Alliance over foxhunting 'Labour presents itself as the champion of the (true) English people against the privileges of the (upper class) elite.'

In this volume, Schoor as well as **Kantara** analyse populism as a main-stream phenomenon that changes the political landscape. **Schoor** develops a framework that links the concepts of populism, elitism and pluralism and identifies political styles in this semantic network. **Kantara** employs conversation analysis to demonstrate how populist styles are employed in TV interviews with mainstream politicians.

Two contributions focus on populism in civil society: **Kahlina (in this volume)** discusses how a neglected element of the populist repertoire, heteronormativity and heterosexism, is foregrounded by the Croatian organisation *On behalf of the family.*

In their contribution on populism in the African context**, Mabandla and Deumert (in this volume)** analyse political documents as well as in creative expressions of the 'soundscape of freedom songs' in Africa in order to shift the perspective on populism away from the Western perspective towards a perspective from anti-colonialism and decolonisation, as shift that should allow us to rediscover

traditions of collective decision making and people-centred politics, without which the ongoing freedom struggles could not be successful.

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