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MARKETING AUTHENTICITY

Analysis of Hungarian Right-Wing Populist Rhetoric

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ABSTRACT

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Both populism and conspiracy theories are gaining attention as they tend to saturate everyday political rhetoric. Earlier research notices how populist and conspiratorial rhetoric intertwine, yet they rarely focus on them as explanations for current social change, and even more, as arguments against it, in defence of an 'authentic' way of life. Both populism and conspiracy theories are often pathologized, while their explanatory aspects are neglected.

This thesis aims to fill these gaps: it is interested in how right-wing populism and conspiratorial rhetoric used by them highlight the difference between an 'authentic', organically evolved society and unwanted, dangerous changes in it. Therefore, it does not only explain social change: it claims that 1. it is an attack on the 'authenticity' of a given society and 2. this attack is planned by conspirators 3. who are in fact 'the elite', acting against 'the people'.

As case study, this thesis analyses speeches held by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, between 2015 and 2020, three in each year, held publicly and translated to English on official government websites. The research question is, how epistemic work is found in the data, using the methodological toolkit of epistemic governance and membership categorization analysis (MCA), built in the framework of World Society Theory and the Bordieuan field theory. The thesis is interested in how basic assumptions on our world appear in the data, how actors in the political field are re-arranged, and how certain qualities are attached to them.

Findings show how the issue of European immigration after 2015 and the influence of the European Union was understood as an attack on the 'authenticity' of Hungary and Europe and constructed as a global conspiracy against national sovereignty. Also, by utilizing MCA, the thesis reflects on how populism re-arranges actors of the political field compared to how it is understood in liberal democracies.

Keywords: populism, conspiracy theories, authenticity, epistemic governance, world society theory, membership categorisation analysis

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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1. Introduction

“We are almost foreigners in our own lands” – it was a typically cloudy summer day in London in 2018, when the Dutch populist Geert Wilders said these words, protesting against the incarceration of his British political ally, Tommy Robinson (Spencer, 2018). A year earlier Marine Le Pen, president of the French party National Rally has criticised global economy weakening “the natural defences of our nation” and referred to other examples, illustrating “that the rise of the people against the establishment can become reality” (Le Pen, 2017). The Finns Party’s pamphlet *European Union Policy* suggests that “traditional Finnish and classic Western values” are opposed to “open immigration and globalisation” (Perussuomalaiset, 2019). Almost two decades earlier, outgoing Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán stated that “the homeland cannot be in opposition” (Ma, 2002).

World society theory focuses on a global synchronization of ideas, values without any supranational government (Meyer et al., 1997). Populist rhetoric is in fact commenting on similar types of processes in its persuasive argumentation, from different angles: it argues that some aspects of social change are unwanted by the ‘people’ and their resistance is needed. Therefore, international organizations become suspicious and often understood as part of conspiracies instead of sovereign actors.

Populism is often discussed as a deeply problematic, anti-democratic political phenomenon, one without moral legitimacy and causing problems, destroying well established democratic norms. But it can also be approached as an explanatory tool since it is built through careful epistemic work. When a political actor states that people are “almost foreigners” in their own land, or refers to “traditional values”, she or he constructs arguments competing with other world views, similarly constructed through epistemic work.

Moreover, those building on such approaches – far-right, extreme right or right-wing populist political actors and supporters¹ – and their policies seem to gain more power and attention on a global scale. Names like Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, Rodrigo Duterte or Jair Bolsonaro

¹ For the sake of simplifying, this thesis uses the “right-wing populism” term, containing extremist and radical right-wing parties or movements too.

ring a bell for many, and Europe also has its fair share of populist leaders or leader-nominees, from the UK's Nigel Farage to the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko.

Studies on the phenomenon of populism or conspiracy theories are on the rise, too. According to Scopus' search engine – one of the largest academic databases – populism has become an increasingly researched topic: while one can find only 29 articles archived from 2000 and 113 from 2010, the coming years show a significant expansion: 645 articles from 2017, 902 from 2018, 1136 from 2019 and 1301 from 2020. Similarly, conspiracy theories seem to interest researchers more and more: only 6 articles are archived from 2000 and 38 from 2010, but 157 from 2018, 139 from 2019 and almost double, 262 from 2020.

In addition, Cambridge Dictionary declared 'populism' as the Word of the Year (2017), Wendalyn Nichols, its Publishing Manager has stated that populism is “both truly local and truly global, as populations and their leaders across the world wrestle with issues of immigration and trade, resurgent nationalism, and economic discontent”.

While scientific literature on the mentioned topics is proliferating, existing researches leave space for investigating the connection between populism and conspiracy theories, and their common features.

Therefore, this thesis aspires to understand how right-wing populist rhetoric justifies its case, reaching out to conspiracy theories as persuasive tools and serving also explanations on social change. The research investigates how selected public speeches of the Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán between 2015 and 2020 can be understood as populist and conspiracist discursive work and how it reflects on social change, what kind of proposals it formulates. The thesis addresses different aspects of this epistemic work: how the social world is portrayed by speaker, how the actors identified are presented and categorized, how moral codes are represented and antagonized and so on. It uses *epistemic governance* as methodological tool to discover these aspects and *membership categorization analysis* in order to elaborate on the question of identified actors (Pi Ferrer, Rautajoki, 2020). It builds on *world society theory* as a global sociological approach which offers key insights for understanding populism's globality, and Pierre Bourdieu's *field theory*, to be able to analyse phenomenon as an epistemic work with a highlighted goal of persuasion, and by that, of gaining political capital in a professional field. A short introduction to Hungarian political changes – for instance, changes in the institutional and media landscape – is offered in order to illustrate how epistemic work of the government is embedded in these transformations.

In my approach, right-wing populism offers today an alternative political discourse to the ones focusing on human rights or individual freedoms, and even though it critiques globalisation, the message of right-wing populists is often synchronized. These political actors see an opportunity to change their positions in the political field progressing from the periphery of this field to its core. There is a constant epistemic work on delegitimizing their political opponents by reframing our understanding on the social world, by rearranging the actors in it, and by antagonizing our existing moral codes. This thesis aims to address this phenomenon too.

While the thesis' topic is limited to the speeches of one Prime Minister, it may open doors for further research: as the quotations illustrate it in the first paragraph, many right-wing populists use similar arguments.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter I focus on the crucial phenomena inspected (populism, conspiracy theories, the notion of authenticity). In the following section I will elaborate on the existing literature on populism, highlighting different approaches and the debates existing, I will describe the historical changes of populism in the United States and Europe, closing with a short introduction to the understandings I implement in this thesis. In the next section I will draw up the literature on conspiracy theories and the debates in it, touching upon the typologies which I will be able to use in my analysis, closing with my own approach for this thesis, containing the common features of populism and conspiracy theories. In another section I will introduce ‘authenticity’ as a notion crucial in studying discourse on social change.

2.1. Populism

The phenomenon of populism is not new: the first American (agrarian) populist political formation, the People's Party was founded in the end of the 19th century, building mostly on small farmers, reaching out also to different groups of the American society (Kazin, 2017, p. 27), while the Narodniks appeared around the same time in the Soviet Union, building on the idealization of peasants and emphasizing the importance of their insights (Müller, 2016, p. 18).

The literature of populism is as diverse as the different types, ideological backgrounds, structures of populist parties or movements, which makes it difficult to embrace a single approach and to summarize its essence into one sentence. In the following sections I highlight the most relevant mileages of the literature, illustrating their richness as much as the aforementioned complications, and also a shift in how they understand populism. Of course, it would be wrong to assume that populism became accepted by scholars, but the tone of writing has changed in many cases as populism itself has changed. In another section I draw up the ideological shifts in the U.S. and Europe showing how the populism of the left today is more frequent on the right, far- or extreme right, closing with a description on my own approach on populism.

2.1.1. The Many Faces of Populism: Definition Debates

The phenomenon was discussed widely by academics at the end of the '60s, when a volume edited by Ionescu and Gellner (1969) has appeared with its lead-in sentence paraphrasing Marx and Engels (2015): “a spectre is haunting the world – populism”. The volume contained papers written for a conference at the London School of Economics two years earlier, with the goal of defining the term, but the authors could not agree about a more precise definition (Ionescu and Geller, 1969 pp. 1-2). The main topics revolved around populism being ideology or movement, appearing as “recurring mentality” because of a “special social situation”, being able to be defined by political psychology (mistrust against “unknown *outside* forces”), being “anti-capitalistic, anti-urban, (...) xenophobic and anti-semitic” (Ionescu and Geller, 1969 p. 4) or simply “a kind of nationalism” (Ionescu and Geller, 1969 p. 183). Some of the texts appear today as deeply normative, embedded in modernization theory, mirroring the mainstream Western approaches of the era – for example: “*The conspiracy theory of neo-colonialism*, which has become an integral part of Latin American radicalism has roots going back to the nineteenth century. Latin American *backwardness* could only be explained in terms of a *sinister alliance* between an entrenched oligarchy and foreign interests”² (Ionescu and Geller, 1969 p. 37). Still, the volume raised important questions and is often referenced by current authors.

Another remarkable work has appeared at the beginning of the '80s, when Canovan (1981) highlighted a distinction between agrarian populism as “a kind of rural radicalism” with a particular socioeconomic base, and one without it, being more a political phenomenon (Canovan, 1981, pp. 8-9). According to her, seven types of populism could be traced:

- Agrarian populisms
 - Farmers’ radicalism
 - Peasant movements
 - Intellectual agrarian socialism
- Political populisms
 - Populist dictatorship
 - Populist democracy

² Highlights added for this thesis

- Reactionary populism
- Politicians' populism (Canovan, 1981, p.13).

She acknowledged that a distinguishing like that may be problematic (e.g., because the People's Part was not only an agrarian uprising but an antielitist revolt too) and accentuated the trap of normative approaches by intellectuals, rooting in their fear or idealism (Canovan, 1981, p. 10). Hence the thorough analysis and alluring intellectual work there may still be questionable assertions in Canovan's conclusions: for instance, she described populism as being against science and technology, being antimilitarist and having a "rather good" moral record when it comes to the issue of racism (1981, pp. 290-291). In spite of that, she identified two elements which are common in all types of populism: 1. an appeal to 'the people' and 2. antielitism, warning that 1. 'the people' is a quite broad concept with many different contents and 2. antielitism being a more precise characteristic since it rules out some ideas and builds on general distrust (Canovan, 1981, pp. 294-295).

Laclau's (2005) work on populism had a different approach from many predecessors. Although he criticized Canovan's typology arguing that it lacks coherence and is just building on "more visible features of a series of movements taken at random", he acknowledged that she took in consideration the diversity of populisms (Laclau, 2005, pp. 5-8). Many of other scholars lacked this kind of approach and even more, excluded any rationality from populism. This, for Laclau was deeply problematic: he argued that the question is not "what is populism?" but "to what social and ideological reality does populism *apply*?" (Laclau, 2005, p. 17), that populism can be understood as not a "clumsy political and ideological operation" but "a performative act endowed with a rationality of its own", not a "transitional moment" but "a constant dimension of political action which necessarily arises" (Laclau, 2005, p. 18).

According to his perception populism has two preconditions and a third addition, based on unsolved and unisolated social demands which will transform into *popular demands*:

1. an "integral antagonistic frontier" which will be able to separate the 'people' from the power
2. the "equivalential articulation of demands" which will give space for the creation of the 'people'
3. these demands will be unified after a high-level political mobilization, creating "a stable system of signification" (Laclau, 2005, p. 74).

As one can see, Canovan's two main elements of populism are traceable here: although she writes about an 'appeal' to the 'people', Laclau demonstrates how this appeal has its grounds in social problems arising and forging a common ground, as much as in the case of antielitism.

Another crucial aspect is that Laclau understands populism not as a type of movement, but as a political logic (Laclau, 2005, p. 117) while he considers populist discourse "imprecise and fluctuating" because of social reality being "heterogeneous and fluctuating" (Laclau, 2005, p. 118).

Müller (2016, p. 98) rejects Laclau's (2006) approach ("constructing a people is the main task of radical politics") based on his earlier work on populism, fearing that left-wing populism may become "redundant or dangerous" refusing "building new majorities" and becoming antipluralist. His approach on populism revolves around this issue: besides populism being antielitist, it is also antipluralist claiming that only the actors in question are able to represent the people.

While Laclau understands this antagonism between power and a unified 'people' as a democratic political way, Müller fears that the opposite is true: he understands populism as "the permanent shadow of representative politics", not being an authentic part of democracy (Müller, 2016, p. 101) but a danger to it, even if it may shed light on the underrepresented parts of society (Müller, 2016, p. 102).

One step further, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, p. 116) identify populism as "an illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism": they refuse the idea that populism is outside of (liberal) democracy and claim that it is its "(bad) conscience".

They summarize their understanding on populism into one sentence: "*a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté Générale (general will) of the people*" (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6). Here, populism being a "thin-centered ideology" is a crucial claim: it suggests that, in contrast with "full" ideologies, populism is attached to other ones, which also means that it cannot give complex and coherent answers to arising problems (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6). They highlight that both populism and elitism are different from pluralism (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 7) – agreeing here with Müller's idea on populism being antipluralist.

2.1.2. Short History: Populism in the U.S. and Europe

As shown earlier, populism is often discussed as identical to right-wing/nationalist populism. Most of the literature seems to discuss right-wing populism and indeed not without a basis: in Europe, 74 from 102 analysed parties were considered as right-wing populist with a total vote share of 17,7 percent (Eirmann et al., 2017, p. 13), Turkey is led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan since 2003 and India by Narendra Modi since 2014, Donald Trump has won the elections in the United States and Rodrigo Duterte in Philippines in 2016, Jair Bolsonaro in 2019.

Populism has a history in shifting from the left to right on the ideological spectrum: as discussed before, even though its roots come from agrarian populists in the U.S. and the Narodniks in Russia and it is modestly present today, it seems that today it has stronger ties with right-wing political parties. To understand this shift, a summary of the history of U.S. populism and notes on European right-wing populism is necessary.

In the United States populism shifted to the right in the 1940s, after World War II from reformers and radicals to conservatives (Kazin, 2017, p. 4.). The left being in defense, liberals taking New Deal and the expanded state as granted, conservatives had the chance to defend “pious, middle-class communities against the amoral governing elite” (Kazin, 2017, p. 4). As Laclau explains (2005, p. 135), the emphasis, and not the content of the message has changed: it was needed to get past the duality of ‘parasites’ and ‘producers’, and the connection between the ‘people’ and ‘workers’, instead referring to the “average man” – here, the ‘parasite’ refers to employers, shareholders etc. In the ‘60s mass media often referred to the people as “the silent majority” or “hard hats”, political actors tried to define “the discontent of citizens who usually considered themselves to be middle class” (Kazin, 2017, p. 223). Many feared that their safety is under siege from ‘above’ (liberal authorities, the “big people”) and ‘below’ (“angry minorities”), and considered that no one recognizes them as “the real, the indispensable America” (Kazin, 2017, p. 233). The left ignoring them or not understanding their needs offered the chance for conservatives to fill in the gaps, linking anti-statist politics to “everyday concerns that nagged at the insecure white middle” (Kazin, 2017, p. 233.).

The question of race has become crucial again in the ‘60s, but even before that, the political standpoints of George Wallace showed that it is an important topic. In 1952, when he became Circuit Judge of the Third Judicial Circuit in Alabama he defended “traditions” of the South – in

fact racial segregation – with injunctions and threats (Kazin, 2017, p. 230). Since World War II European ethnics “declaring their identity as mainstream white Americans”, African-Americans often being attacked by mobs (Kazin, 2017, p. 226), right-wing populists claimed that “government bureaucrats, many influenced by Communism or socialism... misused tax dollars to fund experiments in social engineering for the benefit of pressure groups”, here again, drawing the line between the elite misusing the money of the ‘people’ (Kazin, 2017, p. 227).

The political campaigns of Wallace in 1964 and 1968 for the presidency of the U.S. show how right-wing populism in fact shifted the emphasis mentioned by Laclau: now the role of ‘parasites’ was offered to other parts of society. As Kazin explains, Wallace posed as the defender of citizens by “arrogant but inept bureaucrats, slovenly and unpatriotic protesters, and criminal minorities”, while referring to the ‘people’ as those who have “unglamorous jobs and a culture that prized close families and an unswerving faith in God and country” (Kazin, 2017, p. 224).

By the mid-‘70s the discourse about “traditional” values was tied to “the rhetorical defense of hardworking Americans against the liberal elite” (Kazin, 2017, p. 247.) Meanwhile the role of evangelical Protestant churches became more important, arguing for the “biblical code of sexual self-discipline, patriarchal families, and a Calvinist type of producer ethic” and treating liberal elite not only as “arrogant, bumbling, and spendthrift” but immoral because of their “tolerance of abortion, homosexuality, and atheism” (Kazin, 2017, p. 247).

In the ‘80s Ronald Reagan shifted the discourse of the opposition between the ‘people’ and ‘special interests’ by suggesting that the Democratic elite did not care as much about “working families of America” but rather about minorities like homosexuals, public schools, feminists etc. (Kazin, 2017, p. 262). Right-wing populism and neoliberal values were changing the society hand in hand: conservative Republicans could successfully argue that they are running against the immoral “liberal establishment”, shifting the attention from “big business and its political cronies” (Kazin, 2017, p. 266).

Before the elections in 2016 both the Democratic Party’s candidate Bernie Sanders and the Republican candidate Donald J. Trump were considered as populist but as Kazin argues, their populism had different roots: Sander’s discourse constructed ‘the people’ regardless of their ethnicity or religious affiliation, while Trump’s populism was “narrower and ethnically restrictive” supposing that “real Americans” consist ‘the people’ (Kazin, 2017, p. XIII). In 2016 the latter kind of populism has succeeded.

However, the European history of populism is somewhat different. For instance, in the era of the American People's Party's foundation in Europe Social Democratic parties have emerged, but populist movements did not arrive until the 1970's and they flourished mainly on the right, arising only lately on the left of the ideological compass (Judis, 2016, p. 46). Another difference between the U.S. and Europe is that American populist parties were usually short-lived while Europeans stood the test of time – mainly because of the multi-party systems and the small percentages needed for entering the parliament (Judis, 2016, p. 47).

A first wave of populist success in the '90s coincided with the American success of populist campaigns: Keynesian economic policies and the economic boom behind them, low unemployment faded away as neoliberalism gained influence, and political parties from the whole ideological spectrum embraced it. In the beginning of the '70s the lack of a "buoyant prosperity", the rise of unemployment, the slow-down of economic growth has led to the weakening of social welfare programs, inflation rose and so on (Judis, 2016, pp. 47-48). First, in 1979 Margaret Thatcher has become the prime minister of the United Kingdom, applying neoliberal changes in the country and improving the economy after 1984 (Judis, 2016, p. 49). However, social inequalities have deepened: after the top income tax rate has been dropped from 60 percent to 40, the income share of the top 20 percent has increased while many manufacturing jobs have disappeared (Judis, 2016, p. 49). In the U.K. and in other European countries, although left-wing parties won elections, neoliberal policies continued to be applied, the working classes remaining without representation.

This lack of representation and another crucial aspect, immigration gave chance for right-wing populism's rise. As Judis (2016, pp. 50-51) explains, labour shortage and emigration from former colonies resulted in mass immigration since the '60s and had a negative impact in the '70s: labour surplus has appeared and ever since the growth of non-European immigrant communities, together with anti-immigrant attitudes has risen.

Right-wing populist parties in Western Europe emerged partially from anti-tax movements and partially from the far right, giving attention to the aforementioned attitudes about asylum seekers and immigrants (Judis, 2016, p. 52). These sentiments did not arise only from economic concerns: crime, religious practices, especially views on Islam, integration were crucial issues, the September 11 attacks in the U.S. giving another push for them (Judis, 2016, p. 53).

Many populist parties broke ties with earlier anti-tax policies: they shifted to the representation of blue-collar workers and people in need for a strong welfare state, for instance, the French National Front (now National Rally) and the Danish People's Party (Judis, 2016, p. 54). As Herkman (2016) shows, Nordic populist parties' first wave in the '70s also had anti-tax policies, but in the second wave an anti-neoliberal shift can be perceived in some countries: in Finland and Sweden, populist parties tend to defend welfare state, while the Danish populists suggested the implementation of a 'welfare dualism' which would grant welfare state only for "native" citizens of the country.

The mass immigration of non-Europeans to the continent starting from 2014 and peaking in 2015, terrorist attacks since 2010, sexual assaults in Cologne, Germany in 2015 had another significant impact: the messages of right-wing populists had become more legitimate (Judis, 2016, p. 68-69). While left-wing populism remained important in economically weaker European countries, right-wing populism could build its own path in wealthier ones, such as Denmark, Austria or the United Kingdom and France (Judis, 2016, pp. 69-73). I would suggest that instead of treating the successes of the populist parties– including the ones in Italy, Hungary or Poland – as isolated anomalies, one could state that there is a trend unfolding in Europe too.

2.1.3. Populist Moment and Neoliberal Hegemony

My understanding on populism resonates more with Laclau's, Mudde's and Kaltwasser's: populism usually is a response building on the lack of trust in governments and liberal democracies, a fear of losing popular sovereignty (manifested in governments) regardless of the ideological background: while right-wing populists will frame the political debates around national sentiments, left-wing populists will focus more on local or global class antagonisms and inequalities. As De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017) puts it, there is a "confusing overlap" in the academic and public debates on populism and nationalism partially because of the strength of European right-wing populist parties, and Eurocentric approaches ignoring Latin-American left-wing populism. However, populism "is structured around a vertical, down/up or high/low axis that refers to power" instead of how democracy understand the 'people' ("the-people-as-demos") or how nationalism does ("the people-as-nation") (De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 2017). This approach

is crucial in my thesis since it reflects on the importance of the actors in populist and conspiratorial discourses.

Another important aspect is that social change seems to be detached from ‘the people’, and even if populism may offer simplified answers for these (for instance, not enmeshing the formula of the aforementioned vertical axis or the homogeneity of ‘the people’), its answers are deeply grounded in common understandings about our world. The fear of forced, ‘alien’ social change has its grounds according to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, p. 117) too, who describe how liberal democracies contain contradictions between what majorities would want and the rights guaranteed for minorities, while international organisations, such as the European Central Bank or the International Monetary Fund, private companies and market logic are limiting the power of governments.

Mouffe (2018, p. 13) also argues that the ‘populist moment’ is a response to the crisis caused by ‘neoliberal hegemony’ which affected the middle class too after the 2008 economic crisis with its austerity policies (Mouffe, 2018, p. 15). Politics has been narrowed down to “a mere issue of managing the established order, a domain reserved for experts” while the idea of popular sovereignty became outdated and the discourse of social equality vanished (Mouffe, 2018, p. 15). This process coined as “post-democratic” is pivotal because it explains how the legitimacy of liberal democracies has been deteriorating, consequently how social change can be perceived as something foreign from the will of ‘the people’.

This line of thought has another aspect: as Taggart (2000, p. 2) points out, populists identify themselves with “an idealized heartland”, this being “a world that embodies the collective ways and wisdom of the people who construct it” (Taggart, 2000, p. 3). The idea of a ‘heartland’ is central: this grants the discursive ground for the battles against ‘forced’ social changes, a physical and imagined common space, a collective of people with their own tradition, customs, economic structures and so on.

The ‘heartland’ does not necessarily have to be constructed on the basis of a nation – for example, Evo Morales, Bolivia’s left-wing populist president between 2006 and 2019 originates from the earlier excluded indigenous population and his discourse revolved around their inclusion in the power structures (Nilsson and Gustaffson, 2012, p. 23).

2.2. Conspiracy Theories

In this section I will first highlight the main debates and positions of the literature on conspiracy theories, focusing in another section on the typologies developed by different authors and used by me in my analysis. In the last section I will elaborate on my own understandings and the common features of populism and conspiracy theories.

2.2.1. Understanding Conspiracy Theories: Definition Debates

The term conspiracy originates from the Latin ‘conspirare’, meaning “breathing together” (Byford, 2011, p. 20). The Latin word immediately assumes that two or more actors are involved in an exclusionary act, but it does not suggest more. However, the literature of conspiracy theories (from now on, sometimes marked as ‘CTs’) is vibrant and enriched with debates.

A basic epistemic dilemma characterizes researchers of conspiracy theories: are these theories inherently false, or the terminology can refer to all those explanations which have a conspiracy as their main theme?

In one corner we find experts like Popper (1966, p. 296.), who states that – even though conspiracies indeed exist – a “conspiracy theory of society” is the opposite of social sciences because it explains social phenomena through exposing certain actors or groups. According to the author conspiracy theories are secularized versions of religious superstitions: as in the past, when the conspiracy of the gods offered explanations for historic events, today “powerful men or groups” are in their place in the conspiratorial discourse (Popper, 1966, p. 296).

Hofstadter, one of the pioneers in the literature, is interested in right-wing’s ‘paranoid style’ in American politics. He finds explanation in (non-clinical) paranoia, emphasizing that this style of politics refers to the “qualities of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy” (Hofstadter, 1965, p. 4). As Dentith (2014, p. 9) underlines, Hofstadter uses paranoia as an analogy for conspiracy theories, and even if he recognizes that conspiracies exist in our history, he is interested in their irrationality.

A similarly normative approach is held by Pipes (1997, p. 15): conspiracy theories are “fears of nonexistent conspiracies”, yet he acknowledges that “real conspiracies” do exist and are

fueled exactly by those who build on these theories – for instance Vladimir Lenin and Adolf Hitler (Pipes, 1957, p. 145).

Lakatos (2000) also emphasizes that “real conspiracies” should be named ‘conspiracies’ and “fake” ones ‘conspiracy theories’, but – contradicting Karl Popper – he states that these theories are the “peak performances” of “laic sociology”. As he explains, they represent the “ultimate borders” where ordinary thinking can expand with the tools in hand (Lakatos, 2000).

The authors cited above are, in Dentith’s (2014, p. 9) words, “conspiracy theory sceptics”. As shown, they often affirm the existence of conspiracies, yet they try to confine the notion and oppose it to an assumed reality. Conspiracy theories in their approach are inherently false and fictional, consequently excluded from any discourse which could be taken seriously.

In the other corner of the epistemic debate, we find those experts who emphasize the structure or nature of these discourses, rather than their supposed content. As Coady (2006, p. 2) writes, a CT is “simply a conspiratorial explanation”, but also argues that proved CTs should be named differently since the term seems to mean “an explanation that is contrary to an explanation that has official status”. Räikkä (2009) also remarks that “when conspiracy theories turn into official wisdom, people cease to call them conspiracy theories”. However, Coady (2006, p. 3) uses the term in both ways: for those theories which are opposed to official ones and those which are officially used.

Dentith (2014, p. 23) suggests that the simplest conception is that a CT is “a theory about a conspiracy”. Räikkä (2009) argues that “political conspiracy theories may not be much weaker explanations than standard explanations of political events” and that such historical events as the Holocaust or the Watergate-scandal were once believed to be conspiracy theories. Byford (2011, pp. 23-24) reminds that conspiracies exist despite of conspiracy theories are classified among such things as paranormal beliefs, astrology, UFO-stories etc. Similarly, Barkun (2003, p. 2) uses the term “stigmatized knowledges” for the mentioned beliefs: as he explains, these are marginalized claims, by those institutions which “conventionally distinguish between knowledge and error” (Barkun, 2003, p. 26). Conspiracy theories are ‘suppressed knowledges’ in the sense that they are believed to be intentionally ignored even though secretly accepted as true, and inherently are explanations on why they are unaccepted (Barkun, 2003, p. 27). Barkun seems to disagree with Popper when he argues that conspiracy theories and other stigmatized knowledges

do not base their claims on belief: followers do assume that empirical basis exists and do not expect others to accept them based on faith (Barkun, 2003, p. 28).

Thus, the above cited authors tend to ignore normative understandings of what the notion ‘conspiracy theory’ means. For them, content and its relation to a supposed truth does not change whether we call “a theory about a conspiracy” a conspiracy theory. In this thesis I study conspiracy theories as discursive strategies disregarding the questions related to their truthfulness or validity claims.

2.2.2. The Structure of Conspiracy Theories

While Coady (2006, p. 2) writes about two essential conditions – “a group of agents working together” and the conspiracy to be secretive –, according to Dentith (2014, p. 23) a conspiracy theory needs three conditions: 1. a “set of agents with a plan” 2. steps taken to “minimize public awareness” and 3. a goal. As Dentith explains, conspiring people – the ‘conspirators’ are necessary for a CT (Dentith, 2014, p. 23.), while Lakatos (2000) contrasts them with the ‘Lonely Evil’ of many stories: conspiracy theories are more realistic in supposing a group of people instead of one irrationally powerful antagonist. This is why, I might add, conspiracy theories involving one main character – for instance, George Soros – claim the existence of a network, and also because of what Lakatos (2000) underlines: individuals die, while groups survive them. Byford (2011, p. 72) adds that the conspirators should be unveiled but since the nature of CTs inherently lowers the chances for that. Actors can be present in different ways: early secret societies or later on such groups as Bilderberg were pointed out, but sometimes the conspirators are vaguely mentioned, e.g., as ‘Vatican’ or ‘Kremlin’ (Byford, 2011, p. 72), or nowadays as ‘Brussels’. As Byford (2011, p. 73) also mentions, the list of conspirators can always be expanded, as new elements of a network are unveiled.

Secrecy is also a main condition, according to Dentith (2014, p. 29) but he refuses those standpoints which require ‘perfect secrecy’ for CTs: he states that some agents can hold their identities and actions in secret better than others.

The third condition means that a goal is needed to be desired: this does not immediately mean that the outcomes are the same as the goals (Dentith, 2014, p. 24). As Byford (2011, p. 77) describes, the most known plan is ‘New World Order’, which had its ascension after a speech by

George Bush in 1991. The U.S. President reflected on the demise of “international communism”, but conspiracy theorists referred to this term since the ‘60s, and when the televangelist Pat Robertson published his book with this title in the same year, the conspiracy theory became widely known (Byford, 2011, p. 77). As Barkun explains (2003, p. 39), the CT of ‘New World Order’ explains events as results of a plan of conspirators.

2.2.3. Typology

Several typologies of conspiracy theories had been developed; some of these may prove to be useful for this thesis. In this section I will elaborate on two approaches: from Michael Barkun and Jesse Walker.

Barkun (2003) is interested in the scale of conspiracy theories. While authors like Lakatos (2000) distinguished between local and global conspiracies, Barkun categorized three types: *event conspiracies*, *systemic conspiracies* and *superconspiracies*.

The smallest-scale, *event conspiracies* are “limited, discrete event or set of events” such as the Kennedy assassination, while *systemic conspiracies* have “broad goals, usually conceived as securing control over a country, a region, or even the entire world” (Barkun, 2003, p. 6). These conspirators – Jews, Masons etc. – try to control existing institutions in order to achieve their goals, while the antagonists of *superconspiracies* contain both of the other types, linking them together and suspecting one powerful group behind them (Barkun, 2003, p. 6): for instance, the conspiracy theory of David Icke in which reptilians control all other conspirators (Barkun, 2003, p. 5).

In developing the typology of “America’s demons”, Walker (2013 20-21) differentiates between four types of enemies: the *Enemy Outside*, the *Enemy Within*, the *Enemy Above*, the *Enemy Below* (adding another type to the list, the *Benevolent Conspiracy*).

For the first type, the *Enemy Outside* the latest example from the U.S. history is ex-President Barack Obama and fears around him: the conspiracy theories about him not having genuine birth certificate. As Walker (2013, pp. 159-160) explains, fear from Muslims and hearsays about Obama being one of them, his father being Kenyan and other aspects added to the fear from an *Enemy Outside*: an actor conspiring against us from outside our community. The second type, the *Enemy Within* has different logic: a historical example from Walker (2013, pp. 35-36) is the fear from witches in the Middle Ages, while the Brown Scare (antifascism) of the Roosevelt

administration, and the Red Scare (anticommunism) of the '40s and '50s (Walker, 2013, p. 48) show similar patterns: that the conspirators are part of our society. The *Enemy Above* – for instance, the Illuminati or George Soros – is the most often mentioned type: as Walker (2013, p. 75) writes, conspiracy theory often means only *Enemy Above* type CTs in the media. These theories are “the underground literature of power: lurid, often distorted, and inevitable as long as imperious institutions exist” (Walker, 2013, p. 75). While this type shows the upper part of a hierarchy, the *Enemy Below* type describes the opposite: Walker (2013, p. 53) refers here to conspiracy theories based on slave riots, explaining that while the *Enemy Within* cannot be identified easily, the *Enemy Below* has “a distinct position at the bottom of the social pyramid”. Moreover, the *Enemy Below* can be used as a puppet of the *Enemy Above*: for instance, a conspiracy theory posted by a candidate of the Hungarian far-right party *Jobbik* stated that the Roma community is the “biological weapon” of the Jewry, here the Roma being the *Enemy Below* used by the Jews considered to be the *Enemy Above*.

Conspiracy theories often contain several types of enemies. This typology offers tools for identifying these when I analyse actors involved in conspiratorial discourse of right-wing populism.

2.2.4. Conspiracy Theories and Populism

In this thesis I identify two ineffable aspects of conspiracy theories: on one hand, many of them tend to rely on a populist division of society between the “pure”, “homogenic”, “good-willing” and “sovereign” people and the “corrupted”, “bad-willing” elite. As much as populism reaches out for conspiracy theories from time to time, conspiracy theories can be built on these populist understandings of the world. On the other hand, conspiracy theories offer explanations for many events and changes in society throughout our history or in the present, by claiming that they unveil secret forces which attempt to destroy our institutions/morals/principles/ways of life and so on. In other words, I suggest that as much as populism offers an explanation on social change claimed to be detached by ‘the people’, conspiracy theories attempt something similar.

The additional value of conspiracy theories is built in their nature of being expressly focused on the *actors* and their *secret plans* against a population (or humanity) – these theories, as

folklores or myths, paint the face of the devil: they point out the name of the enemy or enemies (George Soros, Bill Gates, Brussels, the Jewry, the Illuminati etc.).

The existing literature notices the common features of conspiracy theories as populism but lacks further analysis on it. As Bergmann (2018, p. 101) points out, both conspiracy theories and populism tend to divide the “unknowing people” and “their conspirators” with power, understanding politics “as a binary struggle between the people and the undeserving self-serving political class” (Bergmann, 2018, p. 92). In the near past this was especially true for right-wing populists who could build on conspiracy theories about ‘Islamification’ and ‘Sharia laws’ (Bergmann, 2018, p. 4).

Wodak (2015, p. 4) also claims that conspiracy theories are a “necessary ‘toolkit’” for populists, and Canovan (1981, p. 296) also mentions “that antielitism and distrust of politicians can go along with conspiracy theories” as it does in populism. Moreover, as Müller (2016, p. 32) puts it: conspiracy theories “are rooted in and emerge from the very logic of populism itself”.

While these authors identify some of the common grounds of populism and conspiracy theories, I claim that both discourses try to explain social change to an audience which feels that it is detached from politics. In the following section I draw up my approach on the notion of ‘authenticity’ which serves a deeper understanding on how social change can be perceived in populist and conspiratorial discourses.

2.3. Authenticity

As discussed earlier, populism can thrive on the perception of social change being detached from the ‘people’, ‘neoliberal hegemony’ being a spark for the ‘populist moment’. As Monbiot (2019, pp. 38-39.) also puts it: because of the political crisis of neoliberalism “politics become irrelevant to people’s lives, ‘debate is reduced to the yabber of a remote elite’, facts and arguments are replaced by slogans, symbols and sensation”, in other words, people are alienated from public affairs. From a different perspective, Robotham (2020) assumes that while neoliberalism undermines its own “performance legitimacy” by not achieving its claimed goals, this crisis becomes a global problem, “the crisis in the economy, society and culture created by neoliberal globalization” – and as an answer for that, populism captures “the pinnacle of political power in the global system”. In other words, besides the depoliticization of people another effect is the lack

of trust in the neoliberal promises and social change: for instance, when local businesses close down and international corporations take their place, many may feel that political actors failed them and represent foreign interests.

For illustrating this problem furthermore, I chose two phenomena: the first one is the impact of employment of women on families. As Crompton (2002) explains, “individualized, marketized, identities and perspectives have penetrated ever deeper into the social fabric”: families became more instable and the number of divorces and single-parenthoods has grown. Moreover, these changes have led to some proposing a return to “traditional” gender roles (Crompton, 2002).

My other example is McDonaldization: in a newly updated edition Ritzer (2019, pp. 27-28) summarizes the negative social changes based on the four basic principles of McDonaldization (efficiency, calculability, predictability and control): disenchantment, dangers on health and the environment and dehumanization. He argues that “if the world were less McDonaldized, people would better be able to live up to their human potential” (Ritzer, 2019, p. 29) – in other words, McDonaldization brings a social change which consists of alienating people from their own assumed potentials.

Negative effects of social changes may have their reactions, as shown above in my first example: changing gender roles may be contested by some and proposals about “returning” to earlier conditions may flourish. Since we often understand our social world as a given fact, our ‘way of life’, institutional system etc. as ‘normal’, it is plausible to reach out to these when they dissolve. For instance, as Gellner (1983, pp. 48-49) explains, “nations [are perceived] as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny”. The concept of ‘heartland’ mentioned earlier serves similar goals: in a way it can be perceived as a familiar space, a common reference point on a way of life which need defence from unwanted social change.

In this thesis I chose to operate with the word ‘authenticity’: by this term I refer to the above-mentioned endangered way of life in the present, or a lost one from our past, these being opposed to a social change which is understood as unnatural, abnormal with a negative impact.

For instance, in his book about the rural America, Wuthnow (2018, p. 6) focuses on the ‘moral outrage’ based on “a mixture of fear and anger” because their way of life is endangered, and explains how Washington is understood as “big and distant” but also as a power which intervenes in a threatening way in small communities’ lives (Wuthnow, 2018, p. 101). Many

people in rural America feel that this distant entity neglects them and at the same time imposes its rules on them, lacking ‘common sense’ (Wuthnow, 2018, p. 106).

Authenticity claims appearing in my data as the rule of ‘the people’ manifested in the sovereignty of nation-states, without supranational/global “supervision”. Authenticity as social imaginary, in my approach, supposes that societies can indeed be “pure” and “natural” and have somewhat clear visions about how families, ethnicities, religions, states, the economy, the relationship between individuals and communities/the state should function.

From another perspective, Boyle (2006, pp. 16-21) discusses authenticity as an aspect of economy and marketing, pointing out several elements. For him, authenticity – or “real” – means natural (e.g., movements against GMOs, being pro “natural” birth), means simple (e.g., traditional ingredients, no chemicals in the food), means unspun (e.g., not spinned by advertisers), rooted (in tradition, locally), means something three-dimensional (it’s real experience with depth), means human (it’s rooted in humanity, it has a human-scale vs. mass production). He mentions a couple of other elements which are not relevant for this thesis, but the listed ones illustrate how authenticity perceived in economy and marketing can be useful also for analysing the claims made in the political discourse.

In analysing populism and conspiracy theories, I argue that both discourses – often one using the other’s discourse – offer explanations and cures for the loss of our authentic ways. While authentic is, as Boyle described, natural, simple, rooted, unspun, having a depth, human, inauthentic is the opposite: unnatural, impenetrable, without any roots in a given society, spinned by someone, without depth, being only theoretical, and foreign from ourselves. Some of the social changes described earlier are understood as being inauthentic and endangering our authentic lives.

3. Research Questions

Populism can be understood as a consequence of liberal democracies and neoliberalism losing from their legitimacy by depoliticizing society. Representativeness is questioned, since social change seems to be detached from ‘the people’, therefore new political actors aim to tackle this issue. This way, populist rhetoric aims to explain how ‘unwanted’ social change emerges.

Conspiracy theories add to the verticality of populism, in which ‘the elite’ is not part of society, being above it, and is inherently opposed to ‘the people’. Thus, conspiracy theories reinforce populism by claiming that a secretive, conspiring power acts against society.

Authenticity as an argument appears in order to offer further explanations on why social change is unwanted: both populist and conspiratorial rhetoric claims an authentic way of life which is endangered and which needs defines.

This thesis is interested in:

- how discourses conveying right wing populist rhetoric and conspiracy theories portray social change?
- how Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán's selected speeches between 2015 and 2020 use populist and conspiratorial rhetoric
- how key assumptions appear, actors are re-arranged and qualities are attached to them.

4. Theoretical Background

In this chapter I describe two sociological theories on which I build the framework of my thesis. *World society theory* as a global sociological approach offers insights in understanding right-wing populist rhetoric, and serves as an antithesis with its emphasis on world culture's horizontality (versus populism's vertical world-view), while *field theory* laid down by Pierre Bourdieu guides my understanding on how epistemic work is assigned to persuading other actors, thereby gaining political capital in a professional field.

4.1. World Society Theory

Building on the institutionalist theoretical perspective, the main assumption of world society theory is that global models shape nation-states through “global cultural and associational processes”, and offers sociological explanations beyond the ones based on power relations and functional rationality (Meyer et al., 1997). Instead of understanding culture as being constructed from local roots or through history, world society theory claims that it has a worldwide basis – this results in nation-states being globally embedded through “transnational forces” (Meyer et al., 1997). According to this approach existing world models shape how different actors can organize and build their own legitimation, models which enjoy “a considerable amount of consensus” and resting on “claims to universal world applicability” (Meyer et al., 1997). World society theory focuses on similarities of nation-states instead of differences, calling this *isomorphism*: for instance, actors represent themselves as “rational and responsible” and even their goals bear a resemblance (Meyer et al., 1997). Even though goals may be similar, policies may differ from them: *decoupling* may happen because of dominant models being incompatible with certain nation-states (Meyer et al., 1997). According to Meyer et al. (1997) decoupling is more often perceptible in peripheries: *expansive structuration* – “formation and spread of explicit, rationalized, differentiated organizational forms” may outstep the functional needs of a nation-state.

As McNeely (2012) remarks, international organizations were prominent actors in the isomorphism after World War II. Institutional approach, building on these observations, argues that the institutional context is crucial for determining how actors are structured and how they act

(McNeely, 2012). This does not lead to the claim that *world culture* lacks conflicts: on the contrary, many differing aspects are part of it (McNeely, 2012), while *statelessness* characterizes it.

Some aspects of world society theory are relevant in the analysis of populism despite having opposite assumptions. WST lacks a hierarchical view of the world, even if it mentions peripheric and core nation-states: its main assumption lies in a world culture and goals shared by most actors, and it is interested in the *stateless* global processes. International organizations are vehicles of world culture, and there is a possibility for anyone to contribute: conflicts between nation-states are not systemic but incidental.

The sociological explanations of *world society theory* are incompatible with the explanatory logic marketed in right-wing populist rhetoric. According to the latter, the world and the nation-states in it are inherently interconnected through conflicts: local antagonisms consist of different aspirations of ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’, while international relations are shaped by deep cultural differences and power interests. International organizations and their local representants can become suspicious, world models and expansive structuration can be hostile and harmful for the society. In other words: social change described by *world society theory* as a horizontal and voluntary process can be seen as vertical and forced.

Therefore, WST offers tools for refining the analysis of populist thinking: first, because its approach can be used in investigating how a “world culture of populism” as a political force may also build on global models and not only on one’s own local roots or history, and second, because WST describes social change differently from populist logic, counterbalancing it.

The first reason to use WST means that the theoretical tools of world society theory offer ways to analyse how populism as a global phenomenon has more similarities than differences. *Isomorphic change* applies to actors in populism who tend to use similar rhetoric in spite of the cultural differences, creating a “world culture of populism” which is characterized by *statelessness* as much as world culture also lacks any central authoritative power.

The second approach means that while WST describes the role of international organizations, populism also deals with this phenomenon but involving antagonism as a central explanatory. *Expansive structuration* shaped by actors above nation-states becomes suspicious for populism, the social change as result creates the need for defence and highlights the necessity of national sovereignty. Thereby WST adds to the understanding of populism by its own approach on social change.

4.2. Field Theory

Another theory favourable for this thesis is *field theory* laid down by Pierre Bourdieu. He understands social world as a space “constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution” in which actors can be defined by their positions related to each other in the given field (Bourdieu, 1985). Capital is crucial for agents in a social space: their position in the field depends on the relevant forms of power they share, power as in the different forms of capital, economic, cultural, social or symbolic (Bourdieu, 1985). Capital for Bourdieu does not mean only material possession: while *economic capital* indeed can be converted into money, and *cultural capital* into *objectified state* (in form of cultural goods), it also can be converted into *embodied state*, as “an integral part of the person, into a habitus,” or into institutionalized state e.g., as academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). *Social capital*, again, is other than a material capital: it is “a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986).

Coming to the point of the political field, Bourdieu states that political struggles revolve primarily around “knowledge of the social world”, the struggle “to conserve or transform the social word by conserving or transforming the categories through which it is perceived” (Bourdieu, 1985). The creation of ‘common-sense’, agents’ attempt to define the social world is present in the political field, in many forms: “benediction or malediction, eulogy, praise, congratulations, compliments, or insults, reproaches, criticisms, accusations, slanders” (Bourdieu, 1985). For Bourdieu political field can be understood through “the logic of supply and demand”, in which competing agents offer their products for citizens in many forms (concepts, events, commentaries and so on) (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 172). Political field limits “the universe of political discourse” by limiting what is even thinkable or sayable – Bourdieu calls this the “monopoly of the professionals”, those who have the instruments for perceiving and expressing (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 172), at least in periods which in which crisis is not present (1991, p. 173).

While Bourdieu focuses on how professionals are “created”, my goal is not to concentrate on this a division but rather on populism’s attempt to conceal it and rearrange its meaning: in other words, first, to hide the professionalism of the given populists (them being “simple folk”, part of “the people”), and second, to delegitimize professionals by tying them to “the elite”, the ones with specific interests, apart from “what people want”. Another aspect which needs attention is the

process of meaning-making and struggle to have the “right” for creating ‘common-sense’: populist rhetoric constantly engages in this epistemic work, challenging the boundaries of “the universe of political discourse” allegedly from outside the political field.

5. Methodology

The methodological approach of this thesis is grounded in discourse theory, as Howarth (2000, p. 8) explains, in the “assumption about objects and actions being meaningful” and in the methods which makes possible “analysing signifying practices and discursive forms” (2000, p. 10). This thesis follows the post-structuralist understanding of discourse claiming that “discourses are incomplete linguistic systems”, and meanings can change in discourses (Howarth, 2000, p. 42). In other words, while Saussure claims that language is a product and not a process (2000, pp. 28-29), “a closed system of signs” (2000, p. 36), Derrida challenges this and states that signs can “function differently in new situations” (2000, p. 39), creating new meanings. As Laclau and Mouffe further argue, meanings can depend “on the particular systems of difference or discourses that constitute its identity” (Howarth, 2000, p. 101): different actors from different points of view can understand the same situation differently.

This is important in the case of populism since its meaning-making process often involves creating new meanings: for example, social change described by world society theory is understood in a different way by populism, and the actors involved can have new meanings (NGOs are not simply actors in a field but traitors, suspicious representatives of foreign and dangerous interests etc.).

The following sections describe further methodological tools for my analysis. First, I draw up some of the tools laid down by *epistemic governance*, second, I describe membership categorization analysis and third, I emphasize some of the topoi of populist discourse from Ruth Wodak’s work.

5.1. Epistemic Governance

Epistemic governance highlights that “governance works through epistemic means” (Alasuutari and Qadir, 2019, p. 2), as a general theory being interested in “how people seek to bring about change” (Alasuutari and Qadir, 2019, p. 6). Linking *world society theory* and *epistemic governance*, Alasuutari (2015) argues that for WST “ideas and beliefs came to be seen as the primary battleground”, as this is how “unanimity or compromise is reached”, while *epistemic governance* aims to focus exactly on this process: the “struggles over meaning and over a

hegemonic definition of the situation at hand”. Schmidt (2008) writes about something similar, regarding *discursive institutionalism*: first, she describes institutional *background ideational abilities* which constrain the how actors make sense of the world, second, she points out the importance of *foreground discursive abilities*, which make space for institutional changes. With this argument, she clears the way for the possibility of agency in the institutionalist approaches – as Alasuutari (2015) aims this too.

However, this thesis understands *epistemic governance* as a methodological tool kit, as Alasuutari and Qadir also argue that it adds another methodological layer to discourse analysis (2019, p. 149). This approach makes it possible to focus on specified aspects of a set of data in this thesis. As described, *epistemic governance* focuses on the epistemic work found in the analysed data, the *imageries of the social world* which lay the foundation of further epistemic work, and *authorities* involved in arguments.

In this research, the latter aspects will not be used: while it would be interesting to analyse how the world is understood in the data (Is it based on the idea of modernization? Is there a hierarchy of powers? Are there competing blocs in the world?), or which authorities are invoked (ontological, capacity-based, moral or charismatic?), the boundaries of this thesis will not be able to give space for these insights.

Instead, my focus is on the epistemic work. First, on the *ontology of the environment*, beliefs which are assumed to be accepted in society, or in the words of the authors, “the shared view of what is a truthful and accurate picture of the situation at hand” (Alasuutari and Qadir, 2019, p. 24). Even if populism is “stigmatized”, it has to build on shared views in order to be able to persuade other actors.

Second, social world consists of actors, and epistemic work needs to give answer on how addressed people should understand themselves and how they should perceive others (Alasuutari and Qadir, 2019, p. 26). The authors highlight the nation as an example on how *actors and identifications* are tackled by epistemic work (Alasuutari and Qadir, 2019, p. 27), and indeed, right-wing populism tends to claim that it gives voice to “the nation”, even if it excludes certain actors from it (e.g. those in opposition).

Third, epistemic work involves focus on *norms and ideals* in order to make the case for certain political actions (Alasuutari and Qadir, 2019, p. 28), often tied to rationality and science: as the authors explain, universal principles may be understood as axiomatic (Alasuutari and Qadir,

2019, p. 29), endorsed by scientific authorities too, but emotion is also involved in this process. Populism builds on the common assumptions on what is right or wrong, what is ideal in a given society, therefore its meaning-making process involved these aspects as well.

It is important that – because this thesis focuses on the “rebels of politics” – the authors also stress that even those who challenge the status quo build their persuasion on epistemic governance (Alasuutari and Qadir, 2019, p. 4).

Epistemic governance gives methodological tools for analysing our data from the aforementioned three aspects, while *Membership Categorization Analysis* described below creates possibilities for further investigation.

5.2. Membership Categorization Analysis

When analysing *actors and identifications*, membership categorization analysis deepens the investigation. MCA originates from Harvey Sacks’ work in the ‘60s, building on ethnomethodology, and developed side by side with conversation analysis. Sacks was interested in how social order is possible at all, and how is it achieved, therefore he gathered data for understanding how people describe people through social categories (Fitzgerald, 2015). As Hester and Eglin (1996, p. 3) explain, MCA does not consider categories as earlier defined but ones which need to be analysed in situated use.

Sacks introduced several concepts in order to elaborate on his analytical methods. Membership categorization *devices* are for “collecting together and organizing social categories and their relevant actions *in any particular instance*”, while *categories* are references for persons (e.g. brother, teacher) (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2015, p. 8). *Categories* also can create co-memberships in the *devices*, for instance, the categories of ‘baby’ and ‘mommy’ create the organizational device ‘family’ (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2015, p. 8). Sacks also introduces *standardized relational pairs* which include themselves their pair if one mentioned: for instance, doctor/patient or mother/baby pairs (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2015, p. 8).

For this thesis, membership categorization analysis is an applicable tool: it allows further investigation about the identified actors in populist rhetoric, for instance, about the categories and standardized relational pairs used which may differ from “politics as usual”.

5.3. Topoi in the Discourse of Populism

Wodak (2015) offers a diverse set of discursive properties of right-wing populist politics. As she explains, they construct fear in their discourse and propose scapegoats (2015, p. 1), they use nativist body politics and border politics (which often intertwine) and evoke national pasts as arguments (Wodak, 2015, p. 2). As the author points out, they tap “into traditional collective stereotypes and images of the enemy” (2015, p. 4).

Right-wing populist politics build their discourse in order to legitimize their politics of exclusion, by the process of “‘explaining’ and ‘justifying’” (Berger and Luckmann in Wodak, 2015, p. 6) – this explanation resonates well with *epistemic governance*, explaining how the ontology of the environment is built and how it proposed changes are supported by the different authorities invoked.

In discussing the “(re)inventing of nationalism”, Wodak (2015, p. 71) outlines that identities are recreated from time to time, their construction being relied both on inclusion and exclusion. The author also explains that right-wing populism’s identity building attempts rely on the essentialized understanding of nations (Wodak, 2015, p. 71) – while constructivist approaches like Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ concept suggests that nations are imagined because its members do not know each other personally, “yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (2006, p. 6). Nations are *limited* as imaged communities because they have their own boundaries, not encompassing the whole of humanity (a similar approach to Wodak’s earlier mentioned inclusion and exclusion), *sovereign* as products of the Enlightenment and the French revolution (upholding the importance a sovereign state), *communities* understood as a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (2015, p. 7).

5.4. Collection of Data

As a case study I analyse 16 speeches from Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary, in power since 2010.

The collected speeches were translated from Hungarian to English and published in three different official websites: one which represents the Hungarian government (kormany.hu), one which is the Prime Minister's webpage (miniszterelnok.hu) and one published by the International

Communications Office (abouthungary.hu). These websites contain many different texts: beside official speeches there can be found, for instance, interviews or statements too. The analysed speeches and the links are provided in Chapter 10, *Appendix*.

I collected three speeches every year between 2015 and 2020 which were held in three different occasions every year by PM Viktor Orbán. I chose 2015 as a starting point because this could be considered as a crucial year: the so-called European migrant-crisis offered new opportunities to construct not only the image of enemies in Hungary (and other countries), but to build up populist discourse, enforce conspiracy theories or argue for nativist policies. The last year I analysed is 2020 because of the date of the writing this thesis. From the last analysed year, I collected only one speech since the other two other events were cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first type of speech I collected from year to year was the PM's State of the Nation Address held in every February. These speeches were usually the longest and focusing often on statistics, as they described the economic and other developments in the country. The second type of speech was held on every 15th of March, commemorating the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 (in Hungarian also referred to as 'war of independence'). These speeches had a strong ontological background embedded into common understandings on Hungarian past and usually focusing on the issue of national independence. While the first two types of speeches were held in Budapest, the capital of Hungary, the third was held in Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp (also called 'Tusványos'), an event which is repeated every year since 1990. The host town Tusnádfürdő is located in the geographical centre of Romania, where the majority of the citizens are of Hungarian nationality and which was the Eastern periphery of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the Treaty of Trianon in 1920.

After collecting the speeches, I highlighted quotations in Atlas.ti, using some my pre-defined codes. I was focusing on different aspects: using epistemic governance's methods I collected quotes about the ontology of the environment, actors and identifications, and norms and ideals. I identified arguments which reflected populist and conspiracist thinking, references on an endangered authentic way of life and reasonings for nativist policies. In a following step I collected a representative sample of all the highlighted quotes. For that I selected some of the highlighted texts and incorporated them into Excel sheets, further diving them into categories which underline important aspects which I wanted to explain.

In the next step I analyse my findings, relying on the framework of epistemic governance, membership categorization analysis and several aspects of Ruth Wodak's analytical approaches. Focusing on the actors identified by the PM I did not only draw a "map" of their locations in populist thinking, but using membership categorisation analysis I offered an explanation on how populism rearranges the actors compared to other political discourses.

In my analysis I highlighted a binary understanding of the world which relies on the idea of war between worlds in which we can clearly distinct between friends and foes and differentiate between good and evil.

5.5. Limitations

A thesis like that inherently contains several limitations. Primarily, because the data itself is finite: political speeches by the Prime Minister held between 2015 and 2020 cannot offer too broad terrain for understanding, even though they are widely mediatized and discussed further by experts and the population, and are rich in essential reflections. They still build on earlier epistemic work done by other actors from the political parties involved, by experts, talking heads, meme-producers, celebrities and so on. The drastically changing media structure is also important here: many central media institutions disappeared since 2010, while the proportion of "pro-government" press is growing.

On another level, global right-wing populism is changing and growing, the persuasive tools spread amongst them, and this thesis concentrates only on one country, even if the author is aware of the globality of populism. This thesis, on the other hand, creates opportunities for further investigation: its limitations originate from the chosen data, but its tools and main claims can be feasible in the future.

5.6. Ethical Perspectives

If one reads the last chapter of Wuthnow's *The Left Behind. Decile and Rage in Rural America* (2018) one may be amazed how the author's political stances are hard to be figured out, even though his book describes a deeply politicized phenomenon. Similar experiences are can be expected while reading some of the literature on conspiracy theories or populism: many

researchers lack normative or arrogant statements about those who may believe or act differently from the expected.

Not all the authors walk this path: for example, the largely praised book co-written by Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (2019) states that “we know that extremist demagogues emerge from time to time in all societies, even in healthy democracies”. One may feel that notions like ‘extremist’ or ‘demagogue’ are deeply problematic in this context, not to mention ‘healthy democracy’, a judgement which may be too normative for some readers and push a text further from scientific understanding of a phenomenon, and closer to political statements.

The history of social sciences has showed that normative approaches are often problematic, because they appoint not only ‘good’ and ‘bad’ morals, behaviours, social structures, but by doing so, they are labelling the actors too – and not only the ones exercising power, but the masses who trust them. Foucault (2000) states in an interview that “I have never tried to analyse anything whatsoever from the point of view of politics, but always to ask politics what it had to say about the problems with which it was confronted. I question it about the positions it takes and the reasons it gives for this; I don’t ask it to determine the theory of what I do.”

I hold similar values: this thesis is interested in politics, it’s positions and reasons given, but my own political opinions are not relevant in this thesis: the task is understanding instead of polemizing with political actors in a scientific text. Besides the obvious scientific expectations, another aspect is important: if part of a society trusts a political policy, programme, person or party, movement etc., they deserve analytical attention. This cannot be achieved by subjective, moral judgements, but in experiencing their experiences: in other words, trying to be one of them, as much as possible.

6. An Outline on Hungary

In order to understand the local conditions more, a short introduction to Hungary's political background is needed. In this chapter I describe key elements which will guide the reader and highlight those approaches which offer different, yet important perceptions on how right-wing populism of Viktor Orbán has emerged since 2010. I highlight the most important milestones of his political party's history, some of the important institutional changes since their second term, and the changing media landscape in Hungary.

These changes show how his governance is on one hand relying on institutional changes, actual, physical constraints, where professionals can lose their livelihood, but on the other hand governance is epistemic, tools of persuasion are involved in order to gain support for the government, populist and conspiratorial rhetoric is built up in order to offer explanation to social change. In other words: although the following chapters describe physical changes in the Hungarian institutional and media landscape, these descriptions serve only as background for my analysis focusing on epistemic work of the Prime Minister.

6.1. The History of Fidesz

According to their self-understanding, the political party Fidesz (Alliance of Young Democrats) was established by “young Hungarian democrats during the last months of communism in Hungary”, “united by their love of freedom and their commitment to democratic transformation” (Fidesz, 2020). Bibó István Special College, the institution gathering law students had a crucial role in the history of the political party: it served as a ground for forging personal relationships and a network which shaped the political path of Hungary too (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 3). The role of George Soros was also significant: the Hungarian-born Jewish American philanthrope has started his institutional expansion in Hungary in 1986, financing several needs of these young activists: the foundation of the journal *Századvég* (“*End of the Century*”), trips abroad, language courses and so on (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 3) which has led to the foundation of the youth organisation in 1998 and the transition into a political party in 1989 (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 3). Fidesz soon had its chance to take part in meetings between the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (ruling since 1956) and its opposition. While the first congress did not elect Viktor Orbán in the party's leadership

(Lendvai, 2018, ch. 3), later on he returned from his studies in Oxford, so he can take part in the upcoming free elections (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 3), and later becoming the leader of Fidesz. The young politicians took part in the new parliament as an opposition party, suggesting liberal policies and criticizing not only nationalism or anti-Semitism, but also the Catholic Church (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 3). The ideological stances of Fidesz have led to Mr. Orbán becoming the vice-president of the Liberal International (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 3). After a dispute and disruption in the party, the 1994 elections brought disappointment to Fidesz, (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 3), but four years later – now with the support of right-wing parties, they won the elections (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 5). In the next four years the Orbán government had two significant changes in the political institutional background: the Prime Minister's office has become a more powerful actor in decision-making, at the same time the boundaries of the parliament had been cut back (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 5). Meanwhile the ideological shift became more visible: liberalism has been left behind, while the PM's personal path to religiousness became a public affair, and connections with clerical actors had been strengthened (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 5). After 2002, Fidesz had been in opposition for eight years with a crucial political event in the middle of that period. In September 2006 the re-elected Prime Minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány's speech to his fellow party members had been leaked in public media, stating, for instance, that "obviously we have been lying our heads off for the last one-and-a-half, two year" (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 7). After that Fidesz was able to build a narrative about the government being 'illegitimate', while protests became daily in front of the parliament (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 7). In 23 October, on the 50th anniversary of the 1956 revolution – a central historical moment in Hungarian history – demonstrations became violent, public TV center was attacked, and 326 civilians, 399 police officers had been injured, a total 37 million dollars damage had been registered (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 7). In the following years Fidesz had strengthened its media empire, leading a 'cold civil war' against the government, while the PM Ferenc Gyurcsány still remained in his position until May 2009 (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 7). After the global economic crisis and another year of 'crisis management', the 2010 elections brought the second government of Viktor Orbán and a significant shift to right/far-right politics: Fidesz has won 57,2 percent of the popular vote, while the then-neo-Nazi Jobbik party won 17 percent (Lendvai, 2018, ch. 8).

6.2. Changing Institutional Background

During the writing of this thesis – and supposedly at least until the upcoming elections in 2022 – the Orbán government still stands since 2010. During these years significant institutional changes had been orchestrated, and even if this thesis focuses on discourse analysis, an additional realist background may be useful for the reader. Therefore, this section aims to summarize the most important changes in Hungary.

Because of the election law produced a two-thirds majority for Fidesz in the parliament since 2010, major changes had become possible: first, the old constitution had been tweaked a dozen times and the Constitutional Court had been “disabled”, and second, with these barriers solved, a new constitution had been voted (Bánkuti et al., 2012). The new constitution, as Bánkuti and al. (2012) understand it, “unleashed” majoritarianism: electing judges to the Court now needed only two-thirds majority, while the Court’s jurisdiction had been cut back, for instance, in fiscal matters, and judiciaries’ independence also weakened. The Election Commission had been similarly brought under the rule of the party: a dominant majority of members became delegated from Fidesz, while the Media Authority was transformed into a Media Council with an elected leader being a former Fidesz MP, and “the power to interpret vague standards” (Bánkuti et al., 2012).

The regulation of civil society has undergone significant changes too: Nonprofit Act in 2011 has made it more difficult to operate, for instance, by increasing their reporting obligation, or by constraining tax benefits, while their possibilities to take part in decision-making has been reduced and their financial background has also deteriorated (Gessler, 2015). A law on foreign-funded NGO-s demanding that many organisations label themselves as “organisations supported from abroad” was decided by the European Commission to “indirectly discriminate and disproportionately restrict donations from abroad to civil society organisations” (European Commission, 2017).

Scientific and higher education institutional independence also suffered losses: in 2019 institutes of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences were voted to be replaced to a new state research network lead by the Minister of Innovation (Schmidt, 2019), while Corvinus University Budapest, Theatre and Film University and other universities were reorganised – as the Network of Academics in Higher Education stated, this shift means “exempting the state, formally a politically

accountable government minister, from direct responsibility for state universities by transferring their government to foundations newly created by the state and headed by boards of government-appointed trustee” (OHA, 2021). Central European University founded by George Soros was a main target since 2017: with the modification of the Higher Education Law which has ruled out that the US-accredited programs will be available in Hungary, CEU has moved to Vienna, Austria in 2019 (CEU, n.d.).

These changes show how the government got involved in many territories which are demanded to remain autonomous. A territory more relevant for this thesis also experienced major changes: institutions shaping historical and memory policies. Since 2010 several new institutions have been set up: VERITAS Research Institute and Archives, founded in 2013, is interested in the period from 1867 to 1994 (Veritas Intézet, n.d.), while Research Institute and Archives for the History of Regime Change, founded in the same year focuses on the transition in 1989-1990 (Retörki, n.d.). In the same year Committee of National Remembrance was set up with a goal to “preserve memory of the communist dictatorship” through the work of researchers specialised in history and law (NEB, 2015). The Hungarian Research Institute, founded in 2019 focuses on many historical periods since the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin, with other goals, such as policy advice for the government regarding “language impairment”, organising traditionalist events and so on (Magyarságkutató Intézet, n.d.). This practice has a precedence: in 2002 the first Orbán-government has launched the House of Terror in Hungary, which, as Gyáni (2021) argues, was created to “represent the officially approved image of history of the Fidesz”.

6.3. Rearranged Media Landscape

While the last decade’s changes could be discussed further and, in more depth, it is more important to look into the media landscape and how it transformed – in other words, how the professional field became re-arranged in an unprecedented manner.

In 2010 several editorials existed or were independent from the party, which now are dissolved or became part of the media conglomerate hold by actors close to the government. As mentioned in the section above, Fidesz constructed its media empire during its years in opposition at the beginning of the millennium, which consisted of several radio and TV stations, news magazines. After 2010, in the first year of governing new private and public media services became

strongly tied to the government, including radio stations, the whole public media television broadcast and several news portals, magazines (ATLO, 2020). To just highlight a few steps, in 2013 *TV2*, one of the largest private TV channels were purchased by an actor close to the government (two years later sold to another close partner), in 2016 19 regional newspapers were merged under Mediaworks Hungary Ltd., in 2018 Central European Press and Media Foundation not only purchased new outlets but some were even offered them as “gifts” (ATLO, 2020). In the meantime only a few losses has been registered: in 2015 a long-time ally and claimed oligarch of Viktor Orbán, Lajos Simicska had a surprising attack against him, which resulted in his media outlets turning from pro-government to their opposite, until 2016 – in this year they became the part of the governments media empire, and some of them closed down their operations (ATLO, 2020). Central European Press and Media Foundation owned 476 media outlets in 2018 (Bátorfy, 2018), while the balance between pro-government and not pro-government outlets has been changed drastically: for instance, in 2020 93 percent of radio stations is pro-government and 100 percent of regional newspapers, 52 percent of television night shows, while 35 percent of news sites (ATLO, 2020). State advertising has been directed to pro-government media companies mostly: in 2018 80 percent of these, while few of the not pro-government outlets receive high share of state advertising revenues (ATLO, 2020).

Several significant changes were registered in the past 10 years: for instance, the most-read news portal, *Origo* was sold to New Wave Media in 2015, ever since being “one of the prime minister’s most dutiful media boosters” (Kinglesey and Novak, 2018). A year later the leading printed daily newspaper, *Népszabadság* – founded in 1956 – was bought and suspended by the earlier mentioned Mediaworks Hungary Ltd., and according to *Direkt 36*’s investigation “has become a victim of power games of well-connected businessmen and the apparently politically orchestrated redrawing of Hungary’s media landscape” (Fabók et al., 2016). In 2020 another leading news portal has been sold to actors close to Fidesz which resulted in Index’s more than 70 journalists resigning (BBC, 2020) and later founding their own portal *Telex* (Kárpáti et al., 2020), in the beginning of 2021 a leading radio station, *Klubrádió* has lost its right for its broadcasting license (RSF, 2021).

According to Press Freedom Index, Hungary’s ranking has slipped from being the 56th country of 180 analysed to being the 89th (RSF, n.d.).

7. Analysis

World society theory assumes a global culture which lacks any central government, and in which international organisations are the vehicles of values, patterns, policies spreading to nation-states. In this sociological neoinstitutionalist paradigm social change is explained as a result of constant dialogue which circulates around different actors in a more or less horizontal world – in a global framework which operates primarily through the flow of ideas, persuasive epistemic work.

With the methodological toolkit of *epistemic governance*, section 7.1.1. describes the “populist story” relying on different ontologies, presuming a vertical and antagonistic world in which social change is not only suspicious but also unwanted and dangerous. As section 7.1.2 shows, populism explains the actors of the *political field* differently from how liberal democracies understand it and rearranges them – this process is interpreted through *membership categorisation analysis*. Section 7.1.3. focuses on the qualities attached to the actors of the field: here *capital* in a Bourdieuean sense becomes relevant considering that established and attached *norms and ideals* serve as arguments for or against different actors. Section 7.2. follows the same analytical path focusing now on the conspiratorial rhetoric found in the data, while section 7.3. gives attention to the described authenticity of a society which needs to be defended from social change.

7.1. Utilizing Populism

7.1.1. There is a War Going On: The Populist Story

We can find significant parts dedicated for describing the ontology of the environment in all of the collected speeches. These often rely on historical events highlighted in Hungarian history – as specified before, one of the speeches analysed yearly is held on a national Memorial Day: on 15 March because of the 1848 Revolution, while there is another one – which I did not chose for my thesis – on 23 October because of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Both of these events serve as anchors when current social changes need to be described: the speaker can rely on them as proofs for historical continuity, the impression of “something similar is happening as to our

ancestors”³. After carefully categorizing the collected quotations in the speeches, I differentiated between those which describe the European situation and those which refer to Hungary.

7.2.1.1. Hungary

“For ten years we have been debating how to evaluate the economic and social model that we have built in Hungary: it’s been called illiberal, post-liberal, Christian Democrat, a “democratorship”, an authoritarian and hybrid system, and goodness only knows what else.” (Speech Nr. 16.)

How can the political system be described in Hungary today? In many occasions, the speeches react on the criticisms: in the quote above, Orbán highlights a couple of these, including one which he also claims: “illiberal”. As he understands, those who discuss Hungary’s political changes, refuse to accept the Christian roots of Hungarian politics, which consists of three main laws: 1. Distinction between good and bad 2. Equality and 3. “to do unto others as we would have them do unto us”. Hungary follows these laws but its social changes and achievements are in danger now: the financial stability, the ‘nationally-oriented’ foreign policy, the public order which was restored and the national culture.

This message appears every year: Hungary has changed since the elections in 2010 when Fidesz-KNDP has formed the government, but every result is endangered. This understanding has a great resemblance to the above mentioned two national revolutions: the one in 1848 and the one in 1956. Both of these historical events are commonly described as results of the nation’s desire for independence and as a backlash against the dangers from outside the nation: in 1848 against the Habsburg dynasty and in 1956 against the Soviet Union’s influence. These understandings are populist in their nature: they assume a nation with a common will acting against a homogenic and corrupt elite, an inherent antagonism between these sides, resulting in revolutions.

Today’s political events are described as similar: the European Union as a foreign actor – with the help of local political powers – worked in order to reduce national sovereignty, which has resulted in a so-called “polling booth revolution” in 2010 – this is the year when the second Orbán-government was elected. As the Hungarian National Assembly’s official document on “The

³ Quotation is for illustration, not extracted from the speeches.

Programme of National Cooperation” states (HNA, 2020), “the struggle for Hungarian national self-determination began in 1956 with a glorious revolution that ended in bloody suppression. (...) In spring of 2010 the Hungarian nation once again gathered its vigour, and realised a successful revolution in the polling booths.”

As seen above, the government argues that the nature of politics have radically changed since 2010: even though the means of the ‘revolution’ were elections, the government-change was not a mere rearrangement of the political party powers in the parliament but a new dawn in the history of the country.

“We may have lost many important battles, but we Hungarians do not think in terms of a single battle – or a single campaign. Here in the Carpathian Basin, in a zone where cultures, empires and civilisations clash, we can boast the greatest possible victory: in the end we always won the war – the war fought for survival of the homeland and survival of the nation.” (Speech Nr. 7.)

The rhetoric of war saturates the speeches, the words in the quote above are often used: battle, war, rebellion, revolution, survival. Even though – as the next chapter demonstrates – Hungary has allies too, they also serve as tools in a war between different sides, interests or moral standpoints. The sense of danger is crucial, and lays the foundation for the war: if we are in danger, we need to pick up the gauntlet, search for allies in the battle and work together, put aside misunderstandings with them and so on.

Frontlines are to be found everywhere: “important battles” were lost but a whole war is going on between Hungary and its enemies: “we must stop Brussels: we must protect our borders; we must prevent the resettlement of migrants; we must make the networks that receive their funding from abroad transparent; we must keep the right to regulate taxes, wages and household utility charges here at home”. This war is fought by the new rebels against the old establishment, and the first rebels were the Hungarians in Europe, announcing “our own Hungarian political and economic system, which we have constructed in seven years of hard work”.

In this understanding the revolution of 2010 gave political legitimacy for the government to collide with its ‘enemies’ instead of negotiations. If the political field is understood as a battle, then the means can be changed compared to previous governments, and the goals can be re-interpreted too.

7.1.1.2. Europe

“If now we look at our Europe, in terms of the spirit of religion we see that it has rejected its Christian foundations. In terms of the spirit of creative arts we see that there is censorship, and political correctness is forced upon us. In terms of the spirit of research, we can say that the US has overtaken our Europe, and soon China will also have done so.” (Speech Nr. 12.)

What is happening to the old establishment, the Other? Europe as a cultural entity is in danger too, its Christian roots are abandoned and its ideology is flawed, its central role is endangered by other global actors. The idea of the West being in front of crucial social changes appears somewhat similarly to Oswald Spengler’s ideas in his century-old book (Spengler, 1926), in which *Untergang* (decline) and *Vollendung* (fulfilment) are the two sides of the same coin. According to Orbán Europe is declining for now, for at least two main reasons rooting in the rejection of Christianity.

The first one is immigration and its results: “today, however, increasing numbers of people see multiculturalism not as a solution to problems, but as the cause of them”, partially because of the rise of terrorism, crime (mostly against women) and the failure of integration. But there is a spark of hope: even (some) political leaders talk now “about their homelands’ survival, the horrors of globalism, the wave of fundamentalist migrants assaulting their national identities, and an endless digestive tract of financial capital that has swollen to global proportions”, the dangers of European cities having Muslim majorities in the future.

Leaders did not realize or communicate this “occupation” because of the other main reason: ideology. According to the PM, argumentative democracy is replaced with “democracy based on correctness”. Here Orbán mentions the concept of ‘open society’ – coined by Karl Popper (1966) and propagated by George Soros’ Open Society Foundations –, describing it as delegating power to those who are part of a “global network, media gurus, unelected international organisations and their local offices”. In Europe these people rule now and because of them “it is forbidden to speak the truth”, to speak about the existing problems of immigration or the plan to destroy national identities.

The above mentioned ‘spark of hope’, the potential in Spengler’s *Vollendung* (fulfilment) is in the hands of the first rebels of the continent, the Hungarians and their potential allies, who

will join them in the war between forces. In the following chapters I will outline the actors of this war and the norms and ideals attached to them.

7.1.2. Friends and Foes: Actors in Populism

Populist discourse always relies on a binary, antagonistic world view, which supposes a homogenic group often cited as ‘the people’ or ‘the nation’ and another homogenic group, ‘the elite’. In the speeches analysed this kind of distinction has appeared strongly. The Hungarian PM has concentrated often on pointing out the different actors and their relationship, even though this has been quite a complex issue sometimes. In order to understand the discourse, I collected the quotes referring to actors in two main groups: ‘the elite’ and ‘the people/nation’. Under these main groups I marked out further categories:

	The elite	The people/nation
Local	The opposition	The Hungarian nation
		The Government
European	Brussels	The peoples of Europe/Nations
		Visegrád Four + Central/Eastern Europe
Global	A network of the elite	Nations

Table 1.: Illustration of the different actors identified in populist rhetoric.

In order to understand this typology built, the broader picture needs to be clarified. According to my findings the distinction between a certain elite and the people on an opposite side is always clearly outlined, although there is a missing actor in this populist discourse, and this is visible in the table above too: those ‘people’, ‘citizens’, ‘voters’ etc. who support the opposing side of the political spectrum. I will outline my findings on this later based on membership categorization analysis.

The first category which I identified contains local actors on both sides: on the side of the ‘elite’ there is the local political opposition, and from time to time (but strongly connected to

European or global actors) several others, such as human rights activists or NGOs. On the side of the ‘people’ the Hungarians as a homogenic nation and their government are identified, namely the Fidesz-KDNP coalition (Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance and Christian Democratic People's Party). In the second category we find on one side ‘Brussels’ as one signifier for the European leftist/liberal ‘elite’, while on the other side the ‘peoples’ of the continent appear together with several other actors, such as Visegrád Four, an alliance of Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia, or sometimes ‘Central Europe’. On a global scale – this is the third category – a whole network of the ‘elite’ is named, opposing the ‘nations’.

7.1.2.1. Local Level

“In 2004 the Hungarian left incited animosity against Hungarians in neighbouring countries, while today they are ready to welcome illegal immigrants, whom they would greet with open arms. Quite simply these people, these politicians, do not like the Hungarian people – and they do not like them because they are Hungarians” (Speech Nr. 3.)

In the speeches analysed the local political opposition is mostly neglected. I’ve found only a couple of references to the ‘socialists’ or ‘liberals’, ‘the Hungarian left’, but with a clear message: the opposition is an enemy of the nation and is not a legitimate actor. Another claim is that they depend on foreign support. In 2016 the PM has referred to the opposition as those who are part of “the tradition of 1919”⁴ but also those who will not be able to maintain their support without a “host animal”, “aid from abroad”. The opposition was presented as foreign-funded actors whose political standpoints are lacking their roots in Hungary, and the few references on them indicate that the PM does not want to treat them as equal partners. As the quote shows, he claims that the opposition does not like Hungarian people simply because of their nationality – which means that according to the PM the opposition may not be part of the nation and may be a traitor (allying with foreign actors).

The supporters of the opposition parties are not mentioned in the data: this suggests that there is no actual support for their politics, and the ‘nation’ or ‘people’ are almost all united against

⁴ In 1919 the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic (literal translation: Republic of Councils in Hungary) was established.

them: after all, only one thirds voted for them. In Bourdieuean sense this means that they lack political capital, and in the field of politics, even though they could have success before the revolution of 2010, now they are irrelevant actors. In other words: they do not rally take part in the war.

“We Hungarians, wherever we may live in the world, constitute a single nation, and that therefore every Hungarian has a responsibility towards every other Hungarian.” (Speech Nr. 1.)

While on the ‘elite’ side of the local category I found only the opposition – and no mention of those people who support them –, the nation as a whole was often specified. As the quote indicates, Hungarians are a homogenic group of people, “a single nation” which is based on mutual solidarity and a common fate which demands co-working. When describing them, the PM has explained that the people were called “losers”, “wage-earners” and “workers”, while he suggested a different approach, calling them “everyday hardworking people”. With this description – one time even conflating himself with them (“us simple citizens”) he was trying to build the image of the ‘average Joe’, whose main identity is the national background.

“Once more we learnt that all the hard work, all the sacrifices and all the perseverance will be in vain if we do not unite, if we lack strong legislation and government, if we fail to regain our national consciousness individually as well as collectively, if we do not find our self-esteem, stand up for ourselves, and take control of our lives.” (Speech Nr. 1.)

As mentioned earlier, the government is located on the side of the ‘people’ or ‘nation’. As suggested from time to time in the speeches, there is no need to differentiate: a unity is needed (something similar to the solidarity amongst Hungarians, or “mutual trust” as said in a speech), and this unity has to be understood as a “strong legislation and government”. Looking carefully at the quotation above, we can observe how the first-person plural personal pronoun “we” is repeated⁵: the government including the PM and the nation is understood as one, having the same will and path. This also means that the ruling coalition accepts only the ‘nation’ or ‘people’ as ally

⁵ This is, of course, the English translation’s specific. In the Hungarian language the word “we” is often part of other words, but still having the same meaning.

and legitimate actor in the country, or those who are willing to cooperate, as suggested in one of the speeches: “The state, businesses and households have all started behaving like responsible adults”.

7.1.2.2. European Level

“For fifty to sixty years Europe’s leaders – whether on the left or on the right – have always come from the same circle, the same elite, the same mentality, the same schools, the same institutions raising generations of young politicians.” (Speech Nr. 6.)

While the local level is important when describing the ‘nation’ and its allies, but not thorough in identifying the opposition, the European and global level of actors is more vividly described. As portrayed above in the quotation, the European elite is homogenic. This is a kind of conspiratorial approach: even though the facade is multipolar because these leaders can be on the left or the right of the political spectrum, the background – the similar mentality, schools and institutions – shows their ‘real face’. Orbán also describes the European elite in Brussels and some of the European capitals as those who see themselves as “citizens of the world” – more on norms and ideals attached to actors in the next section. Several other actors can be traced around them: one is the ‘international media’ using “artillery bombardments, denunciations, threats and blackmail”, also the ‘financiers’ considering themselves ‘demigods’ and represented by Brussels, and ‘fake civil society activists’ too, who want to dictate the norms in European societies.

If politics are understood as war, it seems that the European elite has a heavy artillery compared to the nations of Europe. But they have other means:

“The peoples of Europe are slowly awakening, they are regrouping, and will soon regain ground. Europe’s beams laid on the suppression of truth are creaking and cracking. The peoples of Europe may have finally understood that their future is at stake: not only are their prosperity, their comfort and their jobs at stake, but their very security and the peaceful order of their lives are in danger.” (Speech Nr. 4.)

I marked two groups of actors on the opposite side of the European elite: the ‘peoples of Europe’ and the political power truly representing them.

The first, the ‘peoples of Europe’ signifies those masses whose will and interests are not represented by the leaders, but who are now realizing this, and changing the face of the leadership of the future. They kept voting for the corrupt elite with the similar ideological background and education, but now it is time for a change – in other words, political legitimization of the European elite (the non-right-wing populists) needs to be dissolved.

As said in one speech, the citizens of Europe and their leaders “must no longer live in separate worlds”, and as in the case of the Hungarian nation, they need to co-work, or they will not be “Christian, free and independent nations”. The ‘real Europe’ is not how the leaders describe it or how they think about it: Europe is “not in Brussels” but it is ‘us’ (remember how earlier the PM conflated himself with the Hungarian nation too).

“I’m convinced that the most important development of the past year has been the Visegrád Four cooperation becoming closer than ever before. We can say that Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava and Budapest are speaking with one voice. This is a great achievement, as these are countries which are very different in their characters. Here we have the enthusiastic Poles, the ever-cautious Czechs, the sober Slovaks and the romantic Hungarians; and yet we are able to speak the same language. We can be truly proud of this.” (Speech Nr. 9.)

If the quotation above would be the only reference on a new frontier in European politics, I could not detect populist rhetoric. The claim that Visegrád Four builds a cooperation would not inherently mean that they work against another actor on the field – V4 is a coalition inside the European Union representing Central European countries. But in the data one can find references on how V4 is understood as a counterpower, and other actors are identified too, who are supposed to work together with the Hungarian government and the ‘peoples of Europe’. Besides V4, the ‘Orthodox world’ (namely Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria), Croatia and Austria are mentioned as countries who ‘come to their senses’, while Bavaria and Italy are joining too. The PM claims that “re-established national foundations” can be important in Central Europe: instead of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia nation states exist today which means that there is a common ground for cooperation based on the national interests of these countries. Orbán envisions a region

– Central Europe – which is politically and economically strong, and emphasizes that this region is different from Western Europe in many ways. This means that the notion of ‘European elite’ sometimes shrinks in the speeches: it does not indicate almost all of the EU governments, but mostly Western Europe.

Poland has a specific place in this order: it is often mentioned as a country which is not only culturally similar to Hungary but also historically a long-standing ally (because of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848) and has an intertwined fate: “Poland is the largest and leading country in Central Europe. When Poland is attacked from Brussels, the attack is against the whole of Central Europe – and against us Hungarians”.

These actors as allies are not accidental, of course: for instance, in Poland the ruling party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) is indeed the ally of Fidesz-KNDP, and Orbán holds good relations with Bavaria’s Christian Social Union or with the ex-Deputy Prime Minister of Italy, Matteo Salvini and ex-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. What interests us here is how the possibly real-political interests are translated in an epistemic work, relying on historical-cultural arguments.

7.1.2.3. Global Level

“The essence of the matter is that in this struggle – the struggle between political representatives of the global elites and political leaders and countries with patriotic feelings – Hungary is on the right side: on the side of patriots.” (Speech Nr. 9.)

While I drew the distinction of the different levels of actors (local, European and global), the speeches indicate that these different levels are in fact constituting a network. There were references about this issue mentioned before: local opposition needing a ‘host animal’ or Brussels collaborating with ‘financiers’. Still there are fragments of the speeches which focus directly on a global war. As the quotation above indicates, this struggle is between ‘global elites’ and the idea of patriotism, in other words: national sovereignty.

The ‘global elites’ are “speculators, corporate conglomerates and financial empires” or sometimes mentioned as ‘international capital’ and also the ‘Brussels bureaucrats’, those people who “turn against their own people”. When describing this global alliance, called even Soros

Empire after the Hungarian-born Jewish American George Soros, Orbán claims a global conspiracy.

The United Nations is also part of the globalist elite: what ‘they’ want according to Orbán is free immigration, a policy which would harm the peoples of Europe: “it’s like saying that a flu epidemic is a good thing, because it makes a positive contribution to people’s health and well-being”.

This scale of the political field differs from the earlier ones. On the local scale I have seen that the opposition is not taken in consideration, while on the European level an obscure and often-changing picture of the ‘European elite’ is opposed to nation-states which sometimes are described as allies of the coalition of the Hungarian people and government. The global scale is even more vague: besides George Soros, concrete actors are rarely named: here the *networking* becomes crucial, which acts globally against nations.

“There has been an uprising by those who are not usually asked, whose voices are not usually heard: those who are not at home in the world of the media; who have been pushed aside by the wheels of the global economy; the seemingly weak and vulnerable; those who have been forced into economic and cultural straightjackets; whose mouths have been gagged in the name of political correctness; who were promised a share of the profits of the global economy and global governance.” (Speech Nr. 8.)

These nations demand national sovereignty. As the quotation shows: the people all around the world are those pushed on the periphery, the unheard, those who had to suffer and lose because of globalisation. Orbán mixes cultural and economic globalisation and criticizes them at the same time. This is an important aspect: the people who lost are not only economically ‘pushed aside’ but also on the level of morals or world views, ways of life. As described elsewhere, it is indeed the war between ‘national’ and ‘globalist’ forces, between ‘citizens of the world’ and those who “believe in nation states, the defence of borders, the family and the value of work”. The latter are represented by ‘national and democratic forces’ while the globalists are ‘unaccountable bureaucrats’ and ‘supranational and anti-democratic’, because they do not take in consideration the will of the people and their demand on national sovereignty.

In this way, global level is similar to the local and European levels: it is the antagonism between the idea of ‘open society’ and progressive social change and between the idea of closed societies which can cooperate in times against enemies ‘outside’ (immigrants, Muslims, foreign-funded NGOs and activists, international capital etc.). Global level also connects the other two: European opposition to right-wing populism and local opposition is also part of the network which works against the will of the people: this way their political capital does not stem from the people but from their embeddedness to the network, the financial background granted for them, the possibilities in media appearance and so on.

7.1.2.4. *Rearranging the Actors*

In ideal-typical parliamentary democracies competing political parties acknowledge each other as equal actors in the professional field, and are equal also according to law: they can all run for office if the legal requirements are fulfilled. This also means that the electoral bases are considered equal and existing: everyone has the right as a citizen (with few legal exclusions) to participate in elections or run for office.

What membership categorization can show us about this approach is that all the *categories* – sometimes named after their ideology, party name or something else, e.g. ‘socialists’, ‘center-right’, ‘greens’, ‘feminists’ – form a *device* we can call ‘political party’. This *device* grants the equality mentioned as inherent of the ideal-typical democracies: if the ‘socialists’, ‘greens’, ‘feminists’ are all ‘political parties’ then they have the same moral and legal rights in the political field.

Moving one step further in the toolkits offered by MCA, *standardized relational pairs* can be identified by pairing ‘political parties’ with their ‘supporters’ or ‘voter base’, a part of society which tends to back them (and which is, of course, ever changing). This understanding grants another layer of legitimacy: political capital of ‘political parties’ lies in the society’s different individuals or groups who are willing to support them from time to time. As the ‘political parties’, the ‘supporters’ also are equal and legitimate.

This seems to work quite differently in populist politics. If we take in consideration the analysis above, we could state that *categories* are understood differently: there are no equal ‘political parties’ anymore, but the populist one and the ‘corrupt elite’. For instance, ‘socialists’ or

‘feminists’ are not understood as part of the *device* ‘political parties’ as they are not legitimate political actors. They are part of another *device*, in this research the ‘corrupt elite’ in which other categories are present, such as NGOs, Brussels, speculators, George Soros and so on.

Moreover, the populist’s *standardized relational pair* is not a part of society (its ‘supporters’) but ‘the people’: all of the nation or – as we saw in the speeches – sometimes all the ‘peoples of Europe’. This is crucial: it is a step for delegitimizing the political opponents: if they are not equal actors anymore but part of a different *device*, the political field is totally restructured. This way the only morally accepted actor of the political field is the populist – because it represents not only the whole device of the only legitimate ‘political parties’ but the whole of society too (the ‘supporters’).

7.1.3. Good and Evil: Norms and Ideals of Populist Discourse

Although the qualities of the actors were tangentially revealed in the earlier chapters, there are many important findings which demand further analysis. The speeches contain many, sometimes longer segments which focus on the norms and moral codes of the appointed adversaries and allies and take a stance about what is right and wrong, good or evil.

“Freedom and the nation’s independence: these are the twin guiding stars of Hungarian life, of Hungarian history. Lineage, a sense of purpose, meaning and a touchstone – the eternal touchstone with which every generation of Hungarians is evaluated.” (Speech Nr. 1.)

Freedom and independence of the country, the nation is often mentioned and recurrently in historical contexts. On one side – the Good one – of the war there are the national sovereigntists, those who do not want to be ‘servants’ in their ‘own country’, are aware of their national identity and are aware that they can lose this if they become a “population without a stable ethnic composition”. This thought is relevant in the debates about immigration, which will be discussed below in more detail: the importance here is that it lays ground for further frontlines against ‘Brussels’. These ideas about national sovereignty – the speaker warns – can be seen as “folklore, it’s boring, it’s nostalgia, and the sentimentality of ageing gentlefolk”, but the homeland can be understood as an ‘anchor’ in our hearts.

It may sound as paradox, but when norms are mentioned, Orbán does not only emphasize war: Hungarians want peace and cooperation too in contrast to Western “arrogance and bombast” which is rooted in an assumed moral superiority. Hungarians only want to have a freedom in defending its borders, its own understanding on how families have to look like.

“National and globalist forces have never squared up to each other so openly. We, the millions with national feelings, are on one side; the elite ‘citizens of the world’ are on the other side. We who believe in nation states, the defence of borders, the family and the value of work are on one side. And opposing us are those who want open society, a world without borders or nations, new forms of family, devalued work and cheap workers – all ruled over by an army of shadowy and unaccountable bureaucrats.” (Speech Nr. 10.)

How are the actors on the other side of the war? As described above, they are the ‘global elites’ or ‘globalist forces’, the ‘citizens of the world’ without roots, demanding “open society, a world without borders or nations, new forms of family, devalued work and cheap workers”. These actors are supranational and anti-democratic, even if they are political opposition inside the country, because they serve foreign interests. Their ideas are rooted in communism because of its internationalist approach, but this will lead only to a world government and the vanishing of nations, cultures, moral codes which we have today – all those handrails which Hungarians and other nations need for defending themselves.

Inside the European political changes this idea leads to the creation of the United States of Europe which is a “crazy idea”. In this war Hungary is “on the right side: on the side of patriots” against the ‘federalist’ European elite.

“They will agree to the full and mandatory distribution of migrants in Europe, and in this sense they’re ready to consign Europe to a new European future with a mixed population.”
(Speech Nr. 9.)

The ethnic composition of sovereign nation-states and the continent is crucial. It is tempting to draw a parallel between these ideas and 20th century national socialist and fascist ideas about race, but these speeches lack suggestions about racial superiority. Even though terrorism,

homophobia, violence against women, lack of integration and “synagogue-burning anti-Semitism” are strongly connected to non-European immigrants in Orbán’s messages, he emphasizes that immigrants are in fact victims “of unfortunate situations in life, of the hard-living conditions in his or her own country, of bad governance there, of our flawed and inviting migration policy, and of people smugglers”. The real enemy for him is not the immigrant but the immigration promoted by the European elite and their local or global allies, the mainstream media, human rights activists etc. This distinction is important; however, it still leads to the explicit anti-immigration standpoints.

“Hungarian revolutionaries are not warriors for hare-brained ideologies, deranged utopias or demented, unsolicited plans for world happiness; in Pest you find no traces of the illusory visions of quack philosophers or the raging resentment of failed intellectuals.” (Speech Nr. 4.)

As shown before, Europe’s suggested obstacle in realizing the dangers in social change (namely immigration) is its ideological myopia which mostly consists of political correctness as “a wall of taboos and dogmas around itself” and “human rights fundamentalism” which opens the door for immigration. Orbán specifies PC as “Eurobabble” and criticism as lecturing and accusing Hungarians of being xenophobic and hostile. The PM touches the question of populism too: liberals – a negative label which he uses more often as years pass – brand their adversaries as populists, but this is only a new version of “class enemy”, a stamp used in socialist countries in the 20th century. In another speech he discusses the term differently: “sinking liberals” argue that listening to people is populism and this is “bad thing” or “harmful”.

Hungarians, on the other hand, are not entangled in ideological debates. They have a clear vision about immigration and a European Union which would weaken national sovereignty and they are willing to defend their values. While the European elite is stuck in its political correctness, and is not able to understand the dangers in immigration, Hungarians are free of this: “Hungarian people are by nature politically incorrect – in other words, they have not yet lost their common sense”. Common sense is not ideological or utopian, it does not care about useless debates because it can rely on the people’s instincts, historical values, national qualities. In Hungary ‘straight-talking’ is in fashion, “clear words and sentences”.

“According to the liberal notion of freedom, you can only be free if you discard everything that involves you in belonging somewhere: borders, the past, language, religion, culture and tradition. If you can free yourself from all this, if you can leave it all behind, then you’re a free person.” (Speech Nr. 15.)

Different labels are used for the political Other: sometimes communism is invoked as ideological root, but the term ‘liberal’ is used frequently in the latter years, and it is even connected to communists: “a liberal is nothing more than a communist with a university degree”. How can be liberals described? Most importantly, they are un-Christian, losing their own religious-moral roots even though liberal democracies could not exist outside of Christianity. This political system was crucial though: but as soon as it departed from Christianity, it is no longer viable. Today instead of defending personal liberties and properties, it questions sexual, religious and national identities, in other words: it suggests that our freedom lies in getting rid of our sense of belonging. They dictate us how to live our lives based on their “theoretical system that will bring salvation, peace and prosperity to all humanity”, a universal model.

In fact, ‘they’ hate ‘us’: the universality of the liberal ideology will not tolerate people resisting it, so it will answer with hate instead of arguments. It wants to uniformize every nation and every individual and attacks those who are stubborn.

“Everyone can see that we are a people’s party community, based on Christian-democratic foundations – the ideal, guiding star of which is a civic Hungary. I do not think that this would change in the next hundred years.” (Speech Nr. 1.)

Stubbornness is a quality of Hungarians. They did not let go their Christian roots, and their common sense is still in its place. They refuse liberalism and the multicultural society propagated by liberals. Christianity is crucial here: it is not only the cultural foundation – “perhaps the only natural foundation” – for Hungarians but also for Europe. This is what is attacked by the elite and this is what needs to be defended by the nations of the continent: so, the Hungarian government represents this will of the people. A Christian government defends “human dignity, the family and the nation” and guarantees the freedom of the nation, but it is not its duty to protect religious articles of faith and it does not care about personal beliefs or the lack of these.

It refuses liberalism, it is its opposite (‘illiberal’), yet it does not contradict some of its values: it stands for the shared ideals of Europe, such as “equality between the sexes; freedom and responsibility; fair competition and solidarity; pride and humility; justice and mercy”.

In order to visualise the outcomes of this section, and to simplify it somewhat, the table below shows the ‘qualities’ attached to the two sides of the political field according to populist rhetoric. As seen, ‘the elite’ – even though its levels, local, European and global are merged here – is seen as a clear opposite of ‘the people’ standing against them.

‘The elite’ and its qualities (on all levels)	‘The people’ (on all levels)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrogant, bombast • pro-United States of Europe, federalist • politically correct, liberal • ideologically myopic, utopian • un-Christian • Rootless, open society, no borders, internationalist, new forms of families supported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • peaceful, wants cooperation, stubborn • sovereigntist • Non-PC, illiberal • relying on instincts, values, common sense • Christian • Deeply rooted in culture and history of the nation

Table 2. Qualities of ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’, different levels (local, European, global) merged.

7.2. Mobilizing Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories often serve populist rhetoric, as discussed before: both can rely on each other, because conspiracy theories can build on a general distrust against an elite (whoever this group may represent) and can add to this distrust by claiming unveiled secrets. Populism can capitalize from conspiracy theories because they enforce its claims assertions and sometimes are able to “sacralise” a profane political competition.

In our specific case, the ground of the conspiracy theories lie in the aforementioned war-mentality: according to the analysed speeches, there is a war between actors with different moral backgrounds, interests, tools and allies. As seen, this war is in fact between good and evil, a force

which wants to destroy nations, religions, families, and a force defending these values. On one side we see a powerful minority – the elite –, while on the other, a majority – the people – who need to wake up.

But a war is not self-evidently a conspiracy: a war can be more or less transparent and “fair”, a raw collision of the opposite sides. However, the speeches contain many references about conspiracies against the people.

In order to offer a deeper insight into these conspiracy theories, we will discuss first the values attacked by the conspirators, specify the actors involved (more or less the same ones considered earlier), and depict a broader understanding on their nature.

7.2.1. The Conspirators

“Then one of the Soros network’s chief ideologues, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, recently let slip that some years ago they secretly launched a programme to breed a Soros-like human race, or, as they modestly put it – if I can pronounce the term – Homo sorosensus. This means “Soros man”. And I realised that from their point of view, from the viewpoint of the Soros types, we indigenous people who have our own countries, our own culture and our own religion – things for which we will fight tooth and nail – are individuals beyond redemption, who cannot be transformed. From their viewpoint, migrants are indeed better raw material to work with.” (Speech Nr. 11.)

Conspiracy theories are actor-heavy theories: on one hand, they build on the claim that some of the actors are not playing with open cards, or their official statements cannot be trusted. On the other hand, these explanations enrich brusque understandings with actors, transforming lifeless theories about structures and institutions into vivid folk tales, offering also a possibility to stand up for or against otherwise faceless and unapproachable bureaucracies, scripts, norms, policies, practices, decisions and so on. As much as populism, conspiracy theories can claim that average people can have a possibility to be politically involved, if they are “awake”, if they realize the real front lines and the truth behind lies. Even if being politically active means voting (cf. “polling booth revolution”) or writing comments on a social media platform, posting a meme on Twitter etc., conspiracy theories – just as populism – do promise repoliticization.

In the speeches analysed the Hungarian PM appoints several actors of conspiracies, these all having strong connections with each other. However, the main face of the globalist elite against sovereigntist forces is George Soros, the Hungarian-born Jewish billionaire, who is present as philanthropist in Hungary since the late '80s. He is claimed to be the puppet master with a broad network of “media outlets maintained by foreign concerns and domestic oligarchs, professional hired activists, troublemaking protest organisers, and a chain of NGOs”. This network is called a “transnational empire” or “Soros Empire”, “international heavy artillery”, “mafia network”. George Soros – although he conspires against the people – “has openly announced that his goal is to protect migrants”, but his articles and declarations do not contain every detail of his plans.

Soros is also important figure as financial speculator. According to Orbán, he saw it with his own eyes “George Soros attempt to plunder Hungary on three separate occasions”: in the nineties he wanted to buy state debt so he can rule the country, later he wanted to buy acquire the locally important OTP Bank, while in 2015 he conspired with “people-smuggling networks disguised as human rights organisations” for bringing immigrants, and offered financial help for the settlement of one million people per year.

Another main part of the conspiracy, as described before, is “Brussels” or the European Union as ally of George Soros, or sometimes even as subordinate of him. Orbán mentions “the European left” as a group which does not understand the importance of national identities, thus supports immigration as a process which harms national thinking by heterogenizing societies, but the main actor still seems to be a joined European elite.

One more important actor is the United Nations: this has only once in the speeches analysed, when the PM has claimed that the organisations of George Soros are working not only in Hungary or the European Union but they are also present in the UN. This is crucial because in time the scale of the conspiracy theories has grown, declaring in the last years that pro-immigration forces are globally active: “Soros has picked a fight not only with us, but also with the British, President Trump and the Israelis”.

As described in section 2.2.3., Walker (2013) lays out four types of enemies (conspirators) used by conspiracy theories. In the data analysed more types are found: first, *enemies above*: powerful actors, such as George Soros and institutions, like the European Union or the United Nations are conspiring against the Hungarian nation and Europeans. In well-known conspiracy theories the Illuminati, the Vatican or the Freemasons have this role: however, Orbán appoints

institutions and public figures as conspirators. *Enemies within* do not appear often – as mentioned earlier, the local opposition is mentioned only a few times: for instance, in section 7.2.2.1. they are mentioned to lose their political influence if they lose their “host animal”, or in other words their “aid from abroad”. Another type, the *enemy below* would be expected to appear in such political rhetoric. Walker (2013) refers to the U.S. slave riots, and I have mentioned that a Hungarian far-right party framed Roma people as “biological weapon” of Jewish people, and Viktor Orbán also was accused of an anti-Roma campaign (Brennan 2020). However, in the data analysed migrants are pictured in an ambiguous way: they are sometimes understood as victims (section 7.2.3.), even though they indeed are dangerous. Still, it is a dilemma whether they are understood by the PM as conspirators: they probably lack the agency for conspiring, although they can be understood as Roma people were understood as “biological weapons”.

7.2.2. The Plan

“It is forbidden to say that this is not accidental and not a chain of unintentional consequences, but a planned, orchestrated campaign, a mass of people directed towards us. It is forbidden to say that in Brussels they are constructing schemes to transport foreigners here as quickly as possible and to settle them here among us. It is forbidden to say that the purpose of settling these people here is to redraw the religious and cultural map of Europe and to reconfigure its ethnic foundations, thereby eliminating nation states, which are the last obstacle to the international movement. It is forbidden to say that Brussels is stealthily devouring ever more slices of our national sovereignty, and that in Brussels today many are working on a plan for a United States of Europe, for which no one has ever given authorisation.” (Speech Nr. 4.)

I identified main values which are endangered by a conspiracy of the elites. One commonly highlighted value was the nation: not so much the idea of nations but the structures based on idea, nation-states which are obstacle for a larger, supranational, centralized political entity, the United States of Europe. This idea is crucial: the existence of nations supposes an identity and loyalty which can guarantee *local security* in a *global war*: in a world filled with ecological disasters, violence, inequalities, immigration etc., nation and the homeland is a safe space. This space is now the target of a global conspiracy and the European elite is part of it. The goal is to destroy this

space and idea so a new type of thinking and a less-democratic political system can step in its place (as mentioned before: the war is between “supranational and anti-democratic” forces). Other identified wordings, such as “cultural map of Europe” or the continent’s “ethnical foundations” also refer to the idea of nation as an indispensable value.

Another aspect, less frequently mentioned, was religion: as discussed earlier, Christianity and political system based on this religion was a central issue in the speeches, yet the quotations – limited samples from the text – did not contain too many references about this topic. However, “post-Christian and post-national era” as a possible future which needs to be blocked or the claim that “they will blend cultures, religions and populations” seemed to tie values like nation and religion together.

The fear from planned immigration appeared in many occasions. This topic is closely tied to values mentioned earlier because this is the social change which endangers them. Immigration is understood slightly differently in different speeches: sometimes it is treated as an opportunity for the European elite to weaken nation-states, sometimes it is – as seen in the highlighted quotation – “a planned, orchestrated campaign” or “a seven-point action plan with which they seek to transform the whole of Europe into an immigrant continent”. The latter seems to be the dominating idea: that the European elite – together with its allies – generated immigration so the social changes – the decay of nations, religions, the capability of self-defence – can lead to the desired political changes.

With the help/instructions of George Soros, this elite has a clear purpose: “settling these people here is to redraw the religious and cultural map of Europe and to reconfigure its ethnic foundations, thereby eliminating nation states, which are the last obstacle to the international movement” so the continent will be soon “bloodless and docile”. This aspiration has a name: they want to implement the “Soros-plan”, the transformation of Europe. Even in this narrower set of data, three yearly repeated speech events between 2015 and 2020 contain rich descriptions of Soros and his aspirations, namely the creation of the so-called “Homo sorosensus” which is rootless, therefore defenceless against conspirers.

Besides immigration, economic involvement is also part of conspiracies. Brussels constantly prevents Hungarian decisions on economic changes, and a warfare is expected: “And finally we must prepare for Brussels attacking our job creation subsidies”. Conspiring with the European Union, global forces “are those who still smell money. They look at Europe and see the

business opportunities inherent in the weakening of the euro. There are those who do not want to lose the jobs and infantry wages they have received from the globalist elite”.

As described in section 2.2.3., Barkun differentiated three levels of conspiracy theories: *event conspiracies*, *systemic conspiracies* and *superconspiracies*. When it comes to the ones found in the data, it seems that in most cases the latter two types appear: sometimes only on a European level, sometimes as *superconspiracies*. The difference is not only in the scale of the conspiracy: the role of the conspirator network is also crucial here – if every other actor is classified under one main actor, than we can identify a *superconspiracy*.

7.3. Constructing Authenticity

In my approach authenticity of a way of life can be understood in two ways: 1. when this authenticity is lost and needs a resurrection and 2. when a current way of life is endangered. In both cases, authenticity serves an argument for defending or resurrecting a social state which went/goes through an unwanted and non-authentic social change.

In the data I found detailed descriptions which attempt to explain the stakes of social change and offer arguments building on authenticity. I collected relevant quotes and differentiated between claims about the Hungarian social change and the ones tackling European issues.

As discussed in section 2.3., authenticity can be defined through several aspects: according to Boyle (2006), authentic is simple, unspun, rooted, with depth. Through these observations I tried to identify how authenticity is understood by the Prime Minister, and how it is distinguished by non-authentic values.

7.3.1. The Authenticity of Hungarians

“The importance of 1848 not only lies in the fact that it happened, but also in the fact that it has been happening ever since – and not only in our annual celebrations: 1848 has become our inner touchstone, and our moral compass.” (Speech Nr. 7.)

One strong set of arguments lies in the history of the nation. When the Prime Minister refers to the revolution of 1848, he builds on a historical moment which is strongly present in

Hungarian memory: the “inner touchstone” of it means national sovereignty, a resistance against foreign powers, if needed. Hungarian ‘moral compass’ is of course, somewhat vague, as well as “ancient law” which is followed by the nation, but it is explained several occasions, through the lense of 1848: “Hungarian soil is the most fertile for the roots of freedom”, happiness is only achievable by this nation if they have freedom and independence. This argument finds its roots in the authenticity of a nation: it is frames as something specific to Hungarians, something so deeply present and ancient which then explains political actions since 2010. Hungarians follow their own inner needs, and if needed, they rebel against unwanted social change.

Time is crucial here, since authenticity needs centuries to form: “the history of the Hungarian people over one thousand one hundred years in the Carpathian Basin appears to be unfathomably intricate and complex”, according to the PM, centuries has been crystallised into the unity of the nation. It is also important because of the locality: Hungarians are part of Europe, so they have the right to defend it: in fact, the “new Europe” is non-authentic, while Hungary as a “thousand-year-old Christian state” represents the “old Europe”, in other words: the authentic, the legitimate one.

“Our duty is to pass on to our children and grandchildren a country and a spiritual and moral inheritance which will permit the emergence of those who are not afraid to fight the revolutions and freedom fights that the future holds in store for the nation.” (Speech Nr. 7.)

In order to preserve the authentic way of life, political action is needed to be taken. The country is needed to be “safeguarded”, the nation to be “retained” for them, and “guidance” is needed to be passed on to the future generations: this is a *task*, not an option: the survival of the Hungarianness. The task is deeply rooted: “it is a Hungarian model created from our traditions, our instincts and our way of thinking: a system of national cooperation. It is national because it springs from within us”.

One danger lies in immigration, another one in the slogan of “The Internationale shall be the human race”. This means that a world of open societies and supranational world government is emerging and this endangers the uniqueness of nations.

What does it mean to be unique? Hungarians’ “most valuable asset is that which sets it apart from all others”, and this “unique, autonomous, age-old and national” quality of the whole

continent is vanishing. According to Orbán's world view reflected in the speeches, nations are "historically and culturally determined", and protect their members and prepare them to act for common good. This authentically developing community is contrasted with liberalism and its rootlessness: here you can be free only "if you discard everything that involves you in belonging somewhere: borders, the past, language, religion, culture and tradition".

7.3.2. The Authenticity of Europe

"(...) what is at stake today is Europe and the European way of life, the survival or extinction of European values and nations – or, to be more precise, their transformation beyond all recognition." (Speech Nr. 3.)

While Hungarians as a nation are authentic because of their historical past, their 1100 years in the Carpathian Basin, their uniqueness, Europe has similar fate. Immigration endangers it because aliens settling in the continent do not respect the "thousand-year-old structure of Europe", instead building their own world. The European way of life is at stake: if European values and nations will not survive immigration, it will mean that the continent will be transformed "beyond all recognition".

Again, authenticity of the continent is contrasted with rootless values: Europe is Christian and this has deep meanings: "there was honour in work, man had dignity, men and women were equal, the family was the basis of the nation, the nation was the basis of Europe, and states guaranteed security", while "open-society Europe" means that borders are gone, the people can be replaced easily, family can be now "fluid form of cohabitation", while national identity becomes a negative term (Scheppelle 2019, pp. 323) . Only Christianity can grant the authenticity of Europe, and the sovereignty of nation-states, the uniqueness of these nations – while Brussels wants to "cast aside our culture, our way of life and everything which separates and distinguishes us Europeans from the other peoples of the world".

8. Discussion and Conclusions

In this chapter I summarize my findings based on the theoretical background and methodological toolkit used, and offer a broader background for them in order to embed the analysis on populist and conspiratorial rhetoric into the last decade's political happenings. Earlier I drew up the Hungarian political changes, but another section is needed to add another layer to the analysis.

In *Discussion* I elaborate on the broader perspectives based on my findings and I outline the possibilities for further research.

8.1. Main Findings

8.1.1. Authenticity at Stake

The aim of this thesis was to understand how right-wing populist rhetoric and conspiracy theories explain social change, using as case study Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's selected speeches between 2015 and 2020. I was interested in how the unfolding rhetoric constructs key assumptions about current social changes, how the actors of the political field are arranged and how qualities are attached to them. I analysed conspiratorial rhetoric too and its common ground with populism: the defence of a claimed authentic way of life.

I used world society theory's framework as a starting point for two reasons: first, because WST can point out how a "world culture of populism" can develop without any central authoritative power, and second, because some of its assumptions are also tackled by right-wing populist rhetoric – from a different perspective. I also used Bourdieu's field theory for highlighting the importance of how actors are understood and evaluated by populist rhetoric.

As a methodological toolkit, I chose epistemic governance: its interest lies in the epistemic work of political (or other) actors, more specifically in the ontology of the environment, the actors and identifications, and the norms and ideals. In order to detail the question of actors, as an additional tool, I used membership categorization analysis.

8.1.1.2. *Populist rhetoric*

First, I analysed populist rhetoric. According to my findings, the key perspective lied in the sense of war: Hungarian and in a broader understanding, European way of life is under siege on several ways, but mainly by immigration. The significant number of non-European immigrants destroys the fabric of the traditional societies while the elite does not take in consideration the will of the people.

Actors were identified on three levels: local, European and global. On a local level, the political opposition acts against the nation – which consists of the Hungarian nation and the government. In Europe the elite – “Brussels” is opposed to the will of the peoples of the continent, the traditional nations. Their will is represented by only a few actors, such as the Visegrád Four or in case, several Central or Eastern-European governments. The global level shows the opposing sides of a network of the elite, acting against nations. Here the picture becomes more complex, and such actors are involved as the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations. While world society understands them as carriers of a world culture, right-wing populism suspects that they are part of a global conspiracy.

Qualities of actors – and by that, wanted and unwanted norms and ideals – are also found in the data, in fact, rich descriptions are part of the analysed speeches. ‘The elite’ is arrogant and politically correct, ideologically myopic. They are working for an un-Christian, rootless world in which borders are dissolved, nations are gone, traditional families are part of the past. On the other side, ‘the people’ are peaceful and desiring cooperation, but they are also sovereigntist. They refuse political correctness and are illiberals. They do not rely on ideologies, hence they rely on their instincts and values – or “common sense”. They are Christian (where it applies, but these findings mostly cover Hungarian and European issues) and they need their cultural and historical roots.

With the utilization of membership categorization analysis, I showed how actors are re-negotiated in the data: in populist rhetoric other political parties are not part of the same *device*: they are, instead of being ‘political parties’, part of the ‘elite’. Also, *standardized relational pairs* are rearranged: populist actors consider themselves to be in a same pair with ‘the people’, while other actors are detached from their ‘supporters’ – their basis is mostly not even mentioned as existing.

8.1.1.2. Conspiratorial Rhetoric

Second, I analysed conspiratorial rhetoric. While right-wing populism can build its own arguments without the claim of conspiracies, it often relies on them. Both populist and conspiratorial rhetoric can function as explanation on social change and utilize arguments about the need for defending a given ‘authenticity’ in a society against foreign and dangerous influence – both claiming that this influence is not ‘natural’, rather being part of a planned ‘war’ on people.

According to my findings, the war against ‘the people’ is in fact a conspiracy, and conspirators are easily identified. The main figure is George Soros Hungarian-born American billionaire with Jewish background – he is often mentioned as an important actor by right-wing populists, and it is a central figure in Hungarian political claims. He is the face of the conspirators, but many actors are involved in all levels: on the local level the opposition and NGO-s serve him, on European level ‘Brussels’ follows his orders, on global level the United Nations and INGO-s all are part of his network.

His plan is to change the face of Europe and melt cultures into each other, achieve the utopia of open society in which everyone is rootless, therefore defenceless against manipulation. Immigration serves as a tool for this social change constrained by the conspirators. In other words: the creation of “Homo sorosensus” (from the name Soros) is the main goal.

For populist rhetoric, conspiracy theories can serve as further persuasive tools. As my findings show, the Hungarian PM leaned on these tools often, reinforcing his populist claims.

8.1.1.3. Authenticity as Argument

As it can be apparent now, the main argument is that an authentic way of life is at stake. Populism argues that people were left out from shaping their own life (based on their roots, cultural values, national habits etc.), but now there is a chance for them to take back their power. Populists claim that they are the true voice of the people, not being part of the elite. Therefore, their special relation with the masses re-shapes the question of legitimacy: regardless of the logic of liberal democracies and the result of elections, they are the only legitimate actors on the field of politics.

Conspiratorial arguments add another layer to that by claiming that the elite has in fact evil plans and that the social change affecting the authenticity is suspicious, out of sync with the people and even harmful (for instance, LGBTQ-rights ‘attack’ “traditional families”).

Here, authenticity is a self-understood value, the core of human civilizations, a treasure which needs to be defended by all means, it offers warmth, familiarity, safety. Social change is not natural and not organic. It is unfriendly, suspicious, cold, unaffable, incompatible with the ‘common sense’ of the people, entangled into utopian ideologies.

8.1.2. Contextualizing Conspiracist Rhetoric in Hungary

In order to interpret the relevance of my findings, another background description is needed. To understand the spectrum of epistemic work in the realm of right-wing populist rhetoric in Hungary, some elements are necessary to be mentioned.

First it is important to describe the local and global conspiracy theories centred around George Soros. Open Society Foundations funded by Soros could get access in the socialist Hungary in 1984, but this step was criticized by the country leader János Kádár in 1988, stating that Soros supports the enemies of the regime – the democratic opposition forming at that time, including Viktor Orbán (Hamvay, 2017). After the system change, in the early ‘90s several far-right political actors mentioned George Soros as puppet master of a conspiracy which aims to destroy “national values, traditions and ethnic specifics” and “Hungarian national consciousness” (Riadó, 1993).

For many years, it seems, Soros was not a central problem any more. However, since the middle of the 2000’s some party members of the Fidesz and the far-right party Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom (The Movement for a Better Hungary) again raised questions regarding the billionaire, and ever since 2015 the issue of immigration was tied to him (Bátorfy and Tremmel 2019). Between 2010 and 2018 the Hungarian government spent €216 million on public communication about the issues held as important (Bátorfy, 2019). In April 2017 the “Stop Brussels” campaign focused on EU policies about immigration and economic questions, involving a national consultation with questions and answer possibilities like: “In recent times, terror attack after terror attack has taken place in Europe. Despite this fact, Brussels wants to force Hungary to allow illegal immigrants into the country. What do you think Hungary should do? (a) For the sake of the safety of Hungarians these people should be placed under supervision while the authorities decide their fate. (b) Allow the illegal immigrants to move freely in Hungary.” (Spike, 2017). In the same year billboards and media ads appeared depicting a smiling George Soros with the text

“Don’t let George Soros have the last laugh”, with a reaction from the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Federations (Mazsihisz) as these opening the door for anti-Semitism (Than, 2017).

In In 2018 ‘Stop Soros’ laws were voted for in the Hungarian parliament, criminalizing individuals or organizations which take part in helping ‘illegal immigrants’ asking for asylum – this was part of reactions on the EU plan about a migrant quota (Guardian, 2018). In another reaction against proposed quotas, in early 2019 another campaign appeared: here George Soros appeared together with EU commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, with the text: “You also have the right to know what Brussels is preparing for! They want to introduce mandatory resettlement quotas. They want to weaken member states’ right to border protection. They would ease immigration with migrant visas.” (Bayer, 2019).

The scale of conspiracy theories has grown over the years. Although I did not analyse temporal changes between 2015 and 2020 based on my data, earlier research shows that conspiracy theories constructed by the Hungarian government first were mostly event-based, as the typology of Barkun has shown (see in Ch. 2.2.3.) and occasional (for instance, tying Soros to a protest or a political actor), later becoming more systemic, claiming the existence of conspirators involved in a planned, longer-term change, growing into a superconspiracies in which the plan becomes global (Kustán and Pintilescu, 2020, pp. 207-231).

It is also important that in 2019 a close colleague of the American political consultant Arthur J. Finkelstein, George Birnbaum gave an interview for the Swiss weekly *Das Magazin* regarding the Hungarian Soros-conspiracy theories. Here he stated that when cooperating with Viktor Orbán, they were searching for an enemy outside: “Finkelstein had an epiphany. What if the veil of the conspiracy were to be lifted and a shadowy figure appear, controlling everything? The puppet master. Someone who not only controlled the “big capital” but embodied it. A real person. A Hungarian. Strange, yet familiar.” (Grassegger, 2019). George Soros was perfect for many reasons: first, because he was criticized for being a financial speculator, second, because he was openly standing for liberal ideas, and third, because Soros was expanding Open Society Foundations in those countries where Finkelstein tried to gain influence (Grassegger, 2019).

The context drawn up above shows that the speeches analysed in this thesis were embedded strongly in Hungarian political discourse. The rhetoric of right-wing populism in Hungary was rooted in earlier political discourse and it was strengthened by other factors, such as billboards, media ads, laws, national consultations.

8.2. Discussion

The rise of Hungarian right-wing populism is not a unique phenomenon. As Zulianello and Larsen (2021) show, between 1979 and 2019 European populist parties have been able to gain significant election successes in the European Parliament: while in 1979 only the Progress Party in Denmark could succeed, a decade later 11 parties were part of the Parliament. Between 1994 and 1999 the aggregate support for many populist parties has grown over 10 percent, while between 2004 and 2009 double-digit election results were achieved in 15 countries of the now-enlarged-EU – with the largest percentage in Hungary, gaining 60,4% and mostly amongst right-wing populists, which focused on nativist arguments (Zulianello and Larsen, 2021). Between 2014 and 2019 populism was “consolidated”: successful populist parties now were present in 22 European Union member states in 2019, specifically right-wing populists remaining strong in Hungary, gaining support in France, Poland, Italy and Great Britain (Zulianello and Larsen, 2021).

My focus on populist rhetoric in this work has been somewhat different from many earlier researches: I focused on its epistemic work, the capability of populism to construct powerful world views which are able to compete with other political claims. My findings showed that actors have an emphasized role in populist logic, in several ways. First, because populism inherently claims that the other political opponents are illegitimate, and second, because conspiracy theories saturate these claims with further suspicion. This is why I found Bourdieu’s field theory as useful for this research: because this actor-heavy rhetoric aims to add or detract political capital in a professional field, and the norms and ideals involved in this epistemic work also seem to serve this purpose. Membership categorization analysis made it possible to investigate this process from another perspective: to trace the changes in categorization of the actors.

These tools, as far as I could review the existing literature, have not been used for such research. Also, populism and conspiracy theories, despite of being discussed as intertwining discourses, are rarely analysed as seen in my research, while their ability to offer explanations on social change, are mostly seem to be neglected. The notion of authenticity or something similar to it also appears to be missing as a link between populism and conspiracy theories.

My research opens the possibility for further ones: the comparison of different countries based on these methodological tools is needed, and world society theory could be applied for understanding the synchronization and domestication of populist rhetoric. A comparison could

also be made between populist and non- or anti-populist rhetoric aiming to build on the ‘authenticity’ of a culture. Epistemic governance is also interested in the types of authorities invoked: building on this it would be important to analyse how these are used in populist rhetoric.

Dilemmas also remain: can the political field be divided in different ‘levels’, as done according to my findings: local, European and global? Are they such strongly isolated or they should be connected more? Besides conspiracy theories, how significant are other elements, such as religion, human rights, nativism and so on?

All these questions open up new doors, and one can hope that her/his work is a starting point for these. Populism is not only relevant today: it is a mirror for liberal democracies, a political alternative, a tool for explaining the world, and it will not fade away, even if it can temporarily shrink. Since the end of the 19th century, it has been part of political life: it has spread from the United States and Russia to become one of the leading approaches for many political actors and their supporters. While many seem to be threatened by it, the role of sociology is to understand how its arguments are constructed. This text, hopefully, was able to add to our understanding.

9. References

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10. Appendix

The speeches analysed (nr. Year. Title. Link):

1. 2015. Viktor Orbán's Speech on the Anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/viktor-orban-s-speech-on-the-anniversary-of-the-hungarian-revolution-of-1848>
2. 2015. The next years will be about hardworking people. <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/the-next-years-will-be-about-hardworking-people>
3. 2015. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's presentation at the 26th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp. <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-presentation-at-the-26th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp>
4. 2016. Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on 15 March. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-15-march/>
5. 2016. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's State of the Nation Address. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address/>
6. 2016. Viktor Orbán's presentation at the 27h Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/viktor-orbans-presentation-at-the-27h-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp/>
7. 2017. Viktor Orbán's speech on the anniversary of the 1848 Revolution. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/viktor-orbans-speech-on-the-anniversary-of-the-1848-revolution/>
8. 2017. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's State of the Nation Address. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address-2/>
9. 2017. Viktor Orbán's speech at the 28th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp. <http://abouthungary.hu/speeches-and-remarks/viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-28th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp/>
10. 2018. Orbán Viktor's ceremonial speech on the 170th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktors-ceremonial-speech-on-the-170th-anniversary-of-the-hungarian-revolution-of-1848/>

11. 2018. Viktor Orbán's "State of the Nation" address. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address/>
12. 2018. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the 29th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-29th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp/>
13. 2019. Orbán Viktor's ceremonial speech on the 171st anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution and Freedom Fight of 1848/49. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktors-ceremonial-speech-on-the-171st-anniversary-of-the-hungarian-revolution-and-freedom-fight-of-1848-49/>
14. 2019. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's "State of the Nation" address. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address-3/>
15. 2019. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the 30th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-30th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp/>
16. 2020. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's "State of the Nation" address. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address-4/>