

In the Name of the People - Populism and the popular: threats or promises to democracy?

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Populism has been on the agenda for at least two decades now. The Italian General Election, Brexit, and the success of the Swedish Democrats has even furthered the academic and broader public interest in the ‘populist explosion’ (Judis 2016). Yet there is no agreement on the nature of the phenomenon (Pappas 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2018; Laclau 2005a, 2005b), nor on its implications for democracy (e.g. Müller 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013; Mouffe 2018). In a Danish context, M H Hansen (2018) points to a potential paradox. Populism and populist stems from Latin meaning ‘people’ (Danish ‘folk’) and simply means ‘popularity’ (‘folkelighed’) and ‘a popular person’ (‘en folkelig person’). However, whereas popular rule (‘folkestyre’) or democracy holds almost univocally positive connotations, populism is mostly used in a pejorative sense.

The overall aim of this project is to investigate into the multifaceted relations between populism, ‘popularity’ (‘folkelighed’) and democracy as they appear in political representations of ‘the people’. More precisely the project sheds light on the extent to which a claim (Saward 2010) of representing ‘the people’ involves populism, and if so, what are the consequences for democracy? The thesis of this project is there are no simple connections between populism and democracy. Populism can be both a threat and a promise, not least due to actual articulation (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) of the ‘people’ and the popular (‘folkelighed’). We therefore need to engage in empirical studies of populism. As can be witnessed in the difficulties in translating ‘folkelighed’ into English, the Danish languages (as part of Scandinavian) and history of ‘folkelighed’ offers unique possibilities for research. This study analyses and compares two instances of claiming to represent the people in Denmark, namely the Danish People’s Party (from its emergence from the progress party) and the Social Democracy (in its transition from a class-based to a ‘people’s party’). Both cases are strong and quite successful claims of representing ‘the people’ (Bächler and Hopmann 2016; Christiansen 2016; Klages 2003; Bryld 2004, 1976; Korsgaard 2001; A. D. Hansen 2017), yet they differ strongly in their ‘substantial’ representational claims, not least of what ‘folkelighed’ consists of, and therefore who are and who are not the people.

State of the art

Publications on populism has witnessed an unrepresented proliferation within the last two years. While most scholars agree populism involves a strong conflict between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’, a recent overview (Pappas 2016) lists seven types of accounts with no less than 20 different definitions. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2018) groups the different accounts into three major traditions; a political-strategic, a sociocultural and an ideational approach, and point to the ideational as the most promising.

This project takes its points of departure in the ideational approach, but even within this there are serious differences and disagreements. Central to this project are the following.

1) Is populism a set of ideas, what has been termed a '*thin centered ideology*' (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Freedman 1998, 2017), or is populism rather a *political style* (Moffitt 2016) or a (discursive) '*logic*' (Laclau 2005; Stavrakakis 2014; Mouffe 2018)?

2) Is populism necessarily *moralistic*? Populism involves a strong conflict between 'the people' and 'the elite'. Some scholars claim this conflict necessarily takes on a moral character (Müller 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2018) staging the people as morally pure and the elite as morally corrupt. To the style- or logics-approach this is an open empirical question. As 'arguing in the moral register' runs counter to democracy (Mouffe 2013), this is a central question.

3) Most, but not all scholars acknowledge the distinction between *left- and right-wing populism* yet there is no consensus on what characterises the two. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) have suggested *inclusive* (left-wing) vs. *exclusive* (right-wing) forms of populism. Judis (2014) has suggested right wing populism is 'triadic', since it both claims a conflict between the people and the elite, and one between the 'real people' and 'intruders', typically immigrants and refugees. In order to further the distinction between left- and right-wing populism, in/exclusion cannot stand alone. It must be supplemented with the classic dimensions of economic equality and redistribution, which follows different patterns than in/exclusive in experiences with populism.

4) Finally but most centrally, the approaches differ on their view on *populism's relation to democracy*. The question of democracy is analysed in three dimensions (based on Allan Dreyer Hansen Forthcoming). i) Populism is based on a strong affirmation of *the right of the people to rule*, or popular sovereignty (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012;). In this sense populism obviously has close affinities to democracy (Canovan 1999), but often runs counter to central aspects of liberal democracy as separation of powers, pluralism etc. (Mouffe 1993). This project closely analyses how the right of the people to rule is presented, through which channels it is imagined to take place and which channels are deemed illegitimate.

ii) In relation to *inclusion to and exclusion from 'the people'*. Since all populism is based on a strong conflict between the people and the elite, there is always an element of exclusion present, even in the inclusive forms. In relation to democracy it is of cardinal importance who the excluded others are and how this exclusion is imagined (Müller 2016).

iii) Populism involves a certain mobilisation of the people against the elite, and in that sense an *activism*. Yet the way populist parties and movements deal with activism of the people differs strongly, ranging from a relative passive support for the party or the leader, to active experiments with participatory processes (Rhodes-Purdy 2015). It is therefore necessary to analyse empirically how the 'activism' of the people is presented and actually organised. In combination, the three

dimensions make it possible to draw much more nuanced and detailed conclusions than a simple opposition between populism and democracy.

Theoretical Foundations

Contributing to the development of a conceptual framework for analysing populism, ‘the popular’ and democracy is a major aim of the project. Overall, it is based on the ideational approach, and draws on and compares central elements from the ‘thin centred ideology’ with the ‘style/ logics’ approach. Apart from Mudde and Kaltwasser, the project is based on Freedén’s morphology of political ideologies (Freedén 1996, 2003) as well as Skinner (2002), Wood (1978, 1984) and Woods’ (2008, 2012) contextualised history of ideas. However it is the style/ logics approach which forms the main theoretical background of the project (Laclau 2005, 2014; Glynos and Howarth 2007). To view populism and the invocation of the popular as ‘logics’ implies populism can be a matter of degree, rather than either-or and that populism can be more or less present at different times. This is central theoretical achievements (Aslanidis 2016), yet the logics approach to populism is still in need of theoretical developments (Hansen 2017 and forthcoming).

Overall outline of the project

The central aim of the study is to highlight the presence and degrees of populist logics, their relationship to democracy and ‘the popular’ (‘det folkelige’), and the democratic consequences thereof. Empirically the focus is on the Social Democracy’s transition in the first part of the 20th century from a ‘class-party’ to a ‘people’s party’, leading up to the program ‘Denmark for the people’. It can be argued (Hansen 2017) that in this period the Social Democracy was significantly shaped by populist logics and as such represents a case of inclusive populism. It will be compared to a case of exclusive populism, i.e. the Danish People’s Party, from its emergence out of the Progress Party, up to the present day (Christiansen 2016). The analysis centres on the way ‘the people’ is represented in two cases – in all the dimensions. More precisely, the focus is on the parties’ representations (the supply side) rather than on e.g. attitudes in the public (the demand side) or e.g. actual outcomes of policies. The broader historical context is the Danish tradition of ‘popularity’ (‘folkelighed’) etc. as it has been shaped since The Constitution (1848). The study consists of three closely related work packages (WP), each addressing different aspect of the overall study.

The three work packages

1) Constructing the people in The Social Democracy and The Danish People’s Party

A three years Ph.D. study (NN.) (incl. ½ year abroad). (Should the project be funded, the Ph.D. position will be advertised internationally in May ’19, making it possible to start 09.19.) This WP undertakes the major part of the empirical work of the project. It examines the way the Social democracy and The Danish People’s Party ‘articulate’ the three democratic dimensions of ‘the

people' (i.e. rule of the people, in/exclusion of the demos and activism) as well as equality/ economic redistribution. It also examines how 'the elite' is represented in both, who are the elite, and whether, the conflict is presented in a moralistic or political form. One central methodological issue is to develop tools for moving beyond simple either-or analysis. Methodologically the study is primarily based on analysis of documents, including party programs, speeches, newspaper articles but also posters, political songs etc. (c.f. 'Methods and Data below'). The conclusions of the WP1 will largely be the conclusions of the entire project.

2) *The Conceptual History of the Popular in Denmark*

A one-year postdoc study (by Mikkel Flohr)

This study will provide a conceptual history of the cluster of interrelated Danish concepts of the popular, comprised of the people (*folk*), popular (*folkelig*) and populism (*populisme*), as they relate to democracy and 'folkestyre'. It covers their initial deployments as part of a positive political project, over the development of 'the people' as *the* legitimizing factor in (democratic) politics, up to and including the contemporary critique of populism. It traces the variation in the ways that the popular has been conceptualized, contested and constructed as part of particular political struggles, focusing in particular on the period leading up to the Danish Constitution (1849), the Easter Crisis of 1920 (to provide broader historical context to WP1) to the present day. Methodologically it relies on the historically contextualising interpretive model of analysis developed by Flohr in his Ph.D. thesis (Flohr, forthcoming). The findings of this part of the project will provide context and historical specificity to the Ph.D.–study, as well as inform the overall theoretical development of the project.

3) *Developing the conceptual Framework – and leading the project.*

14 month's research leave in 3 years (Allan Dreyer Hansen)

Apart from the leading the project and supervising the Ph.D. student this work package will consist mainly of theoretical work. The focus is firstly on *populism's relation to the three dimensions of democracy* (rule of the people, in/exclusion and activism) and to develop conceptual tools to grasp the many faceted relation between the two. Second, to contribute to *clarifying the populist logic*. i.e. answering the question of what forms the idea of the people must take on order for it to be a populist logic? The work on populist logics will be finalised at a one month visit at the Centre o. Ideology and Discourse Analysis, Essex University. In the final part, the main findings of the entire project will be presented in a popularised book on populism, democracy and the popular in Danish.

Methods and data

The project will utilise a set of qualitative methods, primarily (discursive) document studies (Glynos et al. 2009; Howarth 2005; Bowen 2009) of a variety of different sources, using well-known methods such as 'snowballing' etc. The material will be coded according to the analytical dimensions, i.e. the aspects of democracy and economic redistribution. WP 1 includes semi-structured interviews

(politicians and experts) (e.g. Talja 1999) for triangulation (Glasze 2007). The data collection and the analysis will co-evolve not only within the WP'es but significantly, WP 2 will support the development of the methodology in WP 1, especially in relation to the analysis of the Social Democracy.

Two related methodological challenges follow from the logics-approach: how to measure *degrees* (of populism), and how to measure how populist logic *shape* e.g. democracy. This is a general problem in logics studies (Glynos et al. 2009; A. D. Hansen 2017; A. D. Hansen 2005) and has so far not been solved. This will be of central focus and will be addressed directly in developing the methodological design (primarily in the early stages of the project).

Publications and dissemination.

Apart from a Ph. D thesis the publication plan includes 5-6 international peer reviewed articles, 2 co-authored, and 3 - 4 individual, on the substantial, methodological and theoretical findings in e.g. *Discourse Studies*, *J. of Political Ideologies*, *Constellations* and *History of Political Thought*. We will also publish 2 – 3 articles in Danish peer reviewed journals (e.g. *Politik*), as well as disseminating the conclusions to the broader public. Finally the projects overall findings will be published in a ‘popularised book’ (e.g. in *Samfundsstudier*).

Qualifications

Allan Dreyer Hansen has worked and published on the topics of this project for a sustained period, including democracy, populism and the logics approach inclusive of its methodological aspects.

During his Ph.D. study Mikkel Flohr has developed a highly promising approach to the study of political concepts, as well as published widely on issues closely related to the present project.

Project Plan

Year Quarters	2019				2020				2021				2022	
	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2		
Work package 1. Ph.D study (N.N.)														
Literature review														
Developing methodology														
Collecting Material														
Analysis														
Visit abroad														
Conferences														
Publications/ finalising ph.d. thesis					Co-auth.					Indivi			Finalising the thesis	
Work package 2. Post doc Mikkel Flohr														
Literature review														
Developin methodology														
Collecting Material														
Analysis														
Conference														
Publications					Co-auth		Individual							
Work package 3. Theoretical framework/ Leading Allan Dreyer Hansen														
Leading the project, Ph.D. supervision	X	X	X	x	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Literature review														
Developing methodologies														
Developing conceptual frameworks														
Guest researcher at Essex university														
Conferences														
Publications					Co-auth		Co-atho			Indivi		Indiv	Popularised bpk	

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