Abstract

World netizenship or barbarism†

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Abstract: The talk will focus on the potential of social media to support commoning relations and the actuality of devastating impacts through post-truth, fake-news populism.

Keywords: populism; liberal democracy; "We-Them" distinction

In a first section, definitions of populism shall be discussed. In particular, the question will be asked whether populism can be attributed, in principle, to right-wing politics, to left-wing politics, or even to the mainstream politics of the so-called liberal democracy.

There is no agreed-upon meaning of the term "populism". "Instead of a manageable or even well-founded category, we've got a pulp into which anything can be stirred"[1] (German, my translation) (p. 26). It is used for reciprocal stigmatisation. On the one hand, it is used to denounce the extreme right wing, on the other, to discredit, e.g., Bernie Sanders, Alexis Tsipras, Podemos, Attac and other representatives of political parties or movements that head for democratic transformations of society (see, e.g., the latest book of Austrian political scientist Anton Pelinka, Professor at the Central European University in Budapest – a book in which the idea of totalitarianism comes to the fore again [2]). In doing so, the term has become a polemical term, a discursive weapon, used by proponents of so-called liberal democracy. This overlooks that nowadays almost every politics feels a pressure to become populist, as Robert Menasse pointed out in a talk-show [3], and that populism is not an external enemy of democracy but inheres in its centre – culminating in the current stage of neoliberal development of capitalism [1]. Predominantly, it is what the "establishment", the "elite", constructs as mainstream political ideology. Bernd Stegemann [4] (p. 81) refers to Jan-Werner Müller when defining populism as something "claiming truth that is neither democratically nor scientifically substantiated" (German, my translation), a truth that cannot be refuted by arguments or facts. This holds for liberal democracy as well. "The believe of politicians to be able to listen to the market and incorporate its truth is as irrational as the believe in a so-called will of the people and its incarnation in a leader's figure. […] This liberal populism adjudges the vicissitudes of the market absolute truth. It is the populism of our time" (German, my translation) (p. 82).

For that reason, the answer to the question of what is populist requires, in a second section, a systemic redefinition of the commons. It cannot be argued that each critique of the establishment or the elites is as such populist. Yanis Varoufakis denies, in principle, the existence of left-wing populism. Being left and being populist contradict each other [5]. New social movements paved the way for a generalisation of the concept to extend from material products via presumed natural givens (which far from being natural need more and more reproductive work by the economies and health care systems) to information including fields such as education or the arts. Social relations "are about commoning, about (the) common(-good)s, the commons, the commune bonum, which are values that are added, in material or immaterial respects" [6] (p. 279). The relations of commoning realise the synergy effect – essential for any self-organising system – on the level of social systems. In the course of history, a contingent increase in the enclosure of the commons has brought about domination. By enclosing the commons a group of people originates who dominate the rest of the people. Today, the enclosure of the commons even threatens civilisation with extinction. Self-organisation of good life

has become exclusive, commoning relations have become relations of exclusion that deprive increasing numbers of actors of the commons such that actors have been set in competition with each other. Antagonistic social relations are accompanied by conflictive relations among social actors standing either on the dominant side or the dominated side of the antagonism.

Populism can thus be understood as the unthinking, uncritical fight for one's share – a fight without reflection, from which side ever.

Third, the "We – Them" distinction needs to be interpreted from a system theoretical perspective. The current international trend to reconfigure this relation runs contrary to the necessity of mastering the global challenges of our time.

Michael Tomasello [7] hypothesises two evolutionary steps in anthroposociogenesis: A first step from our animal ancestors that like today's chimpanzees formed relationships with kin and other conspecifics in which they favoured "others over themselves" (p. 3) but were "often, perhaps most often, acting out of self-interest" (p. 159), to early humans who "extended their sense of sympathy beyond kin and friends to collaborative partners" with whom they "developed a common-ground understanding of the ideal way that each role had to be played for joint success", and with whom they developed "original socially shared normative standards" that were impartial and recognised "that self and other were of equivalent status and importance in the collaborative enterprise" (p. 4); from this a natural, second-personal morality developed in which the "me" was subordinated to "we" in a joint commitment and a normatively constituted "ought" emerged (p. 5). And a second step from those early humans to homo sapiens sapiens with "a kind of scaled-up version of early humans' second-personal morality", "a kind of cultural and group-minded, 'objective' morality" (p. 6). International Relations from an evolutionary perspective take up that hypothesis and extend the first step of joint intentionalities and the second step of collective intentionalities within groups by another possible and needful step to collective intentionalities on a global scale, that is prepared by current joint intentionalities between groups/cities/states that can be complemented by "global we-identities" leading to global governance [8] (pp. 26-27).

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