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# Populism with a Ph.D: education levels and populist leaders

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## ABSTRACT

Whether we define populism as an ideology, an aesthetic style, or a political strategy, populism is directed against a perceived elite and academic expertise. Yet we have seen several cases of academics who have adopted a populist style in their political careers: Pim Fortuyn (The Netherlands), Pablo Iglesias (Spain), Bernd Lucke (Germany), Christoph Mörgeli (Switzerland), and Yanis Varoufakis (Greece). This article examines how these academic populists address this apparent contradiction by construing ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’, thus that it furthers their own political persona.

## KEYWORDS

Academia; elites; experts; populism; populist leaders

## 1. Introduction

An academic populist seems, at first glance, to be a contradiction in itself. Whether we define populism as an ideology (Mudde 2004, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017), an aesthetic style (Moffitt 2016), or a political strategy (Weyland 2017), it is directed against a perceived elite (Mudde 2004, Müller 2016). Its figureheads identify as outsiders who intend to shorten the vertical distance between ‘the people’ and their government. They publicly oppose an elitist model of democracy that bases its decisions on expert knowledge (Urbinati 2014). By contrast, academics are part of this elite. What do we make, then, of academics who become known as populists?

We will discuss four specific expectations we can have for academic populists concerning 1) their reasons for entering politics; 2) the ways they frame their academic expertise; 3) differences in style from non-academic populists; and 4) the different sacrifices sometimes required of these populists in terms of giving up their lifelong employment prospects in academia. Specifically, we inquire how academic politicians stylize their resort to populist rhetoric and style. How do they make use of their academic background? How do they address the contradiction of being part of the very elite that they attack? How do they construe the ‘elite’? Can academic politicians reconcile populism and a lasting academic career, or does one come at the price of the other? Before turning to our case studies, however, we first examine the tensions generally perceived between a political and an academic life. To what extent can careers in politics and in academia be reconciled?

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## 2. Academics in politics: irreconcilable differences?

Academic populists constitute one particular subset of academics who seek political office. It is an ongoing debate whether academics should be more than neutral observers or experts, or, in other words, whether the academic's quest for truth can be reconciled with the quest for power. Moreover, it is linked to the problem of academic neutrality in the classroom, i.e., whether professors should voice their opinions in class.

Many who have written about this topic tend to favor a clear divide between the life of an academic and that of a politician. In his talk 'Science as a Vocation' (1917), German sociologist Max Weber held that politics does not 'belong in the lecture-room on the part of the docents. And when the docent is scientifically concerned with politics, it belongs there least of all.' From his viewpoint, 'the prophet and the demagogue do not belong on the academic platform[,] not least due to the hierarchy between teacher and student: in the classic lecture setting, students were hardly given the space to contradict or question their professors who demand their respect for the academic authority at the lectern. Classroom cultures have evolved since then, but contemporary scholars argue similarly, in that they regard scholars to be mainly truth-seekers who have been given academic freedom and should refrain from making valuable judgments about politics. Historian Arthur Schlesinger, for example, writes that academics should only speak publicly in order 'to speak truthfully about the issues at hand, because they have a detached cast of mind as well as a large stock of relevant and reliable knowledge on the subject at issue' (Shils, qtd. in Devins 1999, p. 168). Rather than seek power, they should 'speak truth to power' (Schlesinger, qtd. in Devins 1999, p. 189). Recently in the US context, however, some university professors believe that neutrality itself – avoiding topics like racism or climate change – is a political decision (Walker 2018); and William Connolly cites Foucault's idea of the 'specific intellectual'<sup>1</sup> to argue that political theory professors might sometimes need to use their knowledge 'to call into question rules of normalization governing prison life, sexuality, psychiatric illness, nuclear stalemate, family life, extractionist practices, or racial definitions' (Connolly 2017, pp. 125–126).

Becoming involved in politics asks academics to voice not only their *knowledge* in their (arguably) narrow fields of expertise, but also to share their *opinion* on other pressing issues. Few politicians can build their career with a focus on only a single issue, so that academic politicians need to abandon the more common expert stance. The latter is particularly challenging for those adopting a populist agenda and/or style: populists often build on undermining public trust in scientific expertise – which academics essentially embody. Populist academics are thus faced with the tension between popular appeal and the source of their own status as they will ultimately undermine their own symbolic capital and authority if they discourage the public to trust higher education and science. Simultaneously, adopting a populist style and rhetoric may imperil an academic's standing with the very institutions of higher education and academic circles that lent them their prestige initially. 'Populist leaders in general, and strongmen in particular, also use simple and even vulgar language, a so-called *Stammtisch* (beer table) discourse' (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, p. 67) – a style that is not particularly well-received in academia. In other words, channeling the *vox populi* is risky if one wants to keep a *vox academica*.

### 3. Populist leaders and academic populist leaders: definitions and case selection

As mentioned in the introduction, populism is an essentially contested concept, with scholars debating whether it should be understood as an ideology, a ‘thin ideology,’ a style, tactics, rhetoric, or simply as a reaction to globalization. Our cases do confirm a split between a right-wing populism that is in reaction to the free movement of people and leftist variants in opposition to the free movement of goods (Manow 2019), so that we can identify ways to fit our cases into ideational definitions (Mudde 2004, Müller 2016). However, as we focus on the paradox of academics turning to populist politics, we follow Benjamin Moffitt’s (2016) definition and understand populism as a style (De La Torre 2000, Moffitt 2016). In *The Global Rise of Populism*, Moffitt constructs the analytical category of ‘political style’ by drawing on previous work by Robert Hariman, Frank Ankersmit, and Dick Pels. The populist style of simplicity, heightened emotions, conflict and antagonism, and an emphasis on the personal gains traction in a mediated contemporary landscape (Brubaker 2017). For our analysis, we adopt Moffitt’s broad use of the category of political style as a means of classification, a commentary on the way something is done or said (its ‘style’) and its ‘content.’<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, the elements holding our cases of academic populism together center around an affinity for three features of performance and communication that Moffitt describes as the populist style: 1) appeals to ‘the people,’ who are often seen as a source of moral value (Taggart 2000, Mudde 2004, Aslanidis 2015, Diehl 2017), p. 2) disruptive personalities; and 3) advancing the notion that there is a crisis at hand disproportionately affecting ‘the people’ that only they can alleviate (either the corruption of mainstream politicians or economic recession – or both). These three features depend on and reinforce one another: for example, 3) a crisis in the nation might call for 2) disruption or, in Moffitt’s (2016) words, ‘bad manners,’ and 1) the people’s common-sense solutions. Meanwhile, the people need a leader who will stand up for them (through disruption) to solve the crisis. Brandishing the rhetoric of crisis, all five of our cases position themselves within this populist constellation.

Scholars are divided about whether to characterize populism as a strictly right-wing phenomenon or one that appears across the political spectrum (for a vigorous argument as to why the former view operates as an alibi for ignoring demands for equality, noticeable especially in the Greek context, see Stavrakakis 2015). For our case studies, we chose three leaders on the political right and two on the political left. The policies they advocate vary widely, at least one of our cases advocating racist policies and appeals to cultural purity. Our left-wing cases advocate for inclusion in racial terms and emphasize instead the rights of hard-working, lower-income-earning citizens.

For our study, we have focused on politically active academics who fulfill the following criteria:

1. They have stayed in academia for more than 2 years after successfully finishing their doctoral studies and have held a formal position at an institution of higher education. While populists, as with mainstream politicians, can hold university career posts following their public service, we are interested in those who had a career in academia before and/or during their tenure in public life.

2. They fit the definition of ‘populist’ primarily because they attempt to mobilize groups feeling aggrieved or shut out by traditional parties or platforms. Irrespective of their ideology, they all appeal to ‘the people,’ distance themselves from ‘politics as usual,’ and position themselves in response to some perceived crisis or threat to the polity, whether external or internal (see Moffitt and Tormey 2014).
3. They were or are perceived as having a leadership role, irrespective of formal appointments, within their respective party or within a movement.
4. They have been politically active in the last two decades. We thus exclude older cases such as Peru’s former president Alberto Fujimori, who had previously served as a university president (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, p. 75). We settle our attention on contemporary examples so as not to undermine the validity of our conclusions, given how different the political landscape is now compared to national and global politics in the twentieth century.

We have thus selected five politicians who have been or are still known for being both academics as well as populist politicians: on the right spectrum, we look at Pim Fortuyn (The Netherlands), Bernd Lucke (Germany), and Christoph Mörgeli (Switzerland); on the left at Yanis Varoufakis (Greece) and Pablo Manuel Iglesias Turrión (Spain):

- Wilhelmus Simon Petrus ‘Pim’ Fortuyn (1948–2002) had worked in Dutch academia as a lecturer, but he left university due to a lack of prospects. However, he returned to academia and served as an associate professor of sociology between 1990 and 1995. He would then keep using his academic title, against the rules (Van Der Heiden 2012). His political career was cut short: he was assassinated on 6 May 2002, by a left-wing environmental activist, Volkert van der Graaf, who feared for the future of The Netherlands with Fortuyn in politics (Krause 2017, p. 96).
- Bernd Lucke has been a professor of macroeconomics at the University of Hamburg since 1998, but he was on leave until fall 2019 due to his political commitments (Deutsche Presseagentur 2019). He is the founder of the Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland* AfD), and was elected to the European Parliament, yet he lost control over his party and ultimately failed to be re-elected in 2019 (Fiedler 2017, p. 16).
- Christoph Mörgeli served for more than two decades as the director and curator of the University of Zurich’s Museum of the History of Medicine, attained a Habilitation (post-doctoral qualification) in the field of medical history in 1995, but lost his position amidst a scandal to be discussed below. Politically, he was long known as the chief ideologue of the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) and was a member of Switzerland’s National Council.
- Yanis Varoufakis taught economics in the UK, in Texas and Australia before returning to Greece to take up an academic post teaching political economics at the University of Athens (Varoufakis, n.d.). He briefly served as Greece’s minister of finance and is still active in both politics and academia.
- Pablo Iglesias is the leader and co-founder of Podemos (‘We Can’) which boasts unprecedented numbers of mass participation (Faber and Seguíñ 2015). Prior to

becoming a member of parliament, he was part of the political science department at Complutense University of Madrid (Duarte and Tadeo 2015).

#### 4. Academic populists: a different type of populists?

We follow Moffitt's (2016) definition of populism as a political style. We also adopt the gradational approach to populist analysis (Hawkins 2009, Diehl 2011, 2017, Moffitt 2016, Brubaker 2017) according to which a leader's performances can be seen as more or less populist. Moffitt isolates three features of the populist style: 1) 'an appeal to "the people" versus "the elite,"' 2) 'bad manners,' and 3) 'the performance of crisis, breakdown, or threat' (45). To evaluate whether academic populists distinguish themselves from other populist leaders and to understand how they use their status as academics (and thus as experts), we depart slightly from this triadic analysis: in a first step, we consider the reasons these academic populists claimed for entering politics. Do they, as Müller (2016) would for instance, expect to see themselves as the only ones able to speak on behalf of the people? In a second step, we consider how they frame their expert knowledge and justify their populist persona, part of which is the way they conceive of 'the people' and 'the elite.' We then, in a third step, look at their respective style in a narrower sense, focusing on the extent to which they adopt 'bad manners' and are perceived as disruptive. Finally, we focus on the question of whether populism and academia can be reconciled. In other words, we ask whether populist academics can remain *academics*.

##### 4.1. Leaving the ivory tower: reasons for entering politics

Populists enter politics in many ways. They can ride to power on a wave of popular grassroots discontent (Aslanidis 2017, p. 313). They may cite crisis as a motivation for entering politics, or they may manufacture the crisis themselves. As Moffitt (2016) convincingly argues, 'crises are never "neutral" events, but are actively performed by populist actors who attempt to "spectacularise" failure so as to

	Pim Fortuyn	Bernd Lucke	Christoph Mörgeli	Yanis Varoufakis	Pablo Manuel Iglesias Turrión
<b>Discipline</b>	Sociology	Economics	Medical history	Economics	Political Science
<b>Highest rank in academia</b>	Associate professor (1990–1995)	Full professor (since 1998)	Titularprofessor (honorary professor with <i>Habilitation</i> )	Full Professor (since 2006)	Lecturer (2008–2014)
<b>Political party</b>	List Pim Fortuyn	Alternative for Germany (AfD); now LKR	Swiss People's Party (SVP)	SYRIZA; now Democracy in Europe Movement 2025	Podemos
<b>Years in politics</b>	Joined PvdA in 1972; switched to VVD in 1989	Since 2010	1986–2015; failed comeback in 2019	Since 2012	Since 1992
<b>Highest office in politics</b>	None (top candidate in 2002)	Member of the European Parliament (2014–2019)	Member of the National Council (1999–2015)	Minister of Finance (6 months in 2015)	Member of the Congress of Deputies (since 2016)

propagate a sense of crisis' (122). Pauline Hanson's first speech to the Australian parliament, for instance, cited a wide array of so-called failures running the gamut from high interest rates and unemployment to multiculturalism (Moffitt 2016, p. 112). Populists often tap into popular sentiment regarding the failure of the current leadership that allowed or abetted what they portray as a crisis.

Populists stylize themselves as atypical politicians and sometimes have colorful, arguably apolitical reasons for entering politics. Silvio Berlusconi told Italian journalists: 'I am forced to enter politics, otherwise they will put me in prison' (Preretz 2011). Mainstream news media initially interpreted Donald Trump's political interest as a way to promote his business. It has also been noted that populist plutocrats often sail to power on anticorruption platforms emphasizing their status as outsiders (see Cohen 2019 for an overview of the institutional changes that ease the rise of billionaire populists). Trump himself, as is more typical of politicians, portrayed his candidacy as an opportunity for the American people to take advantage of his financial expertise. Joseph Estrada capitalized on his popularity playing Robin Hood-type roles in films and the perception of him as genuinely concerned with the poor (Garrido 2017).

Tapping similarly altruistic sentiments, two of the five academic populists examined here portray themselves as being forced into politics against their will, driven by a fortuitous combination of crisis and conscience to run for office. 'Varoufakis emerged as the political leader of DiEM25 due to his being empowered by an ethical urge to reveal the truth about the EU to its peoples' (Fanoulis and Guerra 2020, p. 221). Varoufakis himself says his wife pushed him into it. Varoufakis told journalists that when Greece's neo-Nazi party was rising in the polls, his wife gave him an ultimatum: 'Either you don't get involved, or you get into politics to protect us, or we get out of the country.' They decided to move to Texas for a visiting assistant professorship and then, when SYRIZA won a victory in 2014 and the party leader, Tsipras, invited Varoufakis to take the post of finance minister, Varoufakis felt that staying abroad would constitute a 'betrayal' of his country.

Iglesias is also portrayed as an intellectual driven to abandon his university job. As one Newsweek article describes Iglesias: 'In speeches and interviews, he comes across as a genuine outsider, the kind of politician who had no choice but to abandon the comforts of his academic chair and take his country back from its corrupt overlords' (Ross 2015).<sup>3</sup> Again, Moffitt's (2016) emphasis on the construction and performance of crisis as a key part of contemporary populist politics is important to understanding these 'origin stories.' Populists like to portray their entrance onto the political scene as motivated by what they characterize as external to politics (in this case, the economic crisis). This is especially true of, as they see themselves, atypical politicians like Trump, Berlusconi, Joseph Estrada, and Thaksin Shinawatra. The question is never what government can do for them but what they can do for government (as they tell it).

Like Iglesias and Varoufakis but to a heightened degree, Fortuyn is described as 'projecting a *missionary sense* of the great leader as a "good shepherd" who was not afraid to lead the way' (Corner and Pels 2003, p. 52 emphasis ours). The leader-as-missionary denies any self-interest in seeking office. Fortuyn's entrance into politics was also unusual, yet it foreshadowed how the media would help popularize his message throughout his career. On 20 August 2001, Fortuyn announced during a televised interview that he intended to run for parliament – without mentioning a party nor being



actually considered as a candidate by any party (Van Holsteyn and Irwin 2003, p. 44). He would then join the populist movement ‘Leefbaar Nederland’ (Liveable Netherlands) as its main candidate, only to be forced out of the party after airing his anti-Islam, anti-immigrant views. The reasons he gave for entering politics were his fears for the future of The Netherlands, specifically for the nation’s cultural ‘purity.’

Lucke too claimed to be driven into politics primarily due to fears about the future of his country, but Lucke’s fears were economic rather than cultural. At the outset of his political career, Lucke would routinely repeat the phrase to introduce himself: ‘I am a professor of economics and I have entered politics very recently’ (Kunz and Greive 2014). With this phrase, he separated himself from mainstream politicians, as most populists do. His academic background and merits are key to both his own rise as an unlikely political shooting-star as well as to the rise of his political party, the Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland* AfD), as he and his early followers repeatedly stressed the importance and necessity of academic expertise. Lucke and his AfD colleagues bolstered their political standing with their claim to superior insight. In his speech on the first AfD convention on 14 April 2013, for instance, Lucke explicitly called the party a home for economic reasons and underlined his knowledge in a technical discussion of the failings of the Euro (Lucke 2013). His academic expertise was, effectively, his reason for entering politics.

Like Fortuyn and Lucke, Christoph Mörgeli was driven to become more involved in national politics due to what he saw as threats from wider Europe. Mörgeli’s mentor Christoph Blocher spearheaded the opposition to the Swiss referendum on joining the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1992. But what sets Mörgeli apart from the other four populist academics is that his entrance into the political arena does not seem spontaneous. On the contrary, Mörgeli was politically active from an early age and seemed to be destined to become politically active (Brotz 2018). As a child, he hung up political posters to promote candidates of the Swiss People’s Party and, at age 16, he initially opposed Christoph Blocher’s candidacy for the Party’s leadership in 1977 (Brotz 2018). Instead of dismissing Mörgeli’s opposition as a youth’s rebellion, Blocher recognized Mörgeli’s talent and took him under his wing, eventually becoming his son’s godfather (Schär 2005).

Perhaps the differences between Mörgeli’s political career and academic populists Lucke, Varoufakis, Iglesias and Fortuyn can be attributed to the tradition in the Swiss *Milizsystem* (literally translated as ‘militia system’ in which political offices are only executed part-time). Christoph followed a very classic, traditional path as he worked his way up from local service in the Reformed Church to being first elected for the Swiss People’s Party (*Schweizerische Volkspartei*, SVP) to the parliament of the Canton of Zurich in 1997 (Neuhaus 2015). He retained his university position and kept teaching all the while becoming one of the most prominent spokespeople of his party. The only element of spontaneity we see in Mörgeli’s story is that, according to him, Mörgeli was accidentally elected to the federal parliament in 1997 as he was placed favorably on Blocher’s party list.

While Varoufakis and Iglesias deny any intrinsic desire to lead (or to benefit or aggrandize themselves), Fortuyn does emphasize his leadership abilities. Lucke and Mörgeli do a bit of both. In all cases, notably, there is an event or some decisive action



that they characterize as an external crisis (e.g., Switzerland joining the EU, immigration, financial crisis) that motivates them to enter the political realm initially.

#### **4.2. *The Professor Is in: (Ab)use of expertise?***

Moffitt (2016) contrasts the populist political style with the technocratic political style, which appeals to the expertise and superior insight of the educated class. Populists tend to reject the latter and instead emphasize ‘common sense.’ Saurette and Gunster (Saurette and Gunster 2011) define such appeals to the wisdom of the crowd as ‘epistemological populism’ (199), which places more value in personal experiences and anecdotal evidence than in science and scholarship. Laclau stresses that populists aim to dethrone ‘the expert’ in the political realm and replace that figure with ‘the people.’ Not only do populists dismiss academic expertise as ‘elitist and therefore illegitimate’ (ibid.), they also tend to undermine the credibility of science as such, by, for instance, overemphasizing the provisional nature of results or possible industry interests (Collins and Evans 2019, p. 210).

Having pursued careers in academia where ‘elitist and therefore illegitimate’ expertise flourishes, academic populists enter into a particular balancing act that requires them to justify, or advantageously use, their background and at the same time, appear to value ‘common sense.’ The way they tackle this paradox differs in each case and shows yet again that the populist style is best analyzed gradationally. As suggested by Moffitt (2016), we can comprehend these delicate negotiations of expertise and common sense if we focus on a core element of the populist style, namely on the way ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ are construed.

Almost all scholars of populism agree that ‘the people’ lie at the center of populist politics (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Zaslove, 2008). In the case of academic populists, the logic works slightly differently and depends on whether they are part of the left or right ideological spectrum as well as the extent to which they rely on their academic expertise to advance their political agenda. An exception to this emphasis on ‘the people’ was Fortuyn, who never supported plebiscitarian or direct democracy and espoused a liberal view of ‘free, emancipated citizens pursuing their own interests’ (Vossen *et al.* 2013, p. 179), though these interests were under assault by non-Western values (Margry 2003, Van Ostaaijen 2019).

Leftist academic populists tend to see themselves as educators of the people, even as the people’s insights and intuitions are ultimately sovereign. Left intellectuals’ education of the working class – and attempts to represent them as a ‘vanguard’ – has a history within Marxist thinking. For Steven Lukes (1974/2005), power is created by false consciousness as the dominant class socializes the working class to hold beliefs contrary to their true interests. It is then the duty of a Marxist vanguard to awaken them, so that they free themselves of their false consciousness (Haugaard 2015). Given the number of problematic assumptions with this notion of power, Mark Haugaard instead considers this as a question of *recognition* – raising tacit knowledge to the level of practical consciousness knowledge. Haugaard reframes Lukes’ third dimension of power to be about converting internalized, tacit patterns of thought into consciously recognized knowledge, i.e., knowledge we can ‘put into words’ (Haugaard 2003, 2015). Leftist

academic populists Iglesias and Varoufakis seek to bring what their fellow countrymen already know to a new level of recognition.

'The people' whom leftist populist academics seek to bring into being is not solely led by what their 'common sense' dictates. In this vein, it is instructive how Podemos draws on Laclau's ideas in their campaign messaging (Errejón *et al.* 2016, Iniesta 2016, Kioupiolis 2016). Laclau views populism as a strategy for unifying a nation through terms, such as 'the people' or 'the elite,' whose definitions are slippery; this rhetoric, however, brings these groups into existence. It is such emotionally charged terms that Iglesias uses to unite his followers. In his 2015 book *Politics in a Time of Crisis*, Iglesias writes:

[P]eople with a critical awareness . . . were in need of cogent arguments, explanation, ideas that could help them understand the world they live in, ideas to reaffirm their indignation, to answer back with, to make them feel part of a community that wants to change things. (Iglesias 2015, p. 8)

Wielding cogent arguments and explanations, Iglesias helped 'people with a critical awareness' understand what the system was all about: corrupt, evil elites preying on the common people. Although Iglesias started Podemos following the success of a manifesto calling for 'popular sovereignty,' his particular populace is smarter and more aware than those voters guided simply by intuition and 'common-sense.' As Arroyas Langa and Pérez Díaz (2016) found analyzing Iglesias's twitter activity, he also describes the common people as morally superior to the corrupt elite, a common theme in populist rhetoric.

Similarly, for Varoufakis, 'the people' are not the lowest common denominator. They are mainly defined as 'those who have been left powerless' by the group of elites ostensibly working in their name but, in truth, putting themselves first. These powerless people too are critical of the current power structure,<sup>4</sup> yet Varoufakis sees them in need of his guidance. Accordingly, he adopts in his op-eds about the global financial crisis, right-wing populism, and the future of Europe the tone of a professor schooling his students, as can be seen in this example from a globally syndicated newspaper column:

When two clashing explanations of the same phenomenon are both correct, they must be incomplete, even if they capture different aspects of observed reality. In such cases, it is useful to adopt a new vantage point from which to take a fresh look at the problem . . . (Varoufakis 2019)

Here, Varoufakis is essentially admitting that he, as a professor, has the time, knowledge, and perspective ('a new vantage point') in order to educate 'the people' on the problem. There is not a high value placed in common sense that we see in populism generally. In both cases, Varoufakis and Iglesias's, 'the people' should be making the decisions, but 'the people' should be those 'with a critical awareness' to identify corruption, injustice, and inequality.

By contrast, in Mörgeli's case, there is no overt element of teaching the people, despite the fact that one of the most common adjectives used to describe him is 'eloquent.' Instead of underlining his academic insight, he points to the insight and intuitions of the people, the sovereign that is more in tune with the challenges of everyday life than politicians (e.g., Mörgeli 2016b, Jan., p. 7), an appeal particularly fruitful in a semi-direct

democracy such as Switzerland. Not surprisingly, popular initiatives were one of the most important tactical means for the Swiss People's Party during Mörgeli's tenure, and he repeatedly criticized how controversial popular initiatives were not implemented (e.g., Mörgeli 2013), stressing how 'the people's' interests differed from those of the government. While he explicitly denied that 'the people' was morally superior, Mörgeli follows typical populist reasoning that the 'Swiss sovereign has a healthy skepticism against intellectual head-creations' (Mörgeli 2016a, July, p. 28).

With the exception of Fortuyn, all of the academic populists surveyed here appeal to and attempt to render present 'the people,' but they portray the divide between 'the people' and 'the elite' so that they do not become part of the latter. As De Cleen (2016) notes, 'the elite' (or, more accurately, the allegedly illegitimate elite) varies by context, and the political goal of the populist in question: 'populism is not necessarily opposed to the existence of the elite *per se*, but against a current and illegitimate elite' (74). Consequently, the educated class is not necessarily seen as part of the illegitimate elite, at least not if its members interpret their role in the service of 'the people.' When academic populists construct 'the elite,' they carefully distinguish between the type of elite they undeniably belong to and the *illegitimate* elite. Being part of the former allows them to better understand and solve the problems created by the latter.

Mörgeli serves as a very classic example of this logic, as he followed the Swiss People Party's line of attacking what they labelled the *classe politique*, the political class. While the French term did not have a pejorative connotation to native speakers, the SVP in the German-speaking part of Switzerland adopted the term in the 1990s to characterize a political establishment keen on joining European institutions, ignoring the will of the people, and harming the nation as such (Mörgeli 2013). Christoph Blocher, the Party's long-time *de facto* leader, shaped the usage of the term, and he probably did so with the aid of Mörgeli who has been said to have contributed to many of his speeches. Consequently, Mörgeli himself used the term as well (e.g., 2013, 2016b), while seeing himself as outside the said *classe* in spite of his seat in parliament. Instead, he assumed the role of an intellectual force in service of the people who could single out a flawed establishment.

As a medical historian, Mörgeli did not have to face the challenge of being potentially framed as a technocrat, a term more likely to be used to characterize economists and political scientists. Yet Iglesias, Varoufakis, and Lucke embraced their academic background in their quest for political influence, with Lucke building most on his technocratic appeal<sup>5</sup> and Iglesias being inspired by his research, but not referencing it explicitly to bolster his authority. In the case of Podemos, most of its senior members taught in the political science department at Complutense University of Madrid, as did Iglesias from 2008 to 2014, and other key leaders in the party include one physicist and one philosopher from the same university (Duarte and Tadeo 2015). While Podemos leaders do not consider themselves part of the elite,<sup>6</sup> they attack the economically privileged and politicians from traditional parties as 'the caste' (*casta*), the equivalent to the Swiss *classe politique*, and their argumentation is clearly informed by their backgrounds in political research. Iglesias himself has worked extensively on civil mass movements and anti-globalization movements. Incidentally, Podemos traces its origins to the anti-globalist *Movimiento-15 M* on whose precursor Iglesias has published research (Iglesias Turrión 2005). It is thus not surprising that 'the caste' includes undemocratic global actors, most

notably the IMF and the World Bank, who – according to Iglesias – shoulder a significant part of the blame for Spain’s economic crisis.

Relying more on his academic credentials than Iglesias, Varoufakis has built his profile as a ‘star economist’ (Georgakakis and Lebaron 2018, p. 228) and had to weather critics who accused him of ‘creating strategies in the tower,’ thus failing to mobilize supporters from the ground up (Abrahamian 2019). In later conversations, he would even underline how he was guided by economic insight, whereas other representatives of *the Troika* focused on political arguments: ‘Once I was accused of “lecturing” them on macroeconomics’ (Varoufakis 2015). Accordingly, Varoufakis might himself be considered a member of the elite, a technocrat even. Yet because he paints ‘the elite’ transnationally as those wielding enormous power and using that power against the people, in this broad-picture contrast, he can side with ‘the people.’ In their reading, ‘the elite’ includes EU bureaucrats and lobbyists, unelected technocrats and inspectorates, bankers, fund managers, governments implementing austerity measures, and ‘fear-mongering’ media and corporations (cited in De Cleen et al., 12). In other words, the elite comprises supranational institutions and corporations as well as national governments infringing upon the people’s democratic rights. Varoufakis thus can credibly unite his roles as an economic expert and as the voice of the people.

Unlike our other cases, each of whom quickly and seamlessly transitioned between professor and politician, in Lucke’s case, he seemed to want to play both roles simultaneously: at the outset of his political career, Lucke repeatedly introduced himself as ‘a professor of economics’ who had ‘entered politics very recently’ (Kunz and Greive 2014). He framed his party as a home for economic reasons and underlined his knowledge in a technical discussion of the failings of the Euro (Lucke 2013). In the same manner, early members would proudly sign their letters to editors with their full academic titles, and many academics would join the party as a home for not only like-minded people, but also a home to people of the same educational background (Beitzer 2013, Krumrey 2015). In fact, of its 64 early supporters, the AfD counted 18 professors of economics (Benowski and Förster 2014, p. 4), earning it the title of a *Professorenpartei*, a party of professors. The AfD embraced the label, stylizing itself first as an expertocratic or technocratic party, and its representatives built on the social capital they saw vested in their academic credentials. Hans-Olaf Henkel, honorary professor of economics and a former manager with IBM, applauded the party’s high density of academics and repeatedly promoted that fact as a reason to join and vote for the AfD (Krumrey 2015). Similarly, Joachim Starbatty, a prominent retired professor of economics, expressed that it was better to be a ‘party of real professors than fake PhDs,’ alluding to the case of a prominent CDU politician who lost his doctoral title due to plagiarism (Kröter 2013, p. 16). With the AfD, Lucke seemed to have found a way of organizing academic expertise in a politically persuasive manner.<sup>7</sup>

Yet today’s AfD is no longer considered a *Professorenpartei*, but rather the opposite, an ‘*Anti-Professorenpartei*’ (Agarwala 2016, p. 62): the party has not only turned hostile to academia as such, it has turned into a populist party that attracts its voters mainly due to its stances on immigration and integration rather than any type of academic expertise and with few of its employees hailing from universities (Gürgen 2018, p. 8–9). It has also lost most of its professorial members, including its erstwhile main representatives Lucke, Starbatty, and Henkel. Instead of keeping the AfD on its professorial course, Lucke lost his leadership role in 2015 to Frauke Petry, the voice of the populist faction (who would,

however, lose her position again to internal competitors) (Amann 2015, pp. 38–39). As sociologist Holger Lengfeld observed, the party had radicalized itself in order to gain voters, becoming a vessel for the New Right and others discontented with mainstream conservatism (Debski 2017, p. 5). In the course thereof, academics like Lucke had become part of the targeted elite rather than the voice of the discontented. Instead of focusing on the European Central Bank and international financial institutions as the class to be targeted, the AfD started to conceive of the elite more broadly and steer in a different direction than its founders had intended.

In line with the other four cases, Fortuyn focused on an illegitimate elite he perceived to be hypocritical and irresponsible in that it had abandoned the Dutch people. In *The Orphaned Society* (*De verweesde samenleving*, 1995), he accused the elites of failing to provide guidance and leadership, leaving society ‘orphaned’ and helpless in light of the threatening advances of Islamic culture. Rather than caring for society at large, Fortuyn claimed (Vossen *et al.* 2013) the said elite only looked after ‘our kind of people’ (*Ons Soort Mensen*) by sharing the spoils of powers among those who were already part of the inner circle of the ‘Church of the Left-Wing’ (*Linkse Kerk*). Clearly distancing himself from that particular elite, Fortuyn could put himself, as his slogan went, ‘At your service’ (Margry 2003, p. 108), yet did not have to pretend to be a man of the streets to be perceived as authentic (Corner and Pels 2003, p. 62 fn11). In fact, embracing his ‘Otherness’ from both ‘the people’ and the alleged elite made him appear authentic and trustworthy. Thus he readily kept referring to himself as ‘professor’ in spite of having left academia several years before entering the political arena (Van Der Heiden 2012) and cultivated the image of the intellectual (Conradi 2002). In particular, it allowed him to play the role of a knowing outsider: while he emphasized with his demeanor and charisma that he was not part of the political establishment, he likewise made sure to be perceived as knowledgeable and competent, as someone who had observed Dutch politics and society long enough to be considered a serious contender for higher offices (Reuter 2009, pp. 238–240). This combination received credibility through Fortuyn’s academic background that bestowed him with the necessary legitimacy to present himself as more than a populist rubble-rouser.

#### **4.3. Prof. populist: style and rhetoric**

All populists must navigate between appearing ordinary and extraordinary (Moffitt 2016). Norm-breaking politicians like Berlusconi, Trump, Estrada, and Shinawatra, famous and wealthy before entering politics, easily meet the criteria for appearing ‘extraordinary,’ and their luxury lifestyles – and yet the ability to *appear* ordinary – are essential components of their political messaging (Diehl 2017, Garrido 2017, Zakaria 2017). These politicians can appear ordinary in a number of ways. Paula Diehl notes that ‘the most powerful technique’ populist politicians use to project images of their similarity with ordinary people is eating – Trump tells CNN that ‘Big Macs are great,’ and Hans-Christian Strache can be seen drinking beer in traditional Austrian attire (Diehl 2017).

Importantly, the evidence suggests that successful populists use the media effectively to communicate their message and project such images of commonality. There is a link between ‘billionaire outsiders, media manipulators, tech savvy populists, and the creation of anti-establishment party movements that spurn the democratic rules of the game’

(Cohen 2019). Populists like Berlusconi, Fortuyn, and Trump all used the media as a primary platform to acquire visibility in the political arena. (Interestingly, Trump and Fortuyn would also both claim to be mischaracterized by the media.) Iglesias came to the public eye as a presenter on political talk shows: he has said that television is, to contemporary politics, ‘what gunpowder was to war’ (Torreblanca quoted in Booth and Baert 2018). This might be particularly important for populists who cannot claim to be outsiders from the beginning – those who cannot tell a simplistic rags-to-riches story that would, in the eyes of many supporters, automatically validate their claims to be spokespersons for the people.

Another feature of populist style is what Moffitt calls ‘bad manners.’ (Other scholars call this aspect of politics disruptive personalities; Arditì, 2007; Heinisch, 2003). One representative example is Trump’s obvious rudeness, vulgar remarks, and bullying behavior. Fortuyn has been similarly classified as using ‘bad manners’ to seem authentic. Like most populist leaders, Fortuyn was known for being unorthodox, calling consensus-oriented politics the ‘left church’ (Brubaker 2017, fn20), describing Islam as a ‘backward culture’ and announcing that The Netherlands should not allow any new asylum seekers in an interview with *De Volkskrant* (Van Holsteyn and Irwin 2003, p. 46, Wansink and Poorthuis 2002). He also wrote a book airing his anti-Islamic views, *Against the Islamization of our Culture* (*Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur*, 1997), but his racism, he insisted, was mainly intellectual in nature. But a salient difference between Fortuyn and populist leaders who project images of machismo is that Fortuyn was a gay man. Leading a lifestyle repeatedly described as flamboyant (Schirmer and Hecking 2016, Klovert 2019),<sup>8</sup> he became known to a broader public due to his column in the newspaper *Elsevier* and his regular appearances on a talk show in which the openly gay consultant, entrepreneur, and former Marxist shared his concerns regarding the future of The Netherlands and the challenges of a multicultural society (Bachmann 2002). Corner and Pels (2003) note that Fortuyn initiated a ‘politics of emotion and personality,’ responding to his opponents’ sentiment and style, not only their ideas (45).

Mörgeli’s rhetoric is similarly inflammatory and divisive, but glossed over by his eloquence and perceived intellectualism. As a columnist for various media outlets, particularly for the right-wing weekly *Weltwoche*, he used a notoriously blunt and provocative style, not shying away from defaming political opponents as well as party members who were not following his own political line. Defending himself, Mörgeli says, ‘I do not think that my political style is hurtful or offensive. But I confront my opponents with their earlier statements and I question their logic. Many cannot bear that, particularly when they are criticized by the political right’ (Rauber 2004, p. 75).<sup>9</sup> While Fortuyn and Mörgeli come closest to warranting the descriptor ‘bad manners,’ our academic populists did not display the level of bad manners and racist outbursts characteristic of other populist leaders, such as Trump or Geert Wilders or ‘Mad Vlad’ Zhirinovskiy.

Yet, we can characterize our academic populists as disruptive mainly in another sense. They use personal style and sometimes dress and grooming (Fortuyn, Varoufakis, and Iglesias) to establish themselves as outside of the mainstream. Somewhat like Pim Fortuyn, Varoufakis has built his profile as a ‘star economist’ (Georgakakis and Lebaron 2018, p. 228) partly by cultivating a flashy persona: riding a motorcycle around Athens, attracting attention for his risky fashion sense (he wore a coat to an important Downing Street meeting that was described by one journalist as



a ‘drug-dealer’s coat’), and using colorful language to critique the economic establishment (publicly referring to the austerity measures imposed on Greece after the country’s debt crises as ‘fiscal waterboarding’) (Fox 2017). Fitting this image, Varoufakis is noted for his unwillingness to compromise or do what is necessary to appease centrist figures. Evangelos Fanoulis and Simona Guerra also note his use of ‘Absolute statements such as “the Juncker Plan was a fraud” (BruegelEvents, n.d.), “EU as a Napoleonic project for France” (StartupTV, 2019), “Troika caused the dissolution of the EU” (Varoufakis 2019a)’ (Fanoulis and Guerra 2020, p. 221). Varoufakis positions himself, like other populists, as a truth-teller – one who insists on telling the truth even when the truth is uncomfortable. These absolute statements ‘performatively establish Varoufakis as the only political subject among equals who reveals the truth about the misdeeds of the EU’ (Fanoulis and Guerra, *ibid.*). Varoufakis, like other populists, purports to “tell it like it is.’

Varoufakis does not, however, draw the kind of attention to himself that Fortuyn or other populists like Trump or Berlusconi do. He is a leader in the sense of inspiring others and spotlighting the issues without himself grabbing too much of the spotlight; and in DiEM’s written statements, he emphasizes that leaders ‘serve’ the people – making the conceptual distinction clear between the leader and the people (De Cleen *et al.* 2020, p. 13). In other words, we do not find the extreme blurring between the populist representative and the represented that we do in Hugo Chávez’s statement, ‘I am not an individual, I am the people’ (quoted in De La Torre 202).

Like Varoufakis, Iglesias has a rather young, Bohemian, and hip image (Iglesias sports a ponytail and a disheveled look). Bohemian, flamboyant, or atypical in appearance and attitude, academics like Varoufakis and Iglesias may ride motorcycles or sport ponytails, but they are not rude or unpolished. Unlike populist politicians with ‘bad manners’ who stir up confrontation and cultivate the rifts and fault lines in a society, academic populists are relatively tame. In terms of the level of theatricality and flamboyance (which seems to correlate with personal style measurements), Fortuyn is the most notable case, Varoufakis and Iglesias again falling in the middle, with Lucke and Mörgeli falling on the other end of the spectrum.

Another essential stylistic component of academic populism is the rhetoric of crisis. Some scholars consider crisis to be an essential fore-element in the success of populist leaders. For our academic populists, crisis is the perfect springboard for their appeal as experts at solving the perceived crisis. Academics are needed because they have insight into what has gone wrong.

Crisis, however, does not always exist prior to populist politics (Brubaker; Moffitt 2016; Stavrakakis *et al.* 2017) and what constitutes a ‘crisis’ is often contested. We see in the cases of our academic populists that appeals to their ‘expert’ status often go hand-in-hand with perceived crisis, whether it be cultural ‘crises’ such as the effects of refugees or economic distress. Fortuyn and Mörgeli sought to construct ‘the people’ at the nationalist level, as an ‘ethic nation,’ against cultural outsiders, not along the vertical up/down axis as left-wing academic populists Varoufakis and Iglesias do. As we see in the case of Lucke and the AfD, the performance of crisis is not always the performer’s to control.

Finally, it should be noted that Fortuyn and Varoufakis both reject the label populist (Corner and Pels 2003, p. 52). Varoufakis uses it solely to describe right-wing extremists.



We can see this as part of their style. For Fortuyn, his style is more personalistic and he resists being pigeon-holed or labeled. For Varoufakis, due to the Greek context in which the label is associated with the political right, he rejects it in order to communicate his own message to Greek citizens more effectively.

#### **4.4. Academic aftermaths: a price to pay for populism?**

Max Weber declared that politics and science separate vocations, seeing ‘prophets and demagogues’ as unsuited for academia. While the five academic populists we analyze would reject both labels, they did or do rely in different ways on the status they gained through their academic career. In other words, they defied the expectation that their background as career academics would harm their ability to present themselves as populists. In contrast, it is less clear to what extent academic populists can maintain a credible academic career after or simultaneous to their political tenure. Not only do we have a very limited number of cases, among which Pim Fortuyn had ended his academic career before launching his political one, comparing them in this regard is complicated due to the different academic employment conditions and other national specificities.

Only Christoph Mörgeli was a ‘working academic’ at the height of his political career. As is the tradition in the Swiss *Milizsystem* (literally translated as ‘militia system’), Mörgeli was expected to execute his political position only part-time, while working mainly in his primary job. Bernd Lucke benefited from the German university system that allowed him to pursue his political ambitions full-time while being on unpaid leave. After losing his re-election bid, he returned to the University of Hamburg at the beginning of the fall semester of 2019 and resumed his duties as a Chair (*Pressemitteilung*, 2019). Yanis Varoufakis may not benefit from the same right by law, but he has already shown that he can easily transition back: after a 2-year hiatus, he returned part-time to the University of Athens in 2017 – and to an overflowing classroom of students who wanted to catch a glimpse of him (Christides 2017). Based on this earlier experience and in light of two honorary professorships abroad, Varoufakis should be able to resume his academic life again. By contrast, Pablo Iglesias did not hold a full professorship at Complutense University of Madrid, but was instead filling in for a professor on leave. Thus, he cannot, in spite of trying to secure such a right, return to the University (*Los motivos por los que Pablo Iglesias ya no puede ser profesor de la Universidad Complutense* 2016). Meanwhile, Iglesias has expressed publicly his ‘frustration and boredom with academic acts’ (Torreblanca quoted in Booth and Baert 2018).

In sum, only three tried to resume or uphold their academic career: Varoufakis, who is once again a Member of Parliament, Lucke, and Mörgeli. The latter two do not allow for any generalizations, but they are instructive as to how the implications of academic freedom, the laws governing employment at a public university, and (right-wing) politics collide. While self-declared ‘erratic Marxist’ Varoufakis was received as a celebrity by his students (Christides 2017) and welcomed back to the academic fold, conservatives Lucke and Mörgeli became the center of debates on the tensions between academia and politics. Their respective experience suggests that left-wing populists benefit from political sympathies of both students and academia at large, while their right-wing counterparts face more resistance and scrutiny.

Bernd Lucke's case illustrates how a public university can be torn between the demands of its own political neutrality, the responsibility to protect its faculty's academic freedom, and student activism. Even before the first day of teaching, the elected representatives of the Hamburg's 43,000 students announced that they would not let Lucke quietly return to their campus community. As the *Allgemeine Studierendenausschuss* (AStA) declared, 'the critical students will not allow an easy return to the academic ivory tower to the man who is responsible for the current rifts in German society' (*Pressemitteilung*, 2019). From their viewpoint, Lucke had 'created a monster' (Düperthal 2019; *Pressemitteilung*, 2019)<sup>10</sup> which he now refuses to tame, taking refuge in academia. The student organization stayed true to their word and did not only disrupt Lucke's first lecture of the semester, but they forced authorities to ask for police protection for the remainder of the semester and the University had to address concerns related to the course in question (Neuheuser 2019).

These protests add to the ongoing debate regarding the extent to which universities should take action against professors who promote political ideas that are considered extremist, offensive, or hurtful by students. Moreover, they raise the question at what cost students should be able to exercise their right to protest: By the end of the winter semester 2019/20, protecting Lucke's lecture cost the University more than 100,000 Euros (Lettgen 2020). So far, German universities have honored their obligations as employers as long as professors have respected the political neutrality of the classroom and fulfilled their duties (Schirmer and Hecking 2016, Klovert 2019). This policy may be key to Lucke's comeback as a 'mere' professor and researcher, albeit one with an interesting political past.

By contrast, Christoph Mörgeli's case shows that even public universities may take a different route if an academic is not protected by tenure and his scholarship is brought into question. Although Mörgeli was well known as a professor to the Swiss public, his actual academic achievements were never a matter of public debate. Only a new leadership at the University of Zurich's Institute of Medical History in February 2011 rapidly changed this: Mörgeli's work as the director of the University's Museum of the History of Medicine was examined and re-evaluated; the evaluators considered his record insufficient and suggested a probation period to make up for shortcomings. What was intended to be a confidential report for the eyes of the responsible Chair only, got leaked to a major newspaper ('Akademische Karriere Mörgelis: Aufstieg Und Fall,' 2012). The media thus started to take a closer look at Mörgeli's academic career, taking stock off a less than stellar record (Knellwolf 2012). A heated public debate ensued about ideology and academia, with Mörgeli demanding a criminal investigation due to the breach of confidentiality. In the end, the university dismissed Mörgeli on the grounds of insufficient performance and breach of loyalty (Baumgartner and Bernet 2012, p. 19).

For Mörgeli, it was clear that other reasons were more important to the university: 'Firing me after 27 in my materially modest existence as museum director – that decision has nothing to do with my achievements as a director, but is solely due to my activities as a member of the National Council for the Swiss People's Party' (Baumgartner and Bernet 2012, p. 26).<sup>11</sup> It would indeed not be far-fetched to argue that Mörgeli payed for his political exposure with the end of his academic career, sealed by his exclusion from the Swiss Society for the History of Medicine and Sciences (Rafi 2012). As became known to the general public, shortly before the leak to the press, the new Chair for medical history

took issue with one of many TV appearances of Mörgeli. The latter criticized the alleged influx of German professors and the dominance of leftist thought in Swiss academia during a talk show, letting the new Chair fear that the Institute would be unable to foster international collaborations with Mörgeli present (Odermatt 2012). Moreover, Mörgeli had applied for the position as Chair, albeit unsuccessfully (Tommer 2010), which may have added to the tensions. It was thus hardly surprising that some, particularly conservative commenters, assumed that the new Chair and the University to have fired Mörgeli for purely political motives (Köppel 2012, p. 38, Spieler 2012), with even renowned sociologist and social-democrat Jean Ziegler criticizing the University for its political intolerance (“Man kann einen Professor nicht so behandeln,” 2012). Naturally, the University defended its decision on the grounds of Mörgeli’s academic shortcomings, from the scientific quality of the dissertations supervised by him to the lack of publications as well as the type of courses he ran (Städler 2016). While these were all sound reasons, both the media and conservative politicians doubted them, not least because the University had not voiced any complaints during the preceding two decades of Mörgeli’s employment.

With the legal consequences of his dismissal unresolved, Mörgeli lost his re-election as National Councillor in fall 2015; an attempted comeback in fall 2019 likewise failed (Haefeli and Schenkel 2019). He thus lost both his political and his academic career. Lacking any survey data, it is impossible to assess to what extent his political failure was linked to the academic affair. Yet it is safe to assume that voters kept his name connected to the many media stories surrounding his departure.

## 5. Conclusion: populist politicians as a special case

‘Populism can be thought of as *politics for ordinary people by extraordinary leaders who construct ordinary profiles*’ (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, p. 78). Extraordinary leaders who hail from the ivory tower face particular challenges and must navigate them in unique ways. Academic populists often turn out to be very ordinary populists, yet they need to adapt the populist style in order to win populist support. Specifically, we analyzed the style and performance of academic populists with regard to 1) their reasons for entering politics; 2) the way they use their academic expertise and define ‘the elite’ vs. ‘the people’; 3) the extent to which they display a disruptive persona; and 4) their ability to reconcile an academic and a political career:

1. As has been the case for most populists, the five academic populists we analyzed all seized moments of political and/or social crisis to enter the political stage, but they framed the necessity for their academic insight differently, if at all. On one side of the spectrum we have a technocratic approach, as displayed by Lucke and his attempts of heading a *Professorenpartei*; and on the other, a mere usage of academic credentials for signaling purposes, as was the case for Fortuyn and Mörgeli.
2. In spite of their ideological differences, all five academic populists painstakingly differentiated between the ‘illegitimate elite’ against which they claimed to defend ‘the people’ and themselves. Due to their own characteristics, they described different types of ‘illegitimate elites,’ which they often labelled with a memorable name such as *casta* or *classe politique*. In all cases, though, their own background

was described as key to dismantle and unveil the machinations of said elite – academic populists suggest that they put their status and expertise in the service of ‘the people,’ however their ideology forces them to define the latter.

3. ‘Bad’ manners in the conventional understanding of the term may not be a trait of academic populists, but they do display disruptive behaviors or personas. They do not shy away from inflammatory rhetoric and, if they do not downright enjoy it, they do not mind provoking both the media and their political opponents. Moreover, Fortuyn, Varoufakis, and Iglesias also stand or stood out due to their appearance, each of them being known for a signature style.
4. Most political systems force politicians to take a hiatus from their original professions; among the five academic populists, only Mörgeli had to juggle academia and politics at the same time. While the small number of cases does not lend itself to generalizations, it is striking how right-wing academic populists face more resistance and scrutiny when they want to return or stay in academia. For them, the quest for power does indeed meant sacrificing the quest for truth.

Our analysis of academic populists constitutes a first in the field and discusses new challenges of reconciling academia and public life. It opens further avenues to explore in the general debate on the role of expertise in politics, a call often heard in times of a global pandemic, and on the role of ideology on campuses.

## Notes

1. ‘The specific intellectual is not a philosopher who advances a universal image of truth and presents it to a waiting state or populace. The specific intellectual is one whose technical skills and specific capacities form a niche that has become strategic during this era. The specific intellectual secedes from a quest for universal acclaim to incite attention to hidden violence and injuries and to excite modes of response to them’ (Connolly 2017, p. 125).
2. ‘Style and content are interrelated, and style can generate, affect and interact with content in quite complex ways’ (Moffitt 2016, p. 42).
3. Podemos can also be seen as what Aslanidis describes as ‘the belated institutional follow-up of the Spanish *indignados*’ (Aslanidis 2017, p. 311) – indicating a link between grassroots mobilization and the creation of institutionalized populist parties. In the case of Varoufakis, the link between the populist leader and the grassroots activism of the Greek *indignados* is less direct.
4. DiEM25 appeals to ‘the majority suffering [from austerity] in quiet desperation,’ and to ‘every genuine democrat . . . radical democrats, left-wing democrats, social democrats, green democrats, liberal democrats, the purpose of whom is to put the “demos” back into democracy against the European Union establishment that sees people power as a threat to its authority’ (Varoufakis, 2016 cited in De Cleen et al., 13).
5. Despite denouncing appointed technocrats of the European Central Bank, Varoufakis himself has been linked to the ‘technocratic.’ De Cleen et al. (2013) write that DiEM tries to address the challenges of creating a transnational political space via ‘the creation of a leadership circle with scientific, technocratic, cosmopolitan and other credentials (here, as in the entire DiEM25 project, the role of Varoufakis is paramount) . . .’ (17).
6. Iglesias mentioned in an interview that Spain’s leading politicians hardly finished their university studies, setting academics apart from that ‘caste’ (Rivas 2014).
7. Earlier, a similar attempt against the Euro had failed: in 2007, he had been a co-organizer of a platform uniting German professors of economics (Plenum der Ökonomen) of whom 189

signed a statement against Germany's Euro policy and the path taken by the European Union (Kröter 2013, p. 16). The same monetary policy agenda was adopted by the AfD, making it for a one-issue party which would, however, seek to combine its monetary concerns with immigration politics and a socially conservative agenda.

8. Krause conducted several expert interviews, also on reasons of Fortuyn's success, and his flamboyance and perceived eccentricity were repeatedly mentioned as part of his success formula.
9. 'Ich finde im Übrigen nicht, dass ich persönlich verletzend oder beleidigend politisiere. Aber ich konfrontiere meine Gegner mit eigenen früheren Aussagen und hinterfrage ihre Logik. Das ertragen viele nicht, vor allem, weil die Kritik von rechts kommt.' Our translation.
10. This is a quote from Niklas Stephan, a representative working on anti-discrimination issues.
11. Our translation. Original phrasing: 'Dass man mich nach 27 Jahren aus meiner materiell bescheidenen Existenz als Museumsleiter drängt, hat sicher nicht mit der Leistung in der Medizingeschichte zu tun, sondern nur mit meinem Wirken als SVP-Nationalrat.'

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