

# E EXTREME

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Newsletter of the ECPR Standing Group  
on Extremism & Democracy

# **Newsletter of the ECPR Standing Group on Extremism & Democracy**

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The *e-Extreme* is the newsletter of the ECPR Standing Group on *Extremism & Democracy*. For any enquiries about the newsletter and book reviews, please contact the managing editors ([extremismanddemocracy@gmail.com](mailto:extremismanddemocracy@gmail.com)).

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# STANDING GROUP ANNOUNCEMENTS

## REGISTER AS AN E&D STANDING GROUP MEMBER

You can join the ECPR Standing Group on *Extremism & Democracy* always free of charge and at the click of a button, [via the ECPR website](#). If you have not already done so, please register as a member so that our list is up to date and complete.

In order to join, you will need a MyECPR account, which we assume many of you will already have. If you do not have one, you can create an account in only a few minutes (and you need not be from an ECPR member institution to do so). If you are from a non-member institution, we will need to accept your application to join, so your membership status (which you can see via your MyECPR account, and on the Standing Group pages when you are logged in to MyECPR) will be 'pending' until you are accepted.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch!

## WORKSHOP ENDORSED AT NEXT ECPR JOINT SESSIONS

The ECPR Standing Group on *Extremism & Democracy* is endorsing the Workshop 17 'Leadership in the European Radical Left' at the 48<sup>th</sup> ECPR Joint Sessions in Toulouse, 14-17 April 2020. The Session is chaired by Luke March (University of Edinburgh) and Luis Ramiro (UNED Madrid). The full list of papers and participants can be found [here](#).

## 2<sup>nd</sup> SUMMER SCHOOL ON 'CONCEPTS AND METHODS FOR RESEARCH ON FAR-RIGHT POLITICS'

The ECPR Standing Group on *Extremism & Democracy* will hold its 2<sup>nd</sup> Summer School on 'Concepts and Methods for Research on Far-Right Politics' this Summer. The event will take place in Oslo, from 29 June to 3 July 2020, and is sponsored by the ECPR and the Centre for Research on Extremism (C-REX).

The Summer School addresses young scholars and students focusing on the study of the far right in its populist, radical, and extremist manifestations. Its aim is to bolster and promote knowledge on the theoretical, empirical, and methodological underpinnings of contemporary far-right politics.

The Summer School introduces participants to concepts and theories explaining the conditions affecting far-right mobilisation and performance; and methods to tackle this phenomenon empirically. Despite the growing attention received by far-right political parties, social movements, and groups, we still lack a comprehensive conceptual and methodological toolkit to investigate its diverse expressions in multiple arenas. The Summer School thus addresses young scholars and students, and discusses how to apply established research techniques to the study of far-right politics, and devise and manage primary and secondary data.

For full information, please refer to the [SG website](#).

## **SECTION ENDORSED AT NEXT ECPR GENERAL CONFERENCE**

The Standing Group on *Extremism & Democracy* is endorsing the Section ‘Populism, Radicalism and Extremism: At the Margins and into the Mainstream’ at the next ECPR General Conference in Innsbruck (26-28 August). The section is chaired by Pietro Castelli Gattinara (University of Oslo), Léonie de Jonge (University of Groningen), and Ofra Klein (European University Institute). The programme will be released by the ECPR on 1 April.

# UPCOMING EVENTS, CALLS FOR PAPERS, AND CALLS FOR APPLICATIONS

## CALL FOR PAPERS: SPECIAL ISSUE ON GENDER, NATIONALISM AND (ANTI-)MIGRATION

**Special Issue Editors:** Dr An Van Raemdonck (University of Amsterdam), Dr Katja Kahlina (University of Helsinki), and Dr Aleksandra Sygnowska (Polish Academy of Sciences)

**Journal:** *Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* (DiGeSt)

**Deadline for submissions:** 1 April 2020

Over the last few years, issues related to gender and sexuality came to the center of public and political debates in Europe. Right-wing parties and far right actors across Europe are gaining popularity while increasingly drawing on gender and sexuality in their anti-immigration and anti-Muslim rhetoric (Mayer, Ajanović and Sauer 2014, Meret and Siim 2013, Sauer, Kuhar, Ajanović and Saarinen 2016). However, there are significant variations in the ways in which gender and anti-immigration discourses and politics, and the interplay between the two, has been articulated. Many right-wing groups, especially those in Europe's West and North, have instrumentalized discourses of gender and sexual equality in an effort to distinguish between 'us' (progressive Europeans) and 'them' (Muslims, minorities, and refugees). Such re-appropriations, conceptualized through the notions of homonationalism (Puar 2007), femonationalism (Farris 2017), and sexual nationalisms (Mepschen and Duyvendak 2012), have served to widen racial boundaries between communities and to advance restrictive policies toward migrants and refugees.

Accompanying these developments, in recent years, discourses of gender and sexual equality have increasingly come under attack by right-wing groups and parties across Europe. Scholars and activists often use the concepts of anti-gender or anti-LGBTQ movements to capture this new phenomenon and point out its transnational dimension (Kováts and Poim 2015, Köttig, Bitzan, and Petó 2017, Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). One of the most prominent discursive threads present in this transnational mobilization is the call for the replacement of the notion of gender with the idea of complementarity of the sexes, stemming from the allegedly natural differences between women and men. These anti-gender discourses and accompanying reproductivism are often closely interwoven with a strong anti-immigration stance.

The aim of this special issue is to capture and interrogate the existing multiplicity of ways in which gender and sexuality are articulated together with nationalist, anti-immigration, and right-wing populist discourses in contemporary European socio-political landscapes. Therefore, we are particularly interested in contributions which analyze the current contestations of gender and gender-related discursive practices in specific contexts and communities from different disciplinary frameworks, including but not limited to sociology, anthropology, political science, gender studies, and socio-legal studies. Overall, we invite contributions that interrogate how two key political struggles in Europe today - around gender and immigration - feed into each other, thereby producing new meanings and arguments.

### **About the journal**

DiGeSt is an interdisciplinary and international journal hosted by Ghent University that accepts papers from authors working from all disciplinary backgrounds; including (though not limited to) gender and diversity studies, sociology, anthropology, empirical ethics, bioethics, feminist studies, psychology, political sciences and history. For more information contact the editors, Dr Ladan Rahbari and Dr Tina Goethals.

### **Timeline**

Please submit your abstracts (max 250 words) by 1 April 2020 only by email to all three guest editors. Please address your emails to: [katja.kahlina@helsinki.fi](mailto:katja.kahlina@helsinki.fi); [anvanraemdonck@gmail.com](mailto:anvanraemdonck@gmail.com); [aleksandra.sygnowska@gmail.com](mailto:aleksandra.sygnowska@gmail.com).

Communication on selected abstracts and invitation of full papers can be expected by 15 April 2020. Authors will be notified if their abstract is accepted on 1 May 2020, and full papers are to be submitted for peer review by 1 October 2020.

## **KEEP US INFORMED**

Please keep us informed of any upcoming conferences or workshops you are organising, and of any publication or funding opportunities that would be of interest to Standing Group members. We will post all details on our website. Similarly, if you would like to write a report on a conference or workshop that you have organised and have this included in our newsletter, please do let us know.

Please, also tell us of any recent publications of interest to Standing Group members so that we may include them in the 'publications alert' section of our newsletter, and please get in touch if you would like to see a particular book (including your own) reviewed in *e-Extreme*, or if you would like to review a specific book

yourself. We are always keen on receiving reviews from junior and senior scholars alike.

Finally, if you would like to get involved in the production of the newsletter, the development of our website, or any of the other activities of the Standing Group, please do get in touch. We are always very keen to involve more and more members in the running of the Standing Group!

# BOOK REVIEWS

## CAS MUDDE. THE FAR RIGHT TODAY

POLITY PRESS, 2019. 205 PP., £14.99 (PAPERBACK). ISBN: 9781509536849

Tamta Gelashvili

*Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)*

Cas Mudde's book remarkably summarizes decades of research on the radical and extreme right, emphasizing the contemporary, post-2000 far right. The book targets a non-academic audience, "people who follow the news, are concerned about the rise of the far right, but feel that media accounts provide too little detail and insight, while academic and non-academic books are too complex or simply too long" (p.4). However, it is similarly useful for scholars, not only because it succinctly reviews up-to-date research findings, but also because it illustrates how an academic could convey a clear, convincing argument not only to peers, but also to other interested audiences. Skilful balance between avoiding complicated scientific jargon and oversimplifying complex political matters makes *The Far Right Today* as enjoyable to read as an academic book can aspire to be.

Mudde's overarching argument is that the contemporary far right differs from its pre-2000s antecedents by its mainstream and normalized nature. Mudde, whose Twitter account aptly summarizes his main observation ("used to study fringe politics, now study mainstream politics"), argues that previously marginal groups and ideas have successfully infiltrated the political mainstream. In some countries, the far right is in power, and in others, it sets the agenda, influencing, however indirectly, public opinion. Opportunism of mainstream politicians and sensationalism of the media have normalized former taboos; politics and media have, however unintentionally, become increasingly accommodating to "conservative-turned-populist radical right" (p.124) discourse. Reflecting on his earlier work – beyond just citing it – Mudde elaborates not only on findings that hold true today, but also on observations that have proved somewhat naïve. Mudde urges us to adapt to the new reality where fringe politics are the new normal.

One of the most exemplary features of the book is its impeccable coherence. The book compiles the answers current research has to various questions on the far right, including its ideologies, leaders/supporters, causes, consequences, possible responses, etc., in well-structured chapters. The main argument on the main-

streaming and normalization of today's far right is supported by an array of evidence from around the world and is reemphasized throughout the book. The last chapter briefly recaps the main takeaways.

Importantly, the book starts with defining relevant terms, since much of the fuss over far-right mobilization stems from the fact that few seem to grasp exactly what the fuss is about. Mudde clarifies labels applied repeatedly and interchangeably to the far right and concepts accepted as common knowledge, as well as their evolution. For example, he traces the origins of the left-right distinction in politics and their transformation from socio-economic to socio-cultural dimensions. In addition to definitions, the historical overview of far-right mobilization gives context to the rise of the contemporary far right, enabling the reader to take a step back and re-evaluate the sensationalism often surrounding the topic.

Mudde sets out to “give an accessible and concise overview” of the contemporary far right (p. 4). He tries to cover as much depth and (geographical) breadth as possible. Still, *The Far Right Today* remains focused on the populist radical right in the West. The title and the first two chapters (History and Ideology) suggest the intention to cover the contemporary far right, including its extreme and radical manifestations. Moreover, Chapter 3 delves into different types of far-right organisms, discussing an impressive variety of cases. But further in the book, focus is on the populist radical right, rather than the wider far-right movement or its extreme, extra-parliamentary manifestations.

Mudde himself mentions the aim to depict far-right diversity, but adds that “emphasis will be on the most *important* ideas, organizations, and personalities of the contemporary period, that is, populist radical right leaders and parties” (p.8, emphasis added). This is somewhat understandable, given space limitations and the understudied nature of the non-party sector (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro, 2019). Yet, given the increasingly important role of extra-parliamentary extreme-right politics, delving into the wider social movement, instead of focusing almost exclusively on party politics, would make for a more thorough account of today's far right.

In addition to populist radical right parties, the book also focuses on the Western world, that is, (Western) Europe and the US. Again, limited existing research on other contexts and on the emergence (or lack thereof) of the far right in other areas may justify Mudde's focus on the West, especially because, unlike much of the literature on the far right, he does try to be less Western-centric, to some extent elaborating on, e.g., India, Australia, Hungary, and Poland. Given the increasingly heterogeneous nature of today's far right, a wider geographical scope would make the account more comprehensive.

What distinguishes the book in the literature on the far right is an extensive discussion on different ways to respond to the challenge. Just as there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for the causes and growth of the far right, there is no one-size-fits-all response to it. Commendably, Mudde discusses the role of not only governments, but also civil society and the media; first, he notes, we need to understand the challenge we face – *The Far Right Today* is indeed a good start – and then we should respond to it collectively, with all major political and media actors on board, without ignoring the issues the far right feeds on, like immigration and integration.

Finally, what sets this remarkable book apart is the Further Reading section, which helps the reader navigate the swarming literature on the far right and get acquainted with leading works and scholars in the field.

Overall, *The Far Right Today* is an (semi)academic equivalent of a page-turner. Mudde rationalizes far-right mobilization in a way that takes the edge off those terrified by the sensationalist coverage of far-right demonstrations, featuring tattoo-covered, black-clothed skinheads with combat boots, but also reminds those dismissing the far-right threat of the indirect and long-term impact of the mainstreaming and normalization of the radical and extreme right. *The Far Right Today* is thus a must-read for students, researchers, policymakers, and those interested in up-to-date research on the far right.

**Tamta Gelashvili** is a junior research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and (as of August 2020) a PhD Candidate at the University of Oslo. She holds a MPhil degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Oslo and an MSc degree in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Amsterdam. Her research interests include the far right, nativism, and social movements. She tweets [@Gelashvili\\_T](https://twitter.com/Gelashvili_T)

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## KRISTOFFER HOLT. RIGHT-WING ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

ROUTLEDGE, 2019. 97 PP., £49.99. ISBN 978-1-138-31830-4

David Jofré  
*University of Glasgow*

Along with the electoral success of right-wing populism in Western countries, we witness today the proliferation of citizen-led alternative media operations on the

right. These media types are challenging traditional journalism by discussing issues that most would consider unacceptable and phobic in the public discourse. Incommoded commentators have been quick to condemn them as 'evil media', but Professor Kristoffer Holt (Gulf University of Science and Technology) believes that we should approach them scientifically. In his book *Right-wing Alternative Media* (2020), Holt asks simple, yet tricky, questions like whether right-wing media can be conceptually alternative and, if so, why they exist. Holt is also interested in both the structural and relational consequences of right-wing alternative media activity, for which he asks if they pose a threat to the existing order and have produced reactions from mainstream politicians and media actors. With research experience in mass media, public discourse and populism, Holt is undoubtedly well-suited to lead this discussion.

The book is a systematic review of existing categorisations and research on alternative media. Divided into five chapters, the first part of the book is where Holt selects diverse theories to build his own conceptual framework to understand alternative media in general. This framework is welcomed in a field that has seen only moderate progress since the seminal works of John Downing (2001) and Chris Atton (2002) on radical and alternative media. In chapter one, Holt presents his pillar argument: right-wing alternative media are conceived by their producers as an alternative to the mainstream news. The argument invites the reader to understand them in relational terms. Simply put, some citizens feel unfairly represented in the news and censored in the public space due to a culture perceived has increasingly oversensitive, and this grievance motivates them to publish diverse alternative content, which may range from offensive to more extremist and dangerous.

In the second chapter, Holt proceeds to assess the impact of right-wing alternative media on the landscape. It is especially interesting to read here how the author builds his own theoretical framework. He contends that 'theoretical assumptions about alternative media must be valid regardless of what ideological orientation they have in order to be useful' (p. 29). This is why the book's most significant contributions to the literature are found here. Based on a cross-disciplinary exercise, where Holt consults a categorisation originally used for political parties (Capoccia, 2002; Sartori, 2005), the book distinguishes different types of anti-system alternative media in relation to how they position themselves in front of the status quo. While some alternative media are not really anti-systemic, or are way too extreme to be considered relevant, others have more serious polarising effects. Basically, if alternative media manage to attract 'harsh criticism and expressions of indignation from mainstream journalists, then their relation to anti-systemness is significant and affects public discourse in a polarising way' (p. 67). So ultimately, right-wing alternative media is not proposed in Holt's book as a closed-ended category but rather as an umbrella term. In chapter 3, the author

reviews existing empirical research on right-wing alternative media, mostly qualitative case studies. He emphasises his own previous work on Swedish immigration-critical media scene, but also finds interesting connections between right-wing populism and online outlets in many other contemporary studies. Thanks to this assessment, Holt moves beyond moral commentary to understand the issue in its real-life consequences, one of which is the use of alternative media by populist politicians as a strategic platform to convey their ideas about gender and race.

Despite its various strengths, Holt's book has some limitations. In his attempt to explain the very existence of these media at the most elemental level, Holt misses a couple of key points. In the third chapter, he reviews empirical research on the audience of right-wing alternative media, as well as propaganda and echo chamber phenomena, but little is mentioned about the human component behind the production of alternative news. In a way, the book engages with explaining what motivates producers to disseminate non-mainstream information, but not how these producers want to connect with their audience. Clemencia Rodríguez's book on citizen media in Colombia (2011) sheds some light on this aspect. She argues that citizens produce their own media in order to create and sustain a local community, thus community-building seems key to understand why people participate in alternative media operations of any kind. For some reason, however, Holt has not incorporated Rodríguez's concepts into his framework, despite his evident efforts to rely on the 'classics' of alternative media scholarship. Moreover, throughout the book there is a strong implication that alternative media can be powerful enough to influence journalistic editors. This argument is quite interesting, especially for media scholars, yet it is not explored in light of intermedia agenda-setting theories (McCombs et al., 2014), which have been very insightful to comprehend how alternative outlets can set the mainstream media agenda.

Holt is aware of other limitations of his book, partly because 'the research frontier is still too foggy' (p. 74) for him. Sooner than later, scholars will have to distinguish between right-wing alternative media in democratic and autocratic states to fully understand their growth and societal effects. For now, the book manages to provide a valuable conceptual toolbox to treat right-wing alternative media as an object of scientific inquiry. Equipped with this toolbox, the reader can distinguish dangerous populist media from irrelevant niche media, so the book works more as a warning than a predicament about the future of journalism. This warning is that if our society decides to respect the right to express hateful ideas, the corridor of opinion will become wider and wider, and mainstream journalism might incorporate parts of some right-wing alternative media's perspectives. In Holt's eyes, the only way to minimise this risk is to apply repressive tolerance measures, even if that means curtailing the aspects of social media that were celebrated at the beginning. The depths of this present-day disjunctive are what make this book

a fascinating reading, not only to media scholars but also to all those interested in the evolution of right-wing populism.

**David Jofré** is a Doctor in Politics, recently graduated from the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. He also holds a MSc in Political Communication from the same university. His research has focused on the relationship between social movements and media in South America, with an emphasis on the creation of new activist media practices and the organisational aspects of mobilisation.

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## CHANTAL MOUFFE. FOR A LEFT POPULISM

VERSO, 2019. 112 PP., £9.99. ISBN: 9781786637567

Omran Shroufi  
*University of York*

There seems little today that populism cannot explain or be attributed to. Britain's EU referendum, the election of Donald Trump and the success of various far right parties across Europe are often given as evidence of its conquering power (Shuster, 2016). Populism was awarded the Cambridge dictionary word of the year in 2017 and was even the focus of an extended *Guardian* series in 2018 which included a quiz 'testing' readers' levels of populism (The Guardian, 2018). Unimpressed with "the sterile academic debate about the 'true nature' of populism" (Mouffe, 2018), Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe has somewhat bravely sought to reclaim the term and make the case for a left populism. The author has good reason to feel frustrated at populism's current status, where the term is often

equated with something 'bad' or used as a synonym for the far right (see De Cleen et al., 2018; Stavrakakis et al., 2017). Indeed, much of her own work, and that of her late partner, the Argentinian political theorist Ernesto Laclau, rarely feature in contemporary conceptualisations and debates on populism. Looking to dispel such misgivings, the author has written this concise and accessible book to suggest progressive, left-wing movements could benefit from effectively incorporating a populist political logic in the formation of their demands.

Mouffe first clarifies her own understanding of populism as a discursive strategy which constructs a political frontier and divides society into two camps, pitting the underdog against those in power. Yet populism, she argues, is "not an ideology and cannot be attributed a specific programmatic content" (Mouffe, 2018, p.11), challenging both the ideational approach (see Mudde, 2007, p.23) and those who view it as inherently negative (e.g. Müller, 2017). While she agrees the current political conjuncture is a 'populist moment', how she traces the genealogy and fault lines of this conjuncture differs from others. It is a reaction against non-partisan, neo-liberal politics, she argues, where efficiency and good governance is prioritised over political imagination. Many of those discredited as populists, Mouffe suggests, are simply opposing "the 'consensus in the centre' and the dogma that there is no alternative to neoliberal globalization" (Mouffe, 2018, p.17). In an era where conflict between fundamentally different projects of society has been ruled out, and 'the power of the people' has lost any real meaning, the populist moment represents an eruption, an attempt to re-energise and re-democratise politics.

For the left to successfully navigate this moment, Mouffe argues that, it must learn from Thatcher to properly understand how we got here. Unlike her opponents, the Ex-British Prime Minister understood the "partisan nature of politics and the importance of the hegemonic struggle" (Mouffe, 2018, p.29). To dismantle the prevailing social-democratic logic and change the rules of the game, Thatcher employed a populist strategy, demarcating a political frontier which pitted industrious entrepreneurs and victimised workers against state bureaucrats, trade unions and lazy benefit cheats. She successfully drew together ostensibly 'incompatible' demands under the banner of liberty and individual and economic freedom, establishing a new 'common sense' and uniting previously disconnected groups. It was this achievement, "that Labour politicians with their essentialist view of politics could not grasp", convinced as they were that "the worsening of the conditions of the workers would soon put them back in government" (Mouffe, 2018, p.29). Fatally for the left, this neo-liberal logic was later enthusiastically adopted by 'Third-Way' leaders such as Blair and remained largely unchallenged up until the 2008 financial crisis.

Mouffe uses the example of Thatcher to illustrate how struggles against power, and their eventual form, follow no predetermined path, rejecting any symbiotic relationship between economic hardship and emancipatory working-class revolt.

No one social class will automatically be the defining catalyst of political struggle, especially as new fights for social justice, questioning ‘novel’ forms of inequality, have grown. Neither will the eventual manifestation of demands “automatically have a progressive character” (Mouffe, 2018, p.64) as the recent success of the far right has shown. She argues that the left needs to understand that the nature of political conflict is not given; it depends on how the ‘people’ and ‘its’ adversary are constructed. In fact, the ‘people’ can be constructed in a multitude of ways, more or less open, monolithic or diverse. For the left to succeed and profit from the populist moment, it must recognise that “many of the demands articulated by right-wing populist parties are democratic demands, to which a progressive answer must be given” (Mouffe, 2018, p.21).

For such a short book, Mouffe covers an impressive range of topics, including the failures of the left, the faltering of neo-liberal capitalism, theories of democracy and liberalism and the role of psychoanalysis in politics. Most notably, she achieves this in a manner which is both engaging and easy to follow. Mouffe makes some valuable contributions to debates on populism, challenging the notion that all populisms are inherently monolithic. The book also serves as a useful companion to those grappling with the key tenets of post-structural discourse theoretical analysis. Her arguments feed into academic debates on the causes of far right success and the commonalities and differences between the far left and right and their supporters. Regarding broader discussions on defeating the far right, the book questions the usefulness of ostracization and delegitimization, suggesting such tactics ignore the actual roots of the problem.

Notwithstanding the book’s strengths, Mouffe’s analysis of the current political moment is not without faults. Her dismissal of class-based politics seems out of sync with growing levels of contestation in the face of stagnant wages, precarious employment and rising inequality, and overlooks a burgeoning interest in socialist media and publications. It is also unclear if a rejection of the neoliberal consensus fully explains far right support - are racist and xenophobic ideas and structures not also crucial to the story? Mouffe also perceives the nation-state as a potentially open space, downplaying the difficulty in establishing a truly progressive national identity. Finally, leaving aside its conceptual merits, there is the word ‘populism’ itself. Mouffe has every reason to feel frustrated but it is hard to get away from its toxicity, within current European public discourse at least. Outside an academic context, one wonders if such negative connotations will only hinder her proposed strategy from reaching its potential and reviving the fortunes of the left.

**Omran Shroufi** is a PhD researcher at the University of York. His thesis examines the far right’s position towards Israel/Palestine and its ideological underpinnings. His research interests include far right ideology and discourses on populism and anti-populism.

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## YANNIS STAVRAKAKIS. POPULISM: MYTHS, STEREOTYPES AND REORIENTATIONS

PUBLICATIONS OF THE HELLENIC OPEN UNIVERSITY, 2019. 110 PP., €8.80. ISBN: 9786188427235 [GREEK]

Grigoris Markou

*Aristotle University of Thessaloniki*

The debate over the concept of populism in Greece began some decades ago, but the recent forceful rise of the radical left (SYRIZA), through a strong populist discourse, has rekindled the research interest on populism. Dozens of books and research papers have been published, many international conferences and events have been organized, and TV documentaries have been created about the resurgence of the populist phenomenon. Nevertheless, the majority of the Greek publications presents a clear anti-populist perspective and recognizes pathological elements in the populist phenomenon. Apart from that, most of the times, populism is linked to nationalism, racism, conspiracy theories, authoritarianism or clientelism, while it is presented as an ideology with common ‘dangerous’ characteristics both on left and right, reproducing thus the theory of ‘the two extremes.’

Yannis Stavrakakis' new book does not belong to the above category. His work comes to fill the lack of in-depth studies that criticize the anti-populist wave in academia, as well as provide strong responses to the recently developed theories and analytical approaches on populism. Stavrakakis is Professor of political science at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and his research interests include

political theory, populism, post-democracy and artistic practices. He has published extensively on populism, anti-populism and democracy, while he is the director of the POPULISMUS observatory.

In his new short book, which derives many arguments from some of his earlier publications, Stavrakakis proposes a new orientation to the research of populism. Initially, he starts with a brief genealogy of populism, tracing its modernist origins in Tsarist Russia with the Narodniks and in the US with the Populist Party. After that, he describes the case of Latin American populism, focusing more on Argentina and Juan Domingo Perón, while he continues his interesting description with European left-wing and right-wing populist parties, movements and leaders. In the second chapter, Stavrakakis analyzes the main theories and analytical approaches on populism, especially focusing on 'the anti-populist wave'. He locates the roots of the contemporary anti-populism in the work of Richard Hofstadter during the 1950s and criticizes modernization theories that present populism as an 'irrational' phenomenon and as 'a pathology' of politics. In this context, he highlights the weaknesses of the concept of 'cultural dualism' (by Nikiforos Diamantouros) that has been widely used by theorists, journalists and politicians to oppose populism in Greece. After that, Stavrakakis highlights the pitfalls of the 'new orthodoxy' in the studies of populism, which accepts the homogeneity of the two antithetical camps ('the people' and 'the establishment') and the attribution of a moral character to the political antagonism between them. According to Stavrakakis, moralistic appeals are inevitable in any political situation and 'it can take political or anti-political, democratic or undemocratic, reactionary or progressive, heroic or even a banal character' (p. 78). In the last chapter of the book, Stavrakakis defines what populism is, using Laclau's formalist approach, while he finds performative approaches as an extremely useful research tool. Moreover, shortly before the end of his book, Stavrakakis feels the necessity to respond again to the anti-populist narratives and explain what populism is not, by arguing that it is not equivalent to nationalism, nativism, fascism and clientelism, while it is not inherently based on charismatic leadership. Finally, while Stavrakakis belongs to a group of scholars who recognize a democratic perspective in the populist phenomenon, he argues that even if populism will be detached from negative stereotypes, it should not be treated as a 'political panacea' and as something *a priori* positive (p. 107). In this logic, the Greek-British political theorist recognizes some limits on populism, but not the ones usually denounced by the anti-populist discourse.

It is perhaps the first time in the Greek literature that a book criticizes strongly the dominant 'orthodoxy of moralization'. Furthermore, it is perhaps the first time [after the previous publication of Sevastakis and Stavrakakis on populism, anti-populism and crisis (Athens: Nefeli, 2012)], that a theoretical book clearly opposes the anti-populist logic that is well established in the country, aiming to shatter the negative stereotypes that have been formed all these years around this

phenomenon. Stavrakakis emphasizes the need to detach populism from modernization remnants of the Cold War period, which do not help political analysis in any way but serve only to polemical writings. Additionally, it is important to note that this well-written book, which follows a laclauian perspective, does not view populism as a panacea or as an exclusively democratic solution, responding in a clear manner to all these people who argue that the Essex's school theorists accept the development of any populist mobilization.

This book is important to be read by anyone who studies populism, anti-populism, political discourse and democracy to understand the boundaries of the contemporary anti-populist argumentation, as well as the problems of the 'new orthodoxy' of 'moralization' in the study of populism. So far the problem is that the book is available only in Greek. We hope that it will be published in other languages soon.

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# PUBLICATIONS ALERT

Our publication alert is based on a semi-automated search and can never be complete. Therefore, please tell us about any **recent** publications of interest to Standing Group members so that we may include them in our newsletter.

- Abou-Chadi, T. & Wagner, M. (2020) Electoral fortunes of social democratic parties: do second dimension positions matter? *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27, 246-272.
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