Sites of Populism

Einstein Forum, Potsdam

January 10, 2018

EINSTEIN FORUM

PROGRAM

| 10.00 | Mischa Gabowitsch, Potsdam |
| | *Introduction: A Sense of Place* |

| 10.30 | Laurent Thévenot, Paris |
| | *Populism and Common-Places* |

| 11.30 | COFFEE BREAK |

| 12.00 | Tuukka Ylä-Anttila, Tampere / Florence |
| | *Familiarity as a Tool of Populism* |

| 13.00 | LUNCH BREAK |

| 14.45 | Mary Taylor, New York |
| | *Populism, Antipopulism, and the Construction of "the People" in Hungary* |

| 15.45 | Virág Molnár, New York |
| | *The Toolkit of Nationalist Populism in Contemporary Hungary: Symbols, Objects, and New Media* |

| 16.45 | COFFEE BREAK |

| 17.00 | Bart Bonikowski, Cambridge/MA (by video link) |
| | *The Resonance of Radical Politics* |

| 18.00 | RECEPTION |

Sites of Populism

Conceived by: **Mischa Gabowitsch**, Potsdam

Participants:
Bart Bonikowski, Cambridge, MA
Virág Molnár, New York
Mary Taylor, New York
Laurent Thévenot, Paris
Tuukka Ylä-Anttila, Tampere/Florence

Everybody is talking about populism. To define this strand of politics, we often resort to dichotomies: emotions, not reason; truthiness instead of facts. But populists do not appeal to abstract emotions. They excel at tapping into everyday lifeworlds—at taking intimately familiar things, places, and habits and endowing them with political significance. Our workshop aims to examine that process based on case studies from a range of countries. Yet we will also discuss whether the personal, the familiar, the intimate can be given a place in politics without playing into the populists' hands.

Sites of Populism

Konzeption: **Mischa Gabowitsch,** Potsdam

Teilnehmer:
Bart Bonikowski, Cambridge, MA
Virág Molnár, New York
Mary Taylor, New York
Laurent Thévenot, Paris
Tuukka Ylä-Anttila, Tampere/Florenz

„Populismus" ist in aller Munde. Oft wird diese Form der Politik über Gegensätze definiert: Emotionen statt Vernunft, gefühlte Wahrheiten statt gesicherter Tatsachen. Doch die Populisten appellieren nicht an abstrakte Gefühle. Sie verstehen es, an alltägliche Lebenswelten anzuknüpfen: Dinge, Orte und Gewohnheiten, die uns vertraut sind, laden sie geschickt mit politischer Bedeutung auf. In dem Workshop soll dieser Prozess, ausgehend von Fallstudien aus verschiedenen Ländern, näher beleuchtet werden. Zugleich sollen Gegenentwürfe zur Sprache kommen und die Frage erörtert werden: Kann man dem Persönlichen, dem Vertrauten, ja dem Heimatlichen einen Platz in der Politik einräumen, ohne es zu einem Spielball des Populismus zu machen?

Veranstaltung in englischer Sprache

Mischa Gabowitsch

A Sense of Place

Populism is often described as a response to globalization, to the erosion of old certainties, to the uprooting of a sense of home. Supporters of populist politicians react to what they feel is a loss of place and a devaluation, in public life, of things they hold dear. Yet place matters regardless of political preference. From geography to sociology and from history to anthropology, the significance of places and multiple attachments to them, of *situated* action and communication, has come to the fore across the social sciences in recent years. Public art has also discovered pre-existing attachments to places: from site-specific works created by artists with no prior attachment to those sites, there is now a move toward more equal forms of co-creation involving local residents. Introducing our workshop, this talk surveys different approaches to understanding the significance of places, offering new insights not only into populism, but also into forms of togetherness and solidarity that might point beyond it.

Mischa Gabowitsch is a researcher at the Einstein Forum. He holds a BA from Oxford and a PhD from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and is a former fellow of the Princeton University Society of Fellows, as well as former editor-in-chief of the journals *Neprikosnovenny zapas* (Moscow) and *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research* (Saint Petersburg). Based on ethnographic fieldwork, oral history, and archival research, his work has focused primarily on the Soviet Union and post-socialist countries, and he has written on societal responses to nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, war, and Stalinist terror; on protest and social movements; and on monuments, memorials, and cemeteries. His most recent book publications are *Protest in Putin's Russia* (2016), *Kriegsgedenken als Event: Der 9. Mai 2015 im postsozialistischen Europa* (2017, as co-editor) and *Replicating Atonement: Foreign Models in the Commemoration of Atrocities* (2017, as editor). At present he is working on a history of Soviet war memorials. In all his work he has been particularly interested in the role specific places play in social action.

Laurent Thévenot

Populism and Common-Places

My approach to populism, and more broadly politics, focuses primarily, not on institutions and parties, nor on strategies of mobilization on the part of leaders, but on the ways in which actors participate in the dynamics of disputes that claim legitimacy for the whole community. The practical operations that this requires—firstly, communicating personal voices and, secondly, composing or integrating acceptable differences—yield different *pluralist constructions of commonality* which differ in the degree to which they welcome, transform, or suppress intimate attachments.

Democratic models of building commonality and difference are usually premised on the construction of deliberative public spaces, disregarding what I call the grammar of personal affinities to common-places, even though this grammar is a widespread feature of ordinary communication. How does this form of communication operate with the multiplicity of common-places and variety of their personal and emotional investment? And what transformations does populism make when it configures unanimity at the expense of pluralism, and links it to hostility toward the enemies of substantialized community?

Laurent Thévenot is professor (Directeur d'études) at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (Centre Simmel) and a member of the editorial board of the journal *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales*. Following his research on "social coding" and "investment in (conventional) forms" that contribute to the coordination of economic and social action, Laurent Thévenot inititated with Luc Boltanski what has become known as "pragmatic sociology" (*De la justification. Les économies de la grandeur*, 1991; English: *On Justification: Economies of Worth*, 2006). To understand the everyday sense of injustice, they studied the practical tests met and the "rise in generality" that occurs when raising one's voice in disputes over the common good. He also co-founded with economists the critical institutionalist current of "convention theory." More recently, in addition to the grammar of orders of worth for the common good, he has also identified other constructions of commonality in the plural (the liberal grammar of interests, the grammar of personal affinities to common-places) which confer both consistency and dynamism on the community (*L'action au pluriel: Sociologie des régimes d'engagement*, 2006). In support of these theoretical developments, his empirical investigations have focused on governance by standards and objectivity, and have drawn on

comparative research programs on architectures of communities in Western Europe and Russia (*Revue d'Études Comparatives Est-Ouest*, 2017, 3-4), the United States (e.g. *Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology: Repertoires of Evaluation in France and the United States*, co-edited with Michèle Lamont, 2000) and Brazil.

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Tuukka Ylä-Anttila

Familiarity as a tool of populism

In the vein of recent theorizing, populism can be seen as a cultural repertoire or "toolkit" to make political demands which claim to represent "the people" against "the elite." By analyzing a public debate in Finland, in which nationalist populist arguments appropriate a culturally shared, familiar experience—that of singing *Suvivirsi*, the Summer Hymn, in spring ceremonies at school—I argue that evoking familiarity is an effective way of "doing populism." I have studied media texts from 2002 to 2014 and a questionnaire to political candidates in 2011 using Laurent Thévenot's work on the regimes of familiarity and justification, as well as recent research on populism as a cultural practice. I claim that political appeals to the familiar hymn are particularly compatible with the populist valorization of the experience of the "common people." Familiarity thus constitutes a capable tool in the toolkit of populism. Remembering the shared experience of singing the hymn bonds the assumed "people" together, and gives an emotional charge to populist claims. I place this argument in a broader context of how populism appeals to "common sense" and redemption, against bureaucratic and technocratic expertise and governance, which is deemed illegitimate by populism.

Tuukka Ylä-Anttila is Postdoctoral Researcher in sociology at the University of Tampere. He holds a PhD from the University of Helsinki. His work deals with populism as a cultural practice, emotional appeals in politics, online public spheres, and alternative knowledge claims in populism. He currently works in two research projects: "Citizens in the Making" on youth participation and non-participation in politics, and "Mobilizing the Disenfranchised" on populist countermedia. His most recent publication is "Familiarity as a tool of populism: Political appropriation of shared experiences and the case of Suvivirsi" in *Acta Sociologica*.

Mary N. Taylor

Populism, Antipopulism, and the Construction of "the People" in Hungary

This presentation will have two parts. The first will address the way in which the label "populism" today functions to legitimate a form of technocratic rule that is common in the neoliberal/post-socialist era. By uncovering the work of "liberal antipopulism," I hope to clear our vision for a deeper view of problems of democracy faced not just in Hungary but more broadly in the "post-political" moment and to make visible aspects of the struggle over the definition of "the people" that go beyond rhetoric. In the second part, I draw on historical and contemporary practices and ideologies of the Hungarian "folk" movement to address questions of how "the people" is constructed in relationship to Hungarianness under particular historical conditions.

Mary N. Taylor is Assistant Director of the Center for Place, Culture, and Politics at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her research focuses on sites, techniques and politics of civic cultivation, social movement, and cultural management; the relationship of ethics and aesthetics to nationalism and cultural differentiation; and people's movements in interwar, socialist and postsocialist Hungary, East Europe, and the Balkans. She is a member of the editorial collective of *LeftEast*, co-organizer of an annual roving summer school on "neoliberalizing postsocialism," and co-founder of the Brooklyn Laundry Social Club. Her writing has been published in an array of fora, including *Focaal*, *Bajo el Volcán*, and *Hungarian Studies*, and she is currently completing her book *Movement of the People: Folk Dance, Populism and Citizenship in Hungary*.

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Virág Molnár

The Toolkit of Nationalist Populism in Contemporary Hungary: Symbols, Objects, and New Media

Studies of social movements underscore the centrality of linguistic frames and framing in political communication. Similarly, research on populism attributes great significance to mapping the distinctive discursive logic of populist reasoning (e.g., the trope of pitting corrupt elites against the people). My

presentation aims to move beyond the focus on discursive practices to stress the role of symbols, objects and new media in the political communication of populist ideas, using Hungary as a case study. First, I show how key historical symbols (e.g., the cockade of the 1848 revolution or the Holy Crown of St. Stephen) that used to be widely shared across the political and social spectrum have been increasingly appropriated by the populist right. Second, I examine how consumer objects, which are key props of a radical nationalist subculture, create important material conduits for political communication. Finally, I highlight how the populist right has used new media to create an alternative public sphere beyond the confines of mainstream media. I suggest that the failure, and outright rejection, of the left and liberals to engage in symbolic communication has enabled right-wing populists to progressively monopolize definitions of cultural membership in the nation.

Virág Molnár holds a Ph.D. from Princeton University and is currently Associate Professor of Sociology at the New School for Social Research. Her research explores the intersections of culture, politics, social change and knowledge production in Eastern Europe, with special focus on urban culture, the built environment, new communications technologies, and the material culture of nationalism. Her book *Building the State: Architecture, Politics, and State Formation in Postwar Central Europe* (2013) received the 2014 Mary Douglas Prize from the American Sociological Association. She has been a visiting fellow at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University, the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and the American Academy in Berlin. Her research has been supported by the National Science Foundation, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, a Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowship, and the American Council of Learned Societies, among others.

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Bart Bonikowski

The Resonance of Radical Politics

Scholarly and journalistic accounts of the recent successes of radical-right politics in Europe and the United States, including the Brexit referendum and the Trump campaign, tend to conflate three phenomena: populism, nationalism, and authoritarianism. While all three are important elements of the radical right,

they are neither coterminous nor limited to the right. The resulting lack of analytical clarity has hindered accounts of the causes and consequences of ethno-nationalist populism. Existing research shows that both the supply and demand sides of radical politics have been relatively stable over time, which suggests that in order to understand public support for radical politics, scholars should instead focus on the increased resonance between pre-existing attitudes and discursive frames. Drawing on recent research in cultural sociology, I argue that resonance is not only a function of the congruence between a frame and the beliefs of its audience, but also of shifting context. In the case of radical-right politics, a variety of social changes have engendered a sense of collective status threat among national ethno-cultural majorities. Political and media discourse has channeled such threats into resentments toward elites, immigrants, and ethnic, racial, and religious minorities, thereby activating previously latent attitudes and lending legitimacy to radical political campaigns that promise to return power and status to their aggrieved supporters. Not only does this form of politics threaten democratic institutions and inter-group relations, but it also has the potential to alter the contours of mainstream public discourse, thereby creating the conditions of possibility for future successes of populist, nationalist, and authoritarian politics.

Bart Bonikowski is Associate Professor of Sociology at Harvard University, Resident Faculty at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, and co-director of the Weatherhead Center Research Cluster on Global Populism. Relying on survey methods, computational text analysis, and experimental research, his work applies insights from cultural sociology to the study of politics in the United States and Europe, with a particular focus on nationalism, populism, and radical politics. In studying populism, Bonikowski has reframed the phenomenon as a dynamic feature of speech acts rather than a stable ideological property of political actors, revealing that variation in populist claims-making, on both the left and the right, is a function of political actors' shifting positions within and across political fields. Bonikowski's research has been published in the *American Sociological Review*, the *Annual Review of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, the *British Journal of Sociology*, the *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, and a number of other journals and edited volumes.