International Symposium
Populism and Borders. Theoretical Reflections and Empirical Insights

11-12 November 2022, University of Lausanne
Géopolis Building, Room 1620

Friday 11 November 2022
Zoom Link: https://unil.zoom.us/j/96946003143

14:00 – 14:15: Introduction (**Oscar Mazzoleni**, University of Lausanne & **Christian Lamour**, LISER, Luxembourg)

Session 1, Chair: Massimiliano Demata, University of Turin

14:15 – 14:40: **James Scott**, University of Eastern Finland

Internal Bordering as a Populist Strategy: Examples from Orban's Hungary and Trump's America

Popular discontent with what is perceived to be status quo politics has opened up opportunities for populist political forces. Arguably, the most potent form of anti-democratic political mobilisation is that of illiberalism and its manipulations of anxieties related to questions of national and socio-cultural identity. At heart is a questioning of national societies as pluralistic communities with shared core values. In the cases of Viktor Orban's political regime in Hungary and Donald Trump's four-year presidency (and its aftermath) we find a pronounced attempt to create narrative hegemony of a sense of nation built upon Christian civilisation and foundationalist understandings of national identity. As part of this identity-based practice of "divide and rule", we see in both cases processes of socio-cultural as well as spatial boundary-making (or bordering). These processes are reflected in social norming and discursive othering that create distinctions based on degrees of national "authenticity." At the same time, social bordering as a political project intersects with psychological processes such as "enclave deliberation" and group self-referentiality that reflect deeper divisions within national societies. In this paper, an ontological security approach will be employed in order to compare in the cases of Hungary and the US how socio-spatial bordering processes have been exploited as a source of illiberal political power. Despite many similarities, the actual mobilisation of popular support reflects local conditions and has resulted in rather different outcomes.

14:40 – 15:05: **Ruth Wodak**, Lancaster University

"Some are more equal than others?!" - "Collective Amnesia" and the Normalization of a Rhetoric of Exclusion

In my contribution, I first present a summary of recent quantitative and qualitative studies on media reporting and political communication that deal with the so-called "migration problem". Simply by being called a "problem", a thousand-year-old phenomenon is perceived as disruptive, burdensome, and threatening; a problem that now must be "solved" – instead of being understood as inherent part of the history of civilization. The dehistoricization is also manifested by the term "illegal migrants", which immediately criminalizes all migrants and refugees. Furthermore, for example, the use of the term "Fortress Europe" is negatively connotated, which is frequently used and not challenged. Indeed, we are confronted with various huge contradictions in the field of asylum and migration policies which are essentialized and taken as given – the well-known TINA-argument! In this way, numerous euphemisms in the Orwellian tradition support and inspire the normalization of right-wing populist agendas (Wodak 2021).

15:05 – 15:30: **Michal Krzyzanowski**, Uppsala University

Crisis and the Normalization of Politics of Exclusion: Discursive Shifts in European Far Right Imagination

This presentation looks at the strategic role of crises in the dynamics of contemporary far-right politics. Special attention is paid here to how crises are constructed and mobilised as well as outright 'performed' (Moffitt 2016) by the far right thus remaining central strategic tools of not only the dynamics of rhetoric of European right-wing populism but also its actions aimed at normalising a much deeper – and indeed long lasting – far right nativist politics of exclusion (Krzyżanowski et. al. 2022; Krzyżanowski & Krzyżanowska 2022). The presentation will first discuss the key tendencies in how crises have traditionally been constructed in the discourse and politics of the European far right (Krzyżanowski & Ledin 2017; Wodak & Krzyżanowski 2017). It will then show that crises have effectively been made into one of the central pre-legitimatory tools (Krzyżanowski 2014) that enabled initiation of a number of wider 'discursive shifts' (Krzyżanowski 2018a, 2018b, 2020b) by the far right in contemporary European public spheres. Here, the analysis will focus on various strategies of amplification of crises that directly/overtly or indirectly/implicitly have been – in the course of the said 'discursive shifts' initiated by the far right – strategically connected to immigration and cultural diversity. As will be shown, imaginary amplification of such crises has often allowed the latter to both criticise its political opponents and self-style themselves as the champions of anti-immigration – and the wider anti-diversity and anti-pluralism – agenda. The latter has been, as a result, eventually normalised (Krzyżanowski 2020a, b) across the wider social and political spectrum and across a number of European countries.

15:30 – 16:00: Coffee break
16:00 – 17:00: General discussion

<u>**Saturday 12 November 2022**</u>
Zoom Link: https://unil.zoom.us/j/91558069588

Session 2, Chair: **Laurent Bernhard**, University of Lausanne/University of Zurich

09:00 – 09:25: **José Javier Olivas Osuna**, UNED

Populism and Borders: Tools for Constructing "The People" and Legitimizing Exclusion

This presentation argues that "the border" and "populism" are mutually constitutive concepts. It shows that (re)bordering claims are usually justified and articulated via populist discursive elements such as antagonism, morality, idealization of society, popular sovereignty and personalistic leadership. The electoral manifestos of four radical right parties —Vox, RN, UKIP, and Brexit Party—, are used to illustrate that borders are basic factors in the process of decontestation of "the people" and construction of exclusion-inclusion narratives. That populists' selective instrumentalization of borders and equivalential logic leads to a non-binary hierarchical "othering" and the emergence of a populist "meta-us".

09:25 – 09:50: **Anna Casaglia**, University of Trento

Territorializing threats in nationalist populist narratives: an Italian perspective on the migration and Covid-19 crises

This presentation explores the capacity of 'territorialising threats' expressed by nationalist populist parties by reinventing and replicating the geopolitical ability to speak in territorial terms exploiting emergencies to advance nationalistic claims. I will focus on the Italian case exploring the narratives and political positions on borders and sovereignty adopted by the Lega party during 2019, when the 'crisis' was related to migration flows, and in the first half of 2020, when the Covid-19 emergency reached its first peak in Italy. The aim is to contribute to the effort of political geographers to unveil the spatial methods of nationalist populism.

09:50 – 10:15: **Nicolas Hubé**, Lorraine University

The frontiers of digital populism. Activist Networks of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen in France

Populism as a broad category tends to encompass the various political parties considered populist as a single block, particularly permeable to the circulation of discourses between parties and between the boundaries of social networks. Based on a study of people linked to the Facebook accounts and outgoing links of Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France, we analyse the (non)circulation between digital activist communities as well as the low rate of media takeovers or links with foreign populist families, even though they are considered close. The only very weak link between the activist networks was, at the time of the investigation, the mobilisation of the Gilets Jaunes, which the political leaders tried to catch.

10:15 – 10:45: Coffee break

10:45 – 11:10: **Manuela Caiani**, Scuola Normale Superiore

Populism in Power and its Consequences

Whereas most of the academic debate on populism has been focussed on its causes, moderate attention has been paid so far in exploring the 'consequences' of the increasing presence of populist parties, either from the left and the right, in power. However, this appears a relevant issue, since many European governments all across Europe (from the West to the East) increasingly see the presence of a 'populist' party in cabinet. Although the topic is closely connected to normative issues (e.g. the quality of democracy), what is lacking now is an empirical exploration of the consequences of populism. In this paper we refer to this scholarship by looking, though a comparative qualitative case study (Italy, Poland, Hungary, Denmark and Finland; Greece and Spain), at the impact of five successful cases of populism (either left wing and right wing) on the policies, politics and polity in their respective countries. Particular attention will be also devoted to the consequences and changes of populism in power on themselves. The paper concludes highlighting a very nuanced picture of populism in power, finding out four possible different paths of populism development in Europe: a. radicalization; b. compromise and moderation; c. splintering; d. losses.

11:10 – 12:15: General discussion

12:15 – 14:15: Lunch

Session 3, Chair: Andrea Pilotti, University of Lausanne

14:15 – 14:40: **Christian Lamour**, LISER, Luxembourg

Right-wing Populism in Europe borderlands: Region with(out) regionalism and other complementary spatial entities

Right-wing populism is a phenomenon affecting most European countries at several territorial levels. However, the regional space remains a scale not often considered for the research of populism in Europe, with the exception of a few countries such as Switzerland. Nevertheless, it is an important geographical level to address the positioning of right-wing political parties with regard to the construction of Europe. The presentation will aim to identify the relationship between right-wing populism and the European regional construction through a critical analysis of populist discourse in several different contexts.

14:40 – 15:05: **Grégoire Yerly**, University of Lausanne

Right-Wing Populist Parties' Bordering Narratives in Times of Crisis: Anti-Immigration Discourse in the Genevan Borderland during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Right-wing populist parties (RWPPs) view immigration as a threat to national identity and cultural and political cohesion. This paper explores the discourse on immigration of two such parties during a systemic crisis (the COVID-19 pandemic) in a borderland area that entails a specific "symbolization" of the border as a result of geographic proximity. What kind of bordering narratives occur in this context, and how do they evolve? To answer these questions, the major RWPPs operating in the Geneva region were studied: the Genevan Swiss People's Party and the Geneva Citizens' Movement. Through a critical discourse analysis, a total of 181 documents published between 1 January and 31 August 2020 were analyzed, including the parties' official Facebook posts, press releases, and newspaper articles. Results show that the context of the pandemic favored the emergence of a strong re-bordering narrative.

15:05 – 15:30: **Cecilia Biancalana**, University of Turin & **Oscar Mazzoleni**, University of Lausanne

Convergence without conflict? Transborder national-populist strategies in multi-scalar spaces of mobilisation

This paper aims to answer the question of how it is possible for national populists to defend national borders while simultaneously avoiding conflict with their ideological counterparts on the other side of the border. National-populist parties face this dilemma. While they defend their own people – and this might explain why formal agreements between them may be difficult – they have, at times, needed to deal directly with neighbouring populist parties that, in turn, are defending their own people. We hypothesise that the possibility of cooperating to avoid open conflict, what we call a national-populist transborder strategy, results not only from the ductility of populist discourse but also from the political opportunities of a multi-scalar space of mobilisation shaped by European integration and processes of globalisation. Creating convergences and avoiding open conflicts between national-populist parties in different countries is possible when we assume that parties run in a multi-scalar space of mobilisation, where they might adopt a "scale-jumping strategy" to define their in-group and out-group. To illustrate our argument, we focus on the borderland between Switzerland and Italy – an area where there has been significant cooperation, but also conflict, among national-populist parties in the past few decades.

15:30 – 16:00: Coffee break

16:00 – 17:00: General discussion