

REVISTA STVLTIFERA

DE HUMANIDADES Y CIENCIAS SOCIALES

DOSIER: POLARIZACIÓN PERNICIOSA, DEMOCRACIA Y POPULISMO
COEDITORES: CLAUDIO RIVEROS Y ALEJANDRO PELFINI

VOLUMEN 5, NÚMERO 2, SEGUNDO SEMESTRE DEL 2022
ISSN 0719-983X



UNIVERSIDAD AUSTRAL DE CHILE
SEDE PUERTO MONTT



Populism versus Parliamentarism: Towards Non-Antagonistic Forms of Democratic Politics

Populismo versus parlamentarismo: Hacia formas no antagonicas de política democrática

Uros Ugarkovic
Adolfo Ibáñez University, Chile

Resumen

Este trabajo se suma al debate sobre la relación entre las categorías de antagonismo y política, pues aborda la cuestión de si la política debe ser vista como intrínsecamente antagonica, o podríamos hablar de formas no antagonicas de pensar y actuar políticamente. Al hacerlo, se involucra críticamente con el argumento de Laclau mediante una revisión de su postura sobre la centralidad del antagonismo para la política, que se ve como resultado de la fusión del populismo con la política, con la consiguiente dificultad para anticipar la posibilidad de una lógica política no populista. Con el telón de fondo del argumento de Laclau, este artículo se pregunta si puede existir una lógica política no populista o una forma de política democrática que, junto con el populismo, se opondría a las formas apolíticas de administración. Basándose en el proyecto intelectual de Kari Palonen, este trabajo retrata el parlamentarismo como una lógica política no populista basada en una forma no antagonica de construcción del “pueblo” como sujeto democrático. Por último, al diferenciar entre las nociones de política democrática y política de la democracia, el artículo termina destacando la naturaleza contingente del efecto que las formas populistas y parlamentarias de política democrática tienen sobre lo que a menudo se construye y percibe como la calidad de la democracia.

Palabras claves: populismo, parlamentarismo, política, lógica política, teoría del discurso, antagonismo

Recibido: 31-03-2022. Aceptado: 08-06-2022



Uros Ugarkovic is PhD candidate at the Adolfo Ibáñez University, Chile.
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0778-2469>

Contacto: uugarkovic@alumnos.uai.cl

Cómo citar: Ugarkovic, U. (2022). Populism versus Parliamentarism: Towards Non-Antagonistic Forms of Democratic Politics. *Revista Stultifera*, 5(2), 59-79. DOI: 10.4206/rev.stultifera.2022.v5n2-03.

Abstract:

This work joins the debate on the relation between the categories of antagonism and politics, as it tackles the question of whether politics is to be seen as intrinsically antagonistic, or we could speak of non-antagonistic forms of thinking and acting politically. In doing so, it critically engages with the argument of Laclau by revisiting his stance on the centrality of antagonism for politics, which is seen as a result of his conflation of populism with politics and the consequent difficulty to anticipate the possibility of a non-populist political logic. Against the backdrop of Laclau's argument, this paper asks the question of whether there can exist a non-populist political logic, or a form of democratic politics which, together with populism, would be opposed to the apolitical forms of administration. Drawing on the intellectual project of Kari Palonen, this work portrays parliamentarism as a non-populist political logic based on a non-antagonistic form of the construction of the "people" as the democratic subject. Lastly, differentiating between the notions of democratic politics and politics of democracy, the paper ends by highlighting the contingent nature of the effect that populist and parliamentary forms of democratic politics have upon what is often constructed and perceived as the quality of democracy.

Keywords: populism, parliamentarism, politics, political logic, discourse theory, antagonism

The contemporary social-scientific literature increasingly focuses on the phenomenon of populism, its link with the process of political polarization, and its effect on what is often perceived and constructed as the quality of democracy. One of the most elaborate analytical frameworks which allows for the observation of the relation between these three categories, and which can help us understand why populism tends to be linked with polarization, why polarization can be so pernicious, as well as how the two are related to the category of democracy, is offered by the so-called Essex tradition of thought.

The Essex tradition uses the category of antagonism to account for the phenomenon which causes the dichotomization of the political field. Antagonism occurs when one discursive element interrupts or prevents the construction of another element's full identity, hence being both constitutive of the latter and symbolizing the possibility of its not being (Laclau, 2014, p. 113). Populism is necessarily antagonistic, for the differences which enter the chain of equivalence resulting in the formation of the popular identity

only do so through the exclusion of another set of differences internal to the society, in rejection of which the former become equivalent. The internal antagonistic frontier and the radical exclusion are therefore seen as constitutive of the popular identity. However, from there, Laclau famously goes on to conflate the categories of populism and politics, arguing that the two are synonymous and that antagonism and the construction of internal antagonistic frontiers are inherent to politics itself (2005, p. 154). Similarly, building upon the assumption that democracy boils down to the process of the construction of the sovereign people through representation and the act of naming, and that populism is the only way of constructing the people as the democratic subject, Laclau concludes that democracy as well is inherently and inevitably antagonistic.

This paper aspires to join the corpus of the literature which critically engages with this particular point in Laclau's argument, as it asks the question of whether politics and democracy are indeed intrinsically antagonistic, or we could speak of non-antagonistic forms of democratic politics which imply non-populist ways of constructing the democratic subject. Democratic politics is hereby understood as politics done within the democratic symbolic framework, which implies the legitimation of the political agency by the reference to the sovereign people and its will. Different forms of democratic politics, therefore, would diverge in the way in which they construct the people and its will, to which they all turn as the sole source of political legitimacy.

Some authors have already critiqued Laclau's conflation of the category of populism with the category of politics (Arditi, 2010) and argued that, rather than being synonymous with politics, populism should be understood as one particular form of doing politics, that is, one particular political logic (De Cleen et al., 2020). However, the literature does not elaborate on what those non-populist forms of politics, or political logics, might be. Laclau himself opposes populism to the apolitical institutionalist discourse which aspires to absorb all demands differentially, hence preventing them from entering chains of equivalence. There is no doubt that administration is apolitical and, as such, opposed to populism as a form of politics. What this article aims to do, however, is to problematize the possibility of the existence of an alternative political logic, a form of democratic politics opposed to populism which, together with populism, would be opposed to apolitical forms of administration.

One of the most relevant contributions on the possibility and the nature of non-antagonistic forms of politics has been made by Laclau's co-author from the *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Chantal Mouffe. Laclau and Mouffe (2001) observe that the identities that form part of an antagonistic relationship are not and can never be full, due to the fact that what prevents them from becoming full is at the same time constitutive of them. This leads them to conclude that antagonism, rather than being an objective relationship, is an indicator and an experience of the impossibility of objectivity, that is, of a final fixture of a system of differences consisting in full identities. It is precisely this lack of objectivity, indicated to by the presence of antagonism, that makes possible the politics as the struggle over the always partial and impermanent (re)institution of the social on an intrinsically contingent and undecidable terrain. It is for this reason that they both recognize the relevance of antagonism for the ontological *political*.

However, when it comes to the *politics*, Mouffe (2005) sustains that the political conflict does not have to take the antagonistic form. Building upon the ontological assumptions of the post-structuralist discourse theory, particularly upon the assumption that the social identities as well as relations between them are discursively constructed, she argues that we can construct our relations with the "other" in an agonistic, rather than antagonistic way. Due to the relational nature of identities which implies that the "other" is constitutive of "us", Mouffe argues that if we constituted the "other" as a legitimate "adversary" rather than as a Schmittian "enemy", we would have created an agonistic political relationship and kept antagonism at bay. The actual purpose of democratic politics, according to her, is to tame antagonism into agonism. In a democratic system, all members of a community see their belonging to the same symbolic space as an equivalence which is above all their differences. Relatedly, they all accept the legitimacy of political institutions within which they are to continue their permanent and ineradicable conflict over the desirable way of instituting the social. Her agonistic model of politics allows for the protection of democratic pluralism in the context of the always looming prospect of antagonism. Interestingly, Mouffe points out to parliamentarism as an example of a potentially effective form of taming antagonism into agonism, ie., a form of democratic politics (2005, pp. 21-25).

This paper starts from yet goes beyond the brief reference that Mouffe makes with respect to parliamentarism, as it tries to further elaborate on

the idea of parliamentarism as a non-antagonistic political logic, or a form of democratic politics. In doing so, it turns to the work of Kari Palonen, who has dedicated a great part of his intellectual project to developing the idea of parliamentarism as an ideal type of acting and thinking politically (2016b; 2019). Building upon the basic principles of classical parliamentarism, Palonen goes beyond the former's narrow understanding of parliamentarism as the institutional form of parliamentary government and elaborates the idea of parliamentarism as a particular way of thinking and doing politics, that is, a particular type of political reason.¹ What is notable is that the category of ideal type of acting and thinking politically, as used by Palonen, corresponds to the category of political logics used within the Essex tradition (De Cleen et al., 2018; De Cleen et al., 2020; Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985/2001). Both can be seen as referring to a form of thinking and doing politics understood as the institution, sedimentation, and normalization of the social, or hegemony, through its public contestation and defense. Yet, the definitional characteristics of parliamentarism make it intrinsically non-antagonistic, hence radically different from the populist political logic when it comes to the articulation of equivalences and differences, construction of the democratic subject, and the preferred form of approaching the (re)institution of the social.

This paper will argue that populism and parliamentarism can be seen as two contentious political logics, or forms of democratic politics. The implication of doing so is twofold. Firstly, this work will critically engage with Laclau's argument by revisiting his stance on the relation between the categories of antagonism and populism on the one side and the categories of politics and democracy on the other. Secondly, in doing so, it will aspire to contribute to the sector of the literature which critiques Laclau's conflation of populism with politics by further elaborating on the prospect of non-populist and non-antagonistic forms of democratic politics.

The first section of the paper will introduce the categories of politics and political logics. The second section will elaborate on populism and parliamentarism as two contentious political logics, or forms of democratic politics. Lastly, underlying the difference between the notions of democratic politics and politics of democracy, the third section will elaborate on populism's and parliamentarism's capacity as forms of democratic politics in the face of the literature questioning each of the two's democratic credentials. In doing so, it will emphasize the contingent nature of the effect

that political logics as forms of democratic politics have upon what is often perceived and constructed as the quality of democracy.

Politics and political logics

Despite approaching the phenomenon in question from two different perspectives, authors belonging to the so-called Essex tradition of thought on the one side, and Kari Palonen on the other, arrive at a very similar understanding of politics.

Laclau (2005) famously defines politics as the institution —to which some add the normalization and sedimentation (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Marttila, 2015)— of the social, or the hegemony. Politics, therefore, is understood as consisting in the public contestation and defense of the social, and antagonism, dissensus, and conflict are seen as inherent to it. Being that the social objectivity is of discursive nature, and that an order of discourse consists of essentially meaningless elements which gain their signification relationally, political intervention is a discursive intervention with the aim of (re)signification of particular elements of the discursive order through their (re)articulation. Politics is, therefore, a discursive activity.

As such, politics operates within the reciprocal relation between the discursive order and practices of articulation (Marttila, 2015). Discursive order, or hegemonic discursive conventions, both make possible and limit individual practices of articulation that draw on it. One can only articulate the elements that exist or create new ones but only in relation to the existing structures of meaning, either with the aim of confirming or contesting the discursive conventions. Practices of articulation, as the empirically accessible part of the discourse, which are often motivated by the interests and demands of those engaged in political struggle, affect back the discursive conventions they draw on. In doing so, they contribute towards the (re)shaping of the hegemonic order of discourse. In this sense, practices of articulation are seen as the method of politics, understood as the institution and the public contestation of the social, i.e., of the hegemonic discursive order.

A similar understanding of politics can be found in the intellectual project of Kari Palonen (Ihalainen et al., 2016a; Ihalainen & Palonen, 2009; Palonen, 2014; 2019; Wiesner et al., 2017). Approaching politics primarily as a power-seeking contingent and controversial activity, Palonen acknowledges the political and social implications of the conceptual change,

which itself is caused by the conflict over the interpretation of contested concepts in political debate.

Palonen builds his position on the point of convergence between the arguments of Skinner and Koselleck. Skinner parts from the assumption that concepts can never have an agreed-upon meaning, as the latter is rather dependent on the act of their use which is one-time, illocutionary, and context-dependent. Consequentially, he suggests focusing on the illocutionary use of words that refer to concepts in the capacity of speech acts, i.e. moves in a debate oriented towards achieving a certain purpose (Skinner, 1969; 1999; 2002). Koselleck acknowledges the intrinsic vagueness and contestability of basic political and social concepts; however, he insists that the possibility of communication between individuals is conditional on the existence of some sort of established corpus of language with its adjacent structures of meaning (1996). Skinner's "words which refer to concepts" presuppose the existence of shared concepts that such words would refer to. These concepts, notes Koselleck, change over time, with some shades of their meaning fading and disappearing, while others being added to them. Skinner recognizes this point as he notes that, while Koselleck focuses on the conceptual change *tout court*, he himself focuses on one particular means through which such change takes place (1999, pp. 71–72; 2002, pp. 186–87). The illocutionary use of words that refer to concepts affects, therefore, over the long term, the established corpus of language that makes their use possible, thereby modifying the meanings of concepts that structure the debate and mediate our perception of the social objectivity.

In this sense, Palonen proposes focusing on the analysis of political debates in order to observe how different uses of concepts as speech acts in a political debate cause, over the long term, the change in the dominant meaning of contested concepts. In doing so he focuses—according to some of his peers, *overfocuses* (Skinner, 1999)—on the political implications of the conceptual change. What allows for such conceptual change, however, is the "conceptual controversy", by which Palonen refers to the conflict over the articulation or interpretation of contested concepts.

The parallel with the Essex tradition's view on the centrality of the reciprocal relation between the discursive conventions and the practices of articulation for the activity of politics is, therefore, evident. Since discursive elements gain their meaning relationally, articulation is constitutive of their

signification. As there is no objective or essential way to structure the discursive elements into a particular formation, their articulation has to be guided by some contingent logic. The category of logics, introduced by Laclau and Mouffe (2001), is most detailly elaborated by Glynos and Howarth (2007).

Social logics answer the *what* question and refer to the irreflexive rule-following of the sedimented forms of the social. Fantasmatic logics answer the *why* question and account for the motivation or fantasy guiding the political agency. Political logics, however, refer to the *how* question, i.e., how the social is to be instituted and sedimented, or publicly contested and defended once its contingent nature has been revealed. Their reference to the *how* question makes them strictly formal.

Political logics are logics of articulation of equivalences and differences and drawing political frontiers. On the empirical level, they take the form of a discursive frame which is used to frame —or articulate— the contextual discursive elements, which provide them with their contingent and context-dependent content. These logics of articulation and structuration of contextual discursive elements help one not only to act politically, but also to make sense of politics for oneself, due to which they can also be thought of as forms of understanding, thinking, and doing politics. In order to be considered political, a logic has to imply a particular way of constructing the people, i.e., the democratic subject, and its sovereign will, the representation of which is the *sine qua non* of democratic politics.

Political logics, therefore, are related to the formal aspect of a political project which can have any sort of contingent ideological and programmatic content. Their formal nature distinguishes them from political ideologies which are of prescriptive nature. Political ideologies, which aspire to project the essence into the essentialless social, offer a vision of a desirable community, and imply a set of desirable policies which would bring us closer to achieving it. In other words, the fact that a certain political project ascribes to a particular ideology —say, its, political-Islamist, neo-liberal, socialist, or communist— indicates what kind of policy outcomes it can be expected to pursue. However, the fact that a political project is guided by a certain political logic —say, its populist— says nothing of its programmatic principles, for political logic refers to its form of understanding and doing politics and framing its contingent ideological and programmatic content.

Political logics as forms of politics imply particular ways of understanding, approaching, and handling dissensus and conflict, which are inherent to politics. Their political nature differentiates them from practices and regimes of practices based on social logics which perpetuate the sedimented forms of the social, such as bureaucracy as the stable element of a polity, or the consensus-imposing administration which operates in accordance with the principles of seemingly objective and universal rationality. The apolitical character of the latter comes from its impulse to try and overcome the dissensus and conflict by assuming that there can exist, beyond all politics, a set of objective or rational criteria which could allow us to establish what is objectively the best form to organize a community.

Towards non-antagonistic forms of democratic politics: Populism and parliamentarism as two contentious political logics

As indicated in the two previous sections, populism is hereby understood in Laclauian terms as political logic, political reason, or a way of thinking about politics (2005). The notion of populism as political logic has been further elaborated within the tradition of Essex most notably by de Cleen et al. (2018; 2020).

Parliamentarism, on the other hand, is understood in terms of Kari Palonen (2019), who defines it as an ideal type of acting and thinking politically, and in doing so goes beyond its narrow understanding as an institutional design. Parliamentarism is founded upon the basic assumption of the intrinsic and irreducible social complexity and heterogeneity, reflected in the intrinsic plurality of identities, demands, interests, and points of view. The irreducible social complexity is perpetuated by the fact that there cannot exist a set of commonly accepted objective criteria on basis of which one could decide which argument or point of view is objectively better than the other. For this reason, parliamentarism insists on the centrality of the free and fair deliberation *in utramque partem* between representatives of different argumentative positions, seen as equally legitimate and representative of the social heterogeneity, as the sole method of political decision-making. In that sense, parliamentarism implies the need for the centralization of power in the parliament as a representative and deliberative institution, which would become the principal forum of politics. The rationale is that the institution of parliament can provide the institutional infrastructure for the permanent

and structured deliberation between representatives of the heterogeneous citizenry as the principal form of the political decision-making process.

Parliamentarism is a political logic. Palonen himself underscores this point when he insists that parliamentary form of acting and thinking is to be understood in opposition to bureaucracy as the stable element of a polity, as well as in opposition to governance based upon the logic of administration or management (2015, p. 14). Parliamentarism is understood as opposed to administration precisely because, in contrast with the latter, it offers “a distinctly political way of thinking” (2019, p. 3). Just like populism, it is strictly formal in its nature, for it implies a form of approaching and understanding politics that, in and on itself, is not linked to any sort of ideological or programmatic content (2019, p. vi). The fact that parliamentarism implies the need for the centralization of power in the parliament as the principal forum of politics does not make it an institutionalist logic in Laclauian sense. Parliamentary political logic sees parliament as a political institution whose purpose is to foment dissensus and conflict, and facilitate doing politics, understood as the public contestation and defense of the social, in the context of the intrinsic and irreducible social heterogeneity. In that sense, its political character opposes it to the administration or the bureaucratic apparatus (2019, pp. 2-3).

The principal difference between populism and parliamentarism is found in the fact that while the former is an antagonistic political logic, the latter is a non-antagonistic one. Political logics represent different forms of articulation of equivalences and differences in the process of (re)drawing political frontiers of inclusion and exclusion, in which they create different sorts of political boundaries and relations between identities. In order to be considered political, a logic needs to produce “some kind of equivalence (some kind of ‘people’)” (Laclau, 2005, p. 154), that is, an equivalence consisting in a popular identity which those identifying with it would superordinate to their internal differences, hence creating the popular or democratic subject, the “people”.

Populism constructs the people in an antagonistic way. The internal antagonistic frontier is a definitional characteristic of the populist political logic, as it has a constitutive role in the formation of the populist people, that is, the *plebs* aspiring to be the only *populus*. The populist people is constituted on the bases of the externalization of one element or set of elements internal to the society, which are transformed into the constitutive

outside, in rejection to which a heterogenous set of demands and identities is constituted as equivalent.

Yet, as noted in the introduction to this work, Laclau's conflation of populism with the categories of politics and political logics leads him to define the latter in terms of the characteristics of the former, and conclude that the internal antagonistic frontier is a defining characteristic of populism, and therefore of the category of political logics itself. Similarly, parting from the assumption that the populist way is the only way of constructing the people, Laclau concludes that, without an internal antagonistic frontier, a society "could not create a 'people'" for "it would be unable to differentiate itself from anything else" (2005, p. 78). His argument, therefore, does not anticipate the possibility of a non-antagonistic political logic, which would be based upon a non-populist way of constructing the people. However, if we agree with De Cleen et al. (2020) that populism and politics are not synonyms and that populism is only one kind of politics, or one particular political logic, then we imply that there can exist political logics, or forms of politics, which are different from the populist one.

Parliamentary political logic is the case in point. Parliamentarism constructs the popular identity non-antagonistically, in such a way as to make the limits of the people coincide with the limits of the heterogeneous citizenry. This clearly resonates with Mouffe's argument that the main condition of a democratic pluralist system is that individuals belonging to it feel that they share the same symbolic space, and that they can elevate this common identity above their internal differences. Second condition is that all of those sharing the common identity accept the legitimacy of political institutions through which they will conduct their permanent and ineradicable political conflict (Mouffe, 2005, p. 20). Unlike populism, parliamentary political logic does not impose its own internal antagonistic frontier, that is, does not construct the popular identity on the basis of the radical exclusion of a set of differences. Rather than on externalization, it is based on the internalization and legitimization of differences, which take the agonistic form. According to Palonen, parliamentary form of thinking and doing politics is based upon the principle of deliberation *in utramque partem* between different argumentative positions and points of view representative of the heterogeneous citizenry, which are all seen as equally legitimate. He explicitly refutes the idea of objectivity and remains unconvinced of the idea that there can be such thing as the objectively best argument or

argumentative position, which would be beyond politics and could be accessed or discovered through deliberation. In so doing, he joins Mouffe in her critical stance towards the basic assumptions of the Habermasian model of deliberation (Palonen, 2019, p. 229). As he sustains, permanent and ineradicable dissensus and conflict are inherent to politics, and parliamentarism represents a form of thinking and doing politics precisely in the context of them. Parliamentary ideal type of acting and thinking politically is based on the assumption that there is no way to reduce the social heterogeneity or to find the objectively best way of instituting the social. In that sense, any intent of social homogenization, removal of dissensus, or imposition of the “rational” rather than political administration of a polity is seen as an attempt not only against parliamentarism, but also against politics as such. In that sense, parliamentarism can be seen as a form of politics different from, and opposed to, the populist one.

Populism and parliamentarism as two forms of democratic politics imply two different ways of constructing the popular will. As for the former, the role of the leader is important for the construction of the populist people and its will, for it is the leader who facilitates the formation of equivalences between heterogeneous demands and the articulation of the popular will. By claiming to be representing the popular will that is already there, the leader creates it. Parliamentary political logic, on the other hand, implies that the popular will is a product of the process of free and fair deliberation *in utramque partem* between the legitimately elected representatives of the heterogeneous people in the parliament as a representative and deliberative institution and the principal arena of politics.

The conflict over the way of constructing the people, indicative of the presence of different political logics underlying the debate, is a common occurrence in the political struggle. The empirical reality provides us with examples of non-populist ways of constructing the people as the democratic subject, countering Laclau’s contention that populism is the only way of constructing the popular identity, and that the populist people is the only possible people.² The signifier “people” is a floating signifier whose signification depends on its articulation, and the conflict over its articulation forms an integral part of the political struggle itself.

In summary, there is no doubt that conflict and dissensus are constitutive of politics, and by extension, of all its different forms. Populism

is based upon the radical antagonistic split between the people and the other. Parliamentarism is based upon the principle of deliberation *in utramque partem*, which presupposes the dissensus and conflict between different points of view. Put differently, without conflict and dissensus neither the internal antagonistic frontiers nor the deliberation *in utramque partem* would be possible which, in turn, means that there would be no politics in either its populist or parliamentary form. The main difference between populist and parliamentary political logics, as two forms of thinking and doing democratic politics, has to do with the issue of antagonism. Populism is an antagonistic political logic, in the sense that it creates its own internal antagonistic frontier, dichotomizing the political field. Parliamentarism, on the other hand, is a non-antagonistic political logic, in the sense that it does not impose an internal antagonistic frontier of its own, but rather suggests a way of approaching the existing conflicts, dissensus, and antagonisms present in a pluralist democratic subject, and proposes a way of doing politics in the context of them.

Populism, parliamentarism, and the “quality of democracy”

In order to understand the relation between populism and parliamentarism as two forms of democratic politics on the one side and the so-called quality of democracy on the other, it is important to differentiate between what we might call democratic politics and politics of democracy. This argument borrows its logic from de Cleen et al. (2020) who differentiate between populist politics and politics of populism. Democratic politics, as mentioned earlier, is politics done within the democratic symbolic framework, which implies a certain form of construction of the sovereign people and its will, and the reference to it as the ultimate source of political legitimacy. Politics of democracy, on the other hand, refers to the fact that “democracy” is a word, used frequently in day-to-day political debate in order to refer to one’s own or the other’s political project, with the aim of achieving a particular illocutionary purpose. In other words, it is a signifier, or an essentially contested concept, conflict over which articulation forms an integral part of the political struggle.

The relation between the categories of populism and parliamentarism and the category of democracy is a hotly debated issue in the academic literature and arguing that the former two are forms of democratic politics can certainly raise objections. Part of the literature argues that populism is incompatible not only with liberalism and the liberal version of democracy,

but also with the idea and the practice of democracy itself (Ober, 2017). Similar can be said of the relationship between parliamentarism and democracy, for the two are often seen as independent and not necessarily mutually compatible traditions. Indeed, the early history of parliamentarism is characterized by its disregard for democratic principles such as popular sovereignty or universal suffrage, which were largely ignored or even explicitly abhorred and rejected as dangerous for parliamentary politics. It was a century ago that Schmitt famously argued that parliamentarism and democracy are incompatible due to the former being founded upon the principles of the liberal rather than democratic tradition. In doing so, he argued that the parliament, as a representative institution based on the principles of free representation and deliberation, is incompatible with the democratic principle of popular self-government based on the singularity of identities of governor and governed (1988).

The contemporary literature on parliamentarism also asks the question of whether the articulation of parliamentarism and democracy within the modern notion of parliamentary democracy has resulted in friction between the two, creating the need for one to give in and renounce some of its definitional characteristics in order to be articulated with the other. In his assessment of the state of the modern parliamentarism, Selinger (2019) seems to be echoing Schmitt's assertion that mass democracy and mass political parties have made basic principles of parliamentarism outdated and inapplicable, depriving the parliament of its intended purpose and function and turning it into a mere façade. Selinger sustains that the modern mass democracy facilitates the concentration of power in the executive which, in turn, weakens the parliamentary principle of free deliberation as the method of political decision-making, as well as the principle of the dominance of the parliament over the executive. Even more importantly, he argues that the modern democracy has weakened –if not terminated– the practice of free parliamentary deliberation, which is a constitutive characteristic of parliamentarism. He notes that the modern democracy, based on the principles of popular sovereignty and universal suffrage, has led to the strengthening of political parties as an indispensable tool for mobilizing and organizing large constituencies. The evolution of political parties has led to their increased grip over the parliamentary representatives, which has resulted in the increase in the party discipline, decrease in the parliamentarians' autonomy, and the removal of the conditions for a truly free mandate and deliberation. The removal of the

conditions for free parliamentary deliberation and the endemicity of party block negotiations and instrumental power struggles in the parliament are therefore seen as directly attributable to the modern democracy. Such a position reflects Leibholz's view on the incompatibility between the party-state, itself a product of the mass democracy, and the principles of genuine parliamentary representation (1951, p. 105). It is for these reasons that Selinger concludes, echoing Schmitt, that there has occurred a break between the classical parliamentarism and the modern democracy, as the former has been rendered impractical by the latter (2019, p. 17).

It is against the backdrop of this literature that the difference between democratic politics and politics of democracy, and the capacity of populism and parliamentarism as forms of democratic politics needs to be restated. Populism is intrinsically linked to the process of the construction of the sovereign people and the popular will that it aspires to represent. The fact that populism cannot be separated from the democratic symbolic framework is also recognized outside the hereby discussed Essex tradition (Canovan, 2002; Pappas, 2016; Urbinati, 2019).

Whether or not one will take parliamentarism to be compatible with democracy depends, among other things, on the way in which one defines democracy. Parliamentarism is certainly not compatible with the Schmittian understanding of democracy, which is based upon the assumption of the homogeneity of the people and the unanimity of the popular will. Parliament as a representative and deliberative institution would obviously be an alien body in an attempt of direct democracy and immediate popular self-rule.

This paper, however, understands democracy as a symbolic framework within which the political agency is legitimized through the reference to the sovereign people, which itself is an empty signifier that can be discursively constructed in different ways, through different forms of articulation of equivalences and differences. As we have seen, a construction of the people in such a way as to make its limits correspond with the limits of the citizenry results in an intrinsically heterogeneous and pluralist democratic subject, in which case political representation and deliberation become necessary instruments of the formulation of the popular will. Therefore, rather than being indicators of parliamentarism's incompatibility with democracy, political representation and deliberation became the precondition for its effective consumption.

Palonen's work on parliamentarism as an ideal type of thinking and acting politically also shows us that, on the conceptual, or ideal-typical level, there is no incompatibility between parliamentarism and democratic principles. Palonen routinely articulates democracy and parliamentarism together within his conception of modern parliamentarism, which presupposes franchise, eligibility, and "modern conceptions of the representation of people" (2016b, p. 7). Democratic credentials of parliamentarism are traced back to the process of transition from estates, based on the imperative mandate and the representation of particular interests, to the parliament, based upon the representation of the people and free mandate (Ihalainen, p. 2016).

In that sense, the parliamentary political logic implies the construction of the people whose limits correspond with the limits of the heterogeneous citizenry, and the construction of the popular will through the process of free parliamentary deliberation between the representatives of the social heterogeneity. It also implies the principle of the sovereignty of the people, for parliamentarians are responsible to the people who exercise control over their representatives through various instruments of democratic accountability, free and periodic elections being principal among them. Certainly, Palonen is aware of the "presidential tendencies" (Wiesner et al., 2017, p. 37) within parliamentarism, as well as of the increase in the party discipline and the negative effects it has on the possibility and practice of a genuinely free parliamentary deliberation. He does not hesitate to qualify them as "challenges to parliamentarism" (Palonen, 2016a). However, rather than as an indicator of the incompatibility between parliamentarism and democracy, he sees them as digressions from the ideal type which occur in practice and which should be addressed and, if possible, reversed. The category of political logics is of ideal-typical nature, meaning that in the empirical reality they are never found in their pure form. Rather than being binary categories—implying that a political project either is or is not populist or parliamentarian—they are of gradual nature, as their presence in a particular political project is a matter of articulation and degree.

This brings us back to the question of the relation between populism and parliamentarism as two forms of thinking and doing democratic politics on the one side and what is often referred to as the quality of democracy on the other. Quality of democracy, as a category of empirical analysis, presupposes the operationalization of a particular interpretation of the

category of democracy and the corresponding method of its quantification, an exercise which necessarily contains a dose of discretion and is therefore always contestable. The effect of populism and parliamentarism on the quality of democracy, regardless of how the latter is constructed, is contingent, as the strictly formal nature of political logics makes them normatively neutral (De Cleen et al., 2020). The effect that political logics have on concrete political outcomes is mediated, as it depends on their articulation with the contingent ideological and programmatic content that they forward, as well as on their interaction with the contingent contextual factors within which they operate. The indirect nature of the link between political logics and concrete political outcomes indicates that one cannot aspire to unequivocally determine the effect that particular political logics have on what one constructs or perceives as the quality of democracy. Instead of recurring to induction, deduction, or analogy in order to determine *the* effect that particular political logics have upon the quality of democracy, such effect is to be analyzed retroductively on case-to-case basis.

Conclusion

Dissensus and conflict are constitutive of politics. Acknowledging this, however, raises the question of whether this implies that antagonism too is constitutive of it, or we can think and do politics in a non-antagonistic way. Ernesto Laclau seems to affirm the former when he, emphasizing the intrinsically antagonistic nature of populism, goes on to reduce all politics to populism and claim that the two are synonyms. As a consequence of such conflation, it has become common within the Essex tradition of thought to observe the phenomenon of populism in opposition to different forms of anti-politics. Populism is most frequently framed as being opposed to the depoliticizing administration, which brings about the decrease in relevance of the people and its will, transition of power from popular representatives to technocrats, and intents towards the removal of dissensus and conflict through rationalistic decision-making and disciplination of the public sphere (Galanopoulos & Stavrakakis, 2019; Katsambekis, 2014; Stavrakakis et al., 2018).

The purpose of this article was to revisit the issue of the relation between antagonism and politics, and the idea of the centrality of the former for the latter. This was done by raising the question of whether we can speak of a logic, opposed to the populist one, which is genuinely political, and

contrast populism to an alternative political logic. Put differently, the question was the one of whether we can speak of a form of democratic politics opposed to the populist one which, together with populism, is opposed to the anti-political administration. It has been argued that parliamentarism is such political logic. While its non-antagonistic character differentiates it from populism, parliamentarism is still a political logic, as it implies an approach to thinking and doing politics, understood as the (re)institution of the social through its public contestation and defense.

The focus on political logics shifts the attention of the analyst to the formal aspect of politics. It allows one to analyze not what an individual or collective political agent does, but how does it do it, that is, how politics is understood, thought of, and done. Political logics undoubtedly have an important effect on political dynamics within a polity. However, their influence on concrete political outcomes is mediated by their articulation with the ideological and programmatic content that they project, as well as by their interaction with contingent contextual factors. Since there is no direct link between political logics and concrete political outcomes, one cannot aspire to establish a general and universal effect that different political logics have on what can be constructed and perceived as the quality of democracy. Nevertheless, the formal aspect of politics is as important for political dynamics and concrete political outcomes within a polity as the actual programmatic and ideological principles being contested over, due to which it deserves to be analyzed for its own sake.

Notes

¹ He reiterates: “For me the main point is not to understand parliamentarism as a political regime, in comparison with presidentialism, semi-presidentialism, etc.” (2019, p. 25, italics in original), for such an understanding is “narrow and misleading” (2019, p. 107). He differentiates between parliamentarism as an ideal type of acting and thinking politically, parliament as an institution, and parliamentary system as a constitutional form.

² Take, for instance, Angela Merkel’s statements such as “We are all the people” (“Angela Merkel: “Wir alle sind das Volk””, 2017), or “There is no justification whatsoever that small groups in our society presume to define who the people are. The people are everyone who lives in this country” (“Das Volk ist jeder, der in diesem Lande lebt”, 2017). These statements are made in response to the populist PEGIDA’s slogan ‘We are the people’. If we accept Laclau’s contention that the “name is the ground of the thing” (2005, pp. 100-101) and that the popular subject

is created through the act of naming, then the two abovementioned interventions represent two distinct ways —one populist other non-populist— of creating the people as the democratic subject, indicative of the presence of two different political logics.

References

- Arditi, B. (2010). Populism Is Hegemony Is Politics? On Ernesto Laclau's On Populist Reason. *Constellations*, 17(3), 488-97.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2004.00468.x>
- Canovan, M. (2002). Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy. In Y. Meny & Y. Surel (Eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (pp. 25-44). Palgrave Macmillan
- De Cleen, B., Glynos, J., & Mondon, A. (2018). Critical Research on Populism: Nine Rules of Engagement. *Organization*, 25(5), 649-61.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508418768053>
- De Cleen, B., Glynos, J., & Mondon, A. (2020). Populist Politics and the Politics of "Populism": The Radical Right in Western Europe. In P. Ostiguy, F. Panizza & B. Moffitt (Eds.), *Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach* (pp. 155-177). Routledge.
- Galanopoulos, A., & Stavrakakis, Y. (2019). Populism, Anti-Populism and Post-Truth in Crisis-Ridden Greece. *POPULISMUS Working Papers*, 10.
<http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/313950>
- Glynos, J., & Howarth, D. (2007). *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*. Routledge.
- Ihalainen, P. (2016). "European Parliamentary Experiences from a Conceptual Historical Perspective." In P. Ihalainen, C. Ilie, & K. Palonen (Eds.), *Parliament and Parliamentarianism: A Comparative History of a European Concept* (pp. 19-31). Berghahn books.
- Ihalainen, P., Ilie, C., & Palonen, K. (2016a). *Parliament and Parliamentarianism: A History of a European Concept*. Berghahn books.
- Ihalainen, P. (2016b). Parliament as a Conceptual Nexus. In *Parliament and Parliamentarianism: A Comparative History of a European Concept* (pp. 1-16). Berghahn books.
- Ihalainen, P., & Palonen, K. (2009). Parliamentary Sources in the Comparative Study of Conceptual History: Methodological Aspects and Illustrations of a Research Proposal. *Parliaments, Estates & Representation*, 29, 17-34.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02606755.2009.9522293>

- Katsambekis, G. (2014). The Place of the People in Post-Democracy Researching “Antipopulism” and Post-Democracy in Crisis-Ridden Greece. *POSTData: Revista de Reflexión y Análisis Político*, 19(2), 555-582.
http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?pid=S1851-96012014000200009&script=sci_abstract&tlng=pt
- Koselleck, R. (1996). A Response to Comments on the Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. In H. Lehmann & M. Richter (Eds.), *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts: New Studies on Begriffsgeschichte* (pp., 59-70). German Historical Institute.
- Laclau, E. (2005). *On Populist Reason*. Verso. <http://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/On-Populist-Reason-by-Ernesto-Laclau.pdf>.
- Laclau, E. (2014). *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*. VERSO Books.
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (2nd. ed.). Verso.
- Leibholz, G. (1951). Der Parteienstaat Des Bonner Grundgesetzes. In H. Wandersleb (Ed.), *Recht, Staat, Wirtschaft* (pp. 99-125). Verlag.
- Marttila, T. (2015). Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis: A Suggestion for a Research Program. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 16(3).
<https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-16.3.2282>
- Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the Political*. Routledge.
- Ober, J. (2017). *Demopolis: Democracy before Liberalism in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Palonen, K. (2014). *Politics and Conceptual Histories: Rhetorical and Temporal Perspectives*.
- Palonen, K. (2016a). Epilogue: Some Challenges to Parliamentarism. In P. Ihalainen, C. Ilie, & K. Palonen (Eds.), *Parliament and Parliamentarianism: A Comparative History of a European Concept* (pp. 311-316). Berghahn books.
- Palonen, K. (2016b). Thinking of Politics in a Parliamentary Manner: Perspectives on the Conceptual History of Parliamentarism. In P. Ihalainen, C. Ilie, & K. Palonen (Eds.), *Parliament and Parliamentarianism: A Comparative History of a European Concept* (pp. 228-242). Berghahn books.
- Palonen, K. (2019). *Parliamentary Thinking: Procedure, Rhetoric and Time*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Palonen, K., & Rosales, J.M. (2015). *Parliamentarism and Democratic Theory*. Barbara Budrich Publishers.
- Pappas, T. S. (2016). Modern Populism: Research Advances, Conceptual and Methodological Pitfalls, and the Minimal Definition. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press.
<https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-17>.
- Schmitt, C. (1988). *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. MIT Press.
<http://books.google.com/books?id=czvz6O0JssC&pgis=1>.
- Selinger, W. (2019). *Parliamentarism: From Burke to Weber*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9781108585330/type/book>.
- Skinner, Q. (1969). Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas. *History and Theory*, 8(1), 3–53. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2504188>
- Skinner, Q. (1999). Rhetoric and Conceptual Change. *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought*, 3(1), 60–73. <https://journal-re-descriptions.org/article/10.7227/R.3.1.5/>.
- Skinner, Q. (2002). *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stavrakakis, Y., Katsambekis, G., Kioupkiolis, A., Nikisianis, N., & Siomos, T. (2018). Populism, Anti-Populism and Crisis. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 17(1), 4–27. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-017-0142-y>
- Urbinati, N. (2019). Political Theory of Populism. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22(1), 111–27. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050317-070753>
- Wiesner, C., Haapala, T., & Palonen, K. (2017). *Debates, Rhetoric and Political Action: Practices of Textual Interpretation and Analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Newspapers articles

- Angela Merkel: „Wir alle sind das Volk“. (13.1.2017). *Deutsche Welle*.
<https://www.dw.com/de/angela-merkel-wir-alle-sind-das-volk/a-37131049>
- „Das Volk ist jeder, der in diesem Lande lebt“. (26.2.2017). *Welt*.
<https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article162407512/Das-Volk-ist-jeder-der-in-diesem-Lande-lebt.html>

REVISTA STULTIFERA

DE HUMANIDADES Y CIENCIAS SOCIALES

VOLUMEN 5, NÚMERO 2, SEGUNDO SEMESTRE DEL 2022

ISSN 0719-983X

Polarización, democracia y populismo(s): propuestas de análisis

Claudio Riveros y Alejandro Pelfini

La razón democrática del populismo. Antagonismo, heterogeneidad y populismo posliberal

Marcelo Nazareno

Populism versus Parliamentarism: Towards Non-Antagonistic Forms of Democratic Politics

Uros Ugarkovic

El antagonismo, perfecto *partenaire* del populismo

Graciela Ferrás

La venganza de los incorrectos. La derecha radical populista y la política del resentimiento

Gastón Souroujon

Del populismo como amenaza a la amenaza populista, crónicas de un destino anunciado. Diálogos necesarios entre la teoría política y la socio-historia

Edgardo Manero

Populismo y polarización política en la Región Andina. Entre los líderes y la demanda populista

Sebastián Umpierrez de Reguero, Ingrid Ríos, Eduardo Herrera y Santiago González

Democracia, república y populismo en la Argentina reciente a la luz del debate intelectual (1983-2015)

Sabrina Morán

Sin agonismo no hay paraíso: Polarización y populismo en el proceso constituyente chileno

Cristóbal Bellolio Badiola

Masivo y antielitario: el estallido social chileno como momento populista

Nicolás Selamé

¿Hay un futuro político para el “postfascismo”? Presentación de Corcuff, P. (2021). *La grande confusion. Comment l'extrême droite gagne la bataille des idées*

Philippe Corcuff

Posturas e imposturas en torno a un concepto negativo de democracia. Reseña de Friz, C. (2021). *El exceso de la democracia*

Cristóbal Balbontín-Gallo y María B. Gutiérrez Recabarren

Reseña de Salmorán, G. (2021). *Populismo. Historia y geografía de un concepto*

Karina Gómez Cantillana