

POLITICAL TRUTH, EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF POPULISM
AND POST-TRUTH

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AND POST-TRUTH**

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ABSTRACT

POLITICAL TRUTH, EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF POPULISM AND POST-TRUTH

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This thesis explores the place of truth in our contemporary public discourse and the epistemological challenges it faces. It takes a look at the perceived distortion of factual reality in the form of increased lies and untruths through the contribution of the nearly all-encompassing concept of “post-truth”. The thesis highlights the central role played by the Internet and new communication mediums in the development of the post-truth condition and emphasizes the novelty they bring about. I use the works of Arendt, Rawls, and many epistemic deliberative democrats for a better understanding of the relationship between truth, public space, public reason, and democracy. The thesis focuses on questioning the conceptual power of post-truth, its meaning, and its relevance in solving the alleged epistemological crisis of contemporary political discourse. To this end, I take a closer look at the epistemological claims of populist leaders and ordinary citizens, their outlook toward science, truth, and politics, and try to understand why they are accused by many of aggravating the post-truth condition. The thesis shows the epistemic vices in current political discourse, investigates the possible corrective measures, and ultimately emphasizes the moral and political

dimension of the post-truth condition. Despite the difficulty of designing a clean epistemological environment, it will be possible to construct a public space based on mutual respect and understanding, tolerance, and even consensus.

Keywords: Truth, Post-truth, Populism, Political Epistemology, Public Discourse

ÖZ

SİYASAL HAKİKAT, POPÜLİZM VE POST-TRUTH'UN EPİSTEMOLOJİK MEYDAN OKUMALARI

ÖZCAN, Kerem

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Bu tez hakikatin, günümüzün kamusal söylemindeki yerini ve karşı karşıya kaldığı epistemolojik meydan okumaları araştırmaktadır. Olgusal gerçekliğin çoğalan yalanlar ve uydurmalarla tahrif edildiği algısını kapsayıcı post-truth (hakikat sonrası/gerçek ötesi) kavramı aracılığıyla ele almaktadır. Bu tez, internet ve yeni iletişim araçlarının post-truth durumunun gelişmesindeki merkezi rolüne dikkat çekerek getirdikleri yenilikleri belirtmektedir. Ayrıca hakikat, kamusal alan, kamusal akıl ve demokrasi arasındaki ilişkiyi daha iyi anlamak için Arendt, Rawls ve birçok müzakereci, epistemik demokrasinin çalışmalarını kullanmaktadır. Bu tez, hakikat sonrası kavramının kavramsal gücünün günümüz kamusal söylemindeki epistemolojik krizi çözmede ne kadar işe yarar olduğunu sorgulamaktadır. Popülist liderlerin ve sıradan vatandaşların, bilime, hakikate ve politikaya bakış açılarından yola çıkarak hakikat sonrası durumu ağırlaştırmakla suçlanmalarının nedeni ortaya çıkarılmaktadır. Bu tez güncel kamusal söylemdeki epistemik kusurları gösterdikten ve olası düzeltici tedbirleri araştırdıktan sonra en nihayetinde sözü edilen epistemolojik sorunun çözümü için politik ve ahlaki yöntemlere de başvurulması gerektiği sonucuna varıyor.

Temiz bir epistemolojik çevre tasarlamamanın zorluđuna karřın, karřılıklı saygı ve anlayıř, hořgörü ve hatta konsensüse dayanan bir kamusal alan inřa etmek mümkün olabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Hakikat, Hakikat Sonrası/Gerçek Ötesi, Popülizm, Siyasal Epistemoloji, Kamusal Söylem

To My Family

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Following the recent developments in the political landscape of the US and the UK, and the Oxford Dictionary's editorial choice as the word of the year in 2016, post-truth has become a very hot topic in public and academic circles. Despite its growing popularity and direct epistemological connotation because of its *truth* component, the concept of post-truth has not attracted the attention of philosophers (Capilla 2021, 313). In the post-truth context, Skirbekk (2019) writes:

What is truth? Pilatus asked, and he let it be with that. Philosophers, by contrast, have struggled with this question all along (and so have I). [...] I assume, the question of truth primarily refers to the realm of political communication and public reasoning, as predicaments of modern societies, and not to the philosophical discussions. (p. 7)

Thus, from the very beginning, the immense popularity of the post-truth phenomenon among scholars in the field of media and communication studies is not surprising. Partly technology-driven structural change in media transformed the communication realm, and “social media” has made it possible to access, publish and interact with people through the Internet with a minimal cost, high speed, and almost no regulation. The initial hope and optimism related to its potential to contribute to the democratization of knowledge, to reaching diverse information and opinions, and to the diversification of communication channels have been replaced by a deep pessimism caused by the overflow of fake news, dis and misinformation, and conspiracy theories of all kind. The situation has deteriorated with the arrival of strong populist leaders who have had no trouble in deliberately lying, deceiving, and also attacking traditional news media and scientific communities and who have been very effective in using social media.

Harcourt's (2021) summary reflects the fear and anxiety of some public and academic circles about the post-truth condition and the negative change it may bring to the respectability of objective truth among the populace:

Many today believe that we are at risk of another paradigmatic change in the foundations of truth and that this potential seismic shift may be accompanied by moral and political decline, by authoritarianism and barbarity, and possibly even—depending on our response to the global climate crisis—by the end of humankind. The fear today is that we have entered a post-truth age and a post-truth society—to borrow the Oxford Dictionary word of the year for 2016. Many believe that this new post-truth era is one in which alternative facts, pseudo-facts, and fake news—borrow the Collins Dictionary word of the year for 2017—will masquerade as actual evidence, and propaganda and political spin will replace public discourse. (p.148)

Philosophers' early interest was generally confined to the conceptualization of the post-truth condition and the determination of its epistemological nature (Searle, 2017; Haack, 2019). As discussed below, both *post* and *truth* terms are highly contentious and ambiguous, and the epistemological status of the post-truth condition is also debatable. Considering the quotation above, it can be stated that the main issue here is whether the post-truth condition refers to an epistemic rupture or a deadly epistemic threat or challenge to the very foundations of liberal democracy or not to an epistemological -probably a political and/or moral- trouble with some epistemic dimensions caused by some technological and institutional changes in public space and societal communication.

It appears that Western liberal democracies experience a special *conjuncture*¹; a (happy) marriage of post truth and (especially right-wing) populist movements. Newman (2022) neatly defines this partnership as follows:

Post-truth is the name of a new political and epistemological paradigm characterized by fake news, alternative facts, conspiracy theories and the deliberate propagation of misinformation. Truth is either cynically manipulated or completely bypassed by politicians and elected officials. Scientific knowledge and expertise are openly disparaged by populist demagogues. (p.13)

¹ “A conjuncture happens when several otherwise independent developments come together in ways that interact with one another, creating a unique historical moment.” Robert B. Marks (2015). *The Origins of Modern World*, Third Edition, Rowman & Littlefield, p. 13.

The concepts of factual truth, rational truth, and opinions, and the relationship between truth and politics make it necessary to read the works of Arendt in order to better understand the post-truth debate. I use these concepts in the way they are defined in the first chapter throughout the thesis. In addition, I examine how Arendt specifies the relationship between factual truths and opinion, the truthfulness in opinions, the importance of human freedom and the plurality of opinions, and the ways in which political actors try to disrupt truth in politics using various strategies.

Rawls' observations about the necessity of disagreement in public reason shed light on our deeply polarized society and suggest that truth cannot end our disagreements mainly because it is too divisive itself. Therefore, he argues that we must not use truth as a criterion to judge our political claims, but still, we must try to arrive at a consensus that is acceptable to all reasonable views. So, Rawls emphasizes the importance of toleration of other opinions as well.

The transformation in public space due to the digitalization of our communicative and informative mediums necessitates the questioning of whether the origin of the post-truth condition could be found there. Therefore, consulting the works and suggestions of deliberative democrats to adapt to the transformations in the public space and the public discourse is also essential. Habermas's idea of public sphere and public communication is useful in this context in order to better understand how public discourse works and the importance of truth in the public discourse.

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Based on the literature mentioned above, the present study tries to understand and analyze the current epistemic challenges that the Western democracies experience. There are some important epistemic challenges against the orthodox epistemological assumptions; however, the claim that post-truth signifies a radical epistemic shift in our relation with the truth is highly questionable. There is a (not dramatically) new epistemic problem, but it appears to be mainly related to the rise of social media and the subsequent explosion of knowledge. The skilled use of these new communicative mediums by nefarious actors like populist leaders has only contributed to this problem.

I argue that although there are some epistemological challenges against the objectivity of factual truths, diagnosing the problem as purely epistemological would not be adequate; the source of the problem rather appears to be moral and political. The polarization of the populace into two camps, the complete contempt towards other groups' morality and rationality, and the use of political discourse only for the obtainment of power and self-satisfaction are the causes of our disagreement about basic facts.

The thesis proceeds as follows. First, I examine Arendt's views about the relationship between (factual)/truth and politics and then the general role of truth in democratic discourse and public reasons and the status of truth after the significant changes in public space due to the rise of the Internet and social media. Then, I analyze the concept of post-truth and its novelty and relevancy, and try to understand the different manifestations and causes of it. Finally, I investigate why populists are accused of worsening the post-truth condition, their epistemic challenges against the current epistemological and political order, and the way populists communicate their understanding of truth.

CHAPTER 2

POLITICAL TRUTH

We live in the digital era, where disinformation and lies are rampant; truth and objectivity appear to be under attack; the factual reality seems shaky; and there is an increased amount of untruth especially in the political domain. Under these circumstances, to be able to understand the place of truth in politics, there are not many ideal philosophers to consult besides Hannah Arendt. She gives us many essential conceptual tools and ideas enabling us to understand the rocky relationship between truth and politics.

In this chapter, I first focus on the meaning of factual truths and their role as the epistemological ground of our public space. Then, I examine the impact of lies on the epistemic domain, followed by the exploration of opinions (*doxa*) and how they are necessary for public communication. Next, I dwell on how factual reality is challenged by political power and examine the delicate relationship between truth and human freedom.

2.1. Giving meaning to factual truths

Arendt (1968) distinguishes rational truths—mathematical, scientific, philosophical and absolute truths found in the form of axioms, discoveries, and theories—from factual truths or truths about events, which are vulnerable to attacks from power. Factual truths are the form of truth which interests politics the most because the political domain consists of acting and living together, and as opposed to the personal nature of philosophical truth, factual truths demand affirmation from the masses. Unlike rational truths, when a factual truth is lost, it can no longer be recuperated by

the human mind (Arendt, 1968). Rational truths can resurface because their origin is in the mind, which offers some kind of permanence in human history (Arendt, 1968). Facts, however, concern “ever-changing affairs of men” (Arendt, 1968, p.231). If there is no remaining written or oral record of the name of a particular king, we can never know the name of that king (Arendt, 1968). The validity of rational truth is found within itself, while the validity of factual truths is arrived in the discussion of relevant opinions in the political domain (Sari, 2021). Arendt (1968) also argues that facts are “beyond agreement, dispute” (235), and she gives the example of the German invasion of Belgium in 1914, whose truthfulness does not depend on public opinion. However, the meaning behind this historic event and many other adjacent points can be discussed because ultimately those facts do not arise from necessity but from contingency (Arendt, 1968).

As seen, there is a tension here. On one hand, factual truths gain meaning in the political domain through discussion, but on the other hand, their factuality is not open to political discussion, which is the most essential feature of the political domain. Sari (2021, p. 57) explains this tension by saying that the “status” of factual truths is political, while their ‘reception’ is antithetical to politics. If we approach the reception of factual truths epistemologically and consider it as a “condition of knowledge”, it can be compatible with the politicalness of the factual truth (Sari, 2021, p. 57). Therefore, Arendt at one side argues that facts must be “permanent and seemingly independent from the human decision”; however, because of their contingent nature, they must also be recorded and recognized by the society, and be the subject to the interpretation of human opinions (Kasper, 2018, p. 90).

Arendt (1968, p. 237) argues that we can establish objectivity by “considering different viewpoints” and she favors the freedom to discuss any opinions over limiting the scope of public debate. Arendt’s position on this issue is related to her fear of totalitarianism, which aims to produce its monopoly over truth by eradicating any forms of opposite opinions, and she wants not only to protect truth but also the plurality of opinions and human freedom (Nelson, 1978). Thus, Arendt distinguishes herself from most post World War II scholars who denounced relativism as a force that weakens the role of

objective truth and opens to question the core values of political liberalism which in turn contributes to the rise of totalitarian regimes (Zerilli, 2012). For Arendt, the main danger that leads to totalitarianism is not relativism, but rather the promotion of the idea of singular truth and ideologies that claim to follow the truth (Zerilli, 2012). For this reason, Arendt is accused by many scholars of banishing truth from the realm of politics.

However, Zerilli (2012) argues that Arendt's worries about the coerciveness of truth that can threaten the plurality of political opinions and democracy has led many scholars like Habermas to dismiss her alleged view on politics that excludes the truth from political discourse. Habermas argues that Arendt's understanding of political judgment is fatally flawed, for "it offers no way to ascertain the truth of statements or adjudicate competing validity claims" (Zerilli, 2012, p. 56). Zerilli (2012) claims that Arendt is also concerned with truth in politics; however, unlike others, she considers human freedom more important than validity of truth claims. She argues that the promotion of a singular truth would kill not only human freedom that give individuals the chance to lie but also human plurality altogether (Zerilli, 2012). Individuals would lose their incentive to discuss their opinions on the public realm, and their truth would be confined to the individual level (Zerilli, 2012).

It is important to note that when Arendt speaks of truth (which includes rational and factual truths corresponding to specific types of truth) in her writings, she adopts the "apodeictic" (capable of "proving or disproving the 'correctness' of political proposals")(Oakeshott, 1991, as cited in Elkins, 2012, p.30) conception of truth, which demands to be "known with certainty" and acts as an "absolute standard of conduct"; thus, it is antithetical with the idea of free discussion of opinions in the public domain (Elkins, 2012, p. 31). Thus, Arendt, who promotes human freedom and the plurality of opinions and their acceptance in the political domain, banishes this type of truth from the political realm (Elkins, 2012).

However, Arendt does not entirely banish truth from political discourse. The truthfulness of doxa (opinion), which does not refer to the absolute truths or the

essence of the things but rather to appearances, constitutes the main point of concern for political discourses (Elkins, 2012). Arendt notes that the word *doxa* does not only mean opinion but also “splendor and fame”; thus, individuals can display their *doxa* and consequently themselves only in the public domain in relation to others (Arendt, 1990, p.80). Asserting an opinion corresponds to showing oneself to others (Arendt, 1990). In private life, one cannot appear in public or show oneself to others and thus cannot have an opinion (Arendt, 1990).

Arendt (1990, p. 81) writes that “every man has his own *doxa*, his own opening to the world”. She also states that “the world opens up differently to every man, according to his position in it” (Arendt, 1990, p. 80). Opinions are shaped by facts, and facts constitute the limits which our reality is understood and determine the boundaries of our conversation (Elkins, 2012). For this reason, political actors share the same factual reality because of the sameness of the world. However, they interpret these facts differently because of the different positions and perspectives they have. Arendt thus argues that we should focus on “persuasive opinion” over “compelling truth” in the correct political discourse (Zerilli, 2012, p. 55).

Arendt’s main priority was to protect “the ability to make political judgments” rather than “defending objective truth” (Zerilli, 2012, p. 55). Disregarding public debate and favoring the enforcement of truth in politics would destroy the intersubjective social fabric. Thus, opinion surpasses objective truth as the paramount concept that achieves social cohesion (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007). For this reason, Arendt (1968, p.259) rejects not only epistocratic rule exemplified by Plato’s idea of the philosopher king by highlighting the importance of opinions in politics dismissed by Plato’s promotion of singular truth over opinions of many but also technocratic rule by placing coercive truth and its transmitters, the “truthtellers”, as a force outside the political domain without denying their regulating role. Although the political principle must be characterized as opinion, its content must not be purely arbitrary (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007). Political decisions need proper justifications; thus, truth becomes an important influencer (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007). Sarı (2021, p. 57) argues that factual truths must be recognized to understand the relevant

phenomena; thus, they are not debatable but they are also “informative and necessary for opinion formation”. Arendt claims that factual truths make the utterance of political judgments possible (Sarı, 2021). The knowledge of factual truths gains meaning only in human action; the common world is established through factual truths, and the desire to respond to this world creates an “understanding” when “combined with political judgment that creates meaning in a plurality of others” (Sarı, 2021, p. 60). Political action is characterized as “simultaneously most alien to true knowledge and most prone to the desire for truth” (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007, p. 1030). Although the action is not strictly dictated by absolute rules, it must still follow some criteria (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007). The act of judgment determines the criteria to be followed, or rather, the criteria emerge in the act of judgment without offering an ultimate content (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007).

According to Zerilli (2012), Arendt strongly emphasizes the process of truth claims gaining political meaning and relevance rather than their truth value. She gives the example of the climate before the Iraq War and states that although there was no evidence of any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the politicians just ignored the facts and decided to continue their war preparations (Zerilli, 2012). The press also ignored these facts because they deemed that the politicians already developed their policy and the facts that run counter to these policies have no longer political importance or meaning (Zerilli, 2012). There is a significant difference between “knowing” and “acknowledging” the truth (Zerilli, 2012, p. 73). Truth has significance if there is a climate of pluralist opinion exchange; otherwise, if the truth is revealed, it can be simply ignored by others and never acknowledged (Zerilli, 2012). Thus, the fact that there was no weapon of mass destruction in Iraq did not carry a meaning because the corresponding action did not occur (Zerilli, 2012).

2.2. Lying in politics

The opposite of rational (philosophical) truth is error and ignorance while the opposite of factual truth is deliberate deception (Arendt, 1968). Arendt (1968) makes a distinction between traditional and modern lies. She says that traditional lies are

directed toward state secrets or personal intentions which can later turn out to be true (Arendt, 1968). Modern lies are about subjects that everyone knows (Arendt, 1968). History is rewritten under the eyes of witnesses using manipulated imagery to trick human memory (Arendt, 1968). The modern lie is in essence linked to the modern belief that truth is not given by an independent reality but rather produced by the human mind (Arendt, 1968, p. 226). Such an epistemic outlook has encouraged politicians to create their own truths in this domain of action called politics (Arendt, 1968). Traditional lies are also directed at an external enemy and are not intended to deceive everybody (Arendt, 1968). They only change particular matters, not the whole underlying context (Arendt, 1968). Thus, they have been easy to decipher by observing the contradictions within the context, and those who produce the lies are aware of the truth (Arendt, 1968). Modern lies are different in that they change the whole context beneath events and even the liars themselves begin to believe their own lies, and thus, it is more tailored to internal consumption (Arendt, 1968). It provides the populace who wants to deceive themselves and escape from reality with a new alternative reality (Nelson, 1978).

Lying originates from the very contingent nature of factual truths, and human beings' capacity to lie is inseparable from the conditions of our human freedom (Zerilli, 2012). Problems with factual truths arise when they are either presented as necessary and undebatable rational truths or as relativistic truths that are entirely dependent on subjective perspective and that are undebatable like aesthetic choices (Zerilli, 2012). Either option suffocates public debate and eventually human plurality and freedom. Facts are important for politics, but we must make them compatible with human freedom (Zerilli, 2012). For Arendt, "it is not the truth that sets you free (...) rather, a love and practice of freedom saves truth" (Zerilli, 2012, p. 71). Although freedom and truth must function together in politics, paradoxically the contingency of freedom that makes lying possible and the coerciveness of truth endanger the existence of the opposite side (Zerilli, 2012). The collapse of factual truths and the imposed rule of rational truths without any discussion respectively destroy reality, judgment, and action in favor of fiction, ideology, and terror (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007). The regime that emerges in the context of this collapse, which is called totalitarianism, is

a form of government where the intersubjective world and politics no longer exist because their necessary conditions, which are human freedom and the plurality of opinions, are nowhere to be found (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007). All actions are dictated through a “law of motion” that denies every other alternative (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007, p. 1040). Arendt argues that freedom can only be exercised in action in an intersubjective world, and without freedom, terror would replace political action (Nelson, 1978). Nelson (1978, p. 273) argues that in totalitarian regimes, people “deprived of public speech and action (...) have only ideology to guide them in belief and behavior”. The ultimate aim of a totalitarian regime is to create a citizenry which is totally incapable of evaluating what is true and what is false. The modern populist movements also share this approach with totalitarian regimes; they all view truth as something manufactured by a political power.

Sarı (2021) argues that lies destroy our shared responsibility towards the political community. Lying is an action that aims to change the world, but all actions aim at that, so it is a part of human freedom (Sarı, 2021). It is strictly egotistical in its aim to maximize personal benefit against the betterment of the world. It is against plural existence of human beings and the principle of equality. It not only “lacks worldly principles” (Sarı, 2021, p. 62) but also destroys freedom of thought by cutting the communities’ access to factual truth (Sarı, 2021). The opinion formation process requires the supply of factual truths; therefore, lying is not a political action. It stands against the plurality of human existence and the requirement of impartial stance for political judgments (Sarı, 2021).

However, despite all efforts by power, facts are resilient against lies, mainly because lies cannot propose the same stability offered by facts; political bodies change with history, and eternal manipulation over factual misconstruction is highly unlikely (Arendt, 1968). In other words, truth has its own power even if it is tried to be destroyed by “persuasion or violence” (Arendt, 1968, p. 259). Arendt (1968, p. 259) names “truthtellers” (philosophers, scientists, historians, reporters, and others) as the guardians of truth. They are placed outside the political realm and must accomplish their mission without political commitment (Arendt, 1968). She characterizes them with adjectives like “impartial,” “isolated”, and “independent” (Arendt, 1968, p. 260).

Arendt (1968) views the academe, the judiciary system, and the press as the main organs outside the political power that seek the truth. Thus, ultimately, Arendt states that the truth cannot be entirely replaced by lies (Arendt, 1968). Politics requires the existence of facts as it cannot function without them. Facts are the basis of discussion and problem solving, and political action requires a stable past and a common perception of the present (Kasper, 2018). Politics ultimately serves to establish a common conception of reality with our peers. Elkins (2012) argues that placing truth-tellers outside of the political realm can cause serious drawbacks. For example, in Arendt's opinion, the press, an institution that is responsible for protecting the truth from the political realm, is only responsible for conveying and protecting the factual truths. However, Elkins (2012) argues that the press' role to protect truth is in general very limited, and placing truth outside of politics can prevent us from discussing the fundamental issues of political institutions, and the pre-conditions of the human world would not be subject to debate but rather would be accepted without questioning (Elkins, 2012).

2.3. Truthfulness of the doxa

Arendt (1968) states that Plato realized a contrast between 'rational truth' based on strict principles and 'opinions' which can change from time to time or person to person. Plato contrasted philosophers' immutable truths based on solid reasoning with the opinions of sophists which are based on eloquence and rhetorical skills. In addition, Plato perceived ignorance as a greater threat to truth in politics than the deliberate lie, which was seen as a greater threat against the factual truth which in Plato's opinion occupied a lesser role compared to rational truth in politics (Arendt, 1968). Platonism's triumph over Sophism pushed an erroneous conceptualization of politics at the forefront of Western politics (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007). Truth has become the absolute force that determines political affairs; it has imposed certain rules in the demise of different worldly perspectives and damaged interconnected relations of individuals within a shared world (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007).

As an alternative to the truth-opinion dichotomy advocated by Plato, Arendt (1990, p. 84) puts forward the Socratic idea of “making doxa truthful”. For Socrates, opinion is not mere subjectivity. It contains truth within itself and arises from the common world we have, but is also not universally valid either (Zerilli, 2012). The objective is to find the truth within the opinion and not surpass the opinion by arriving at the truth. Thus, when we arrive at the truth, we do not separate truth from opinion and the opinion continues to contain the truth (Zerilli, 2012). Socrates wanted the philosophers to be a middleman that achieves truthfulness among the citizens by showing them the commonness of the shared world through Socratic dialogue (Arendt, 1990). For Socrates, at first, one can only know his or her own truth and experience. Absolute truth is impossible to know. What is important is being truthful by showing one’s truth in doxa to others (Arendt, 1990). One cannot know the truth of others without asking them; therefore, citizens must try to understand the different opinions of other citizens (Arendt, 1990). Platonists, on the other hand, argue that without knowing the universals, we cannot know the truth of particulars; thus, particulars must be “subsumed” to the universal to have absolute standards that can determine their truth status, so opinion is something to overcome to achieve truth (Zerilli, 2012, p. 60). Socratic conception of truth is neither correspondence to object nor the platonic subsumption of particular to universal. It concerns the ‘appearance’, i.e., the way “things show up for us as they do”, or the truth as ‘aletheia’ (Zerilli, 2012, p. 61). We must note that for Ancient Greeks doxa is the manifestation of appearance in speech, so truth and opinion are related to each other, not separate (Zerilli, 2012).

After Kant declared human reason as limited, the public discourse shunned by Platonists as the medium of opinions gained importance as a source of knowledge (Arendt, 1968). Kant argued that the fallible human mind must communicate with others to improve or validate its knowledge (Arendt, 1968). “For Arendt (...) the validity of rational truths does not require an exchange of opinions, by contrast, the validity of factual truths gains meaning in being discussed” (Sarı, 2021, p. 61).

The acceptance of imperfect mind meant that human beings could no longer access absolute truth, but they could only produce opinions (Arendt, 1968). Today, the focus

has shifted from the rational truth which deals with absolute truth to opinions (Arendt, 1968). Thus, we can no longer be satisfied with the philosophical truth of the philosophers, and we rather evaluate a truth by the number of its proponents (Arendt, 1968). However, it is important to note that while the number of believers in an opinion gives it a more representative 'power', the quality of the opinion still depends on its relation to truthfulness (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007). Otherwise, it would lead to majoritarianism or mob rule, which are seen as defective forms of government compared to the pluralistic liberal democracies. For this reason, Elkins (2012, p. 32) argues that if we want to validate opinions, we must use "accuracy" rather than "representativeness".

Arendt argues that the philosophical truth of philosophers can no longer claim authority over the truth of "many" in public space. In other words, "the clash of rational truth and opinion has disappeared" (Arendt, 1968, p. 236). The main reason for this is that even if we argue that the rational truth exists in a transcendental realm, i.e., the point where it is discussed in the marketplace of ideas, it transforms into an opinion (Arendt, 1968). We can only argue about the appearances of rational truths, as we have no access to the transcendental layer (Arendt, 1968). For Arendt (1968, p.238), this transformation is not just "a shifting (...) from one kind of reasoning to another but from one way of human existence to another". Arendt (1968, p. 238) adopts Kantian conception of thinking and argues that thinking can only occur in the public domain where there is a free exchange of opinions; thus, "no opinion is self-evident". Opinion formation requires public debate and the presence of factual truths that make individual opinions "meaningful" and "freely formed" (Sarı, 2012, p. 59). Arendt conceived public space not as the space where already formed opinions clash, but rather the very spatial condition that creates and propagates these opinions (Zerilli, 2012). When we discuss facts in public space, they acquire political significance without public debate even if they are considered true and they are irrelevant to politics (Zerilli, 2012).

Arendt's conception of 'opinion' implies "impartiality" (Sarı, 2021, p.60). It is different from personal interests and is formed in public to motivate political action,

and personal interest can never be enough to justify a political action (Sarı, 2021). Arendt claims that although everyone sees appearances from their own view, we must not focus needlessly on personal aspects and imply wrongly that opinions are very subjective in nature (Zerilli, 2012). If people describe an event they have experienced, we must focus on the event itself, not on the fact that it is transmitted through the subjective lens of the transmitter (Zerilli, 2012).

The common world is created through the free discussion of the multitude of opinions, and it implies “common responsibility” toward this world, which means that personal interests cannot form it (Sarı, 2021, p. 60). When individuals describe appearances they perceive, their descriptions are never purely subjective and they are expressed through common sense constructed through shared culture (Zerilli, 2012).

2.4. Challenges against factual reality

Regarding modern politics, Arendt is more concerned with the status of facts in politics than rational truths (Zerilli, 2012). Arendt argues that the clash between factual truth and political power persists. Factual truths are more involved in politics, and also more vulnerable to attacks (Zerilli, 2012). Political power considers inconvenient factual truths more dangerous than hostile opinions (Arendt, 1968). When it perceives a fact as harmful to itself, political power has “the tendency to transform² fact into opinion, to blur the dividing line between them” (Arendt, 1968, p. 237). Thus, Arendt (1968) states that direct challenges to factual truth are not only by lies but also by the opinions which had previously challenged the rational truth. This transformation of facts to opinions is possible because facts are contingent by nature (Arendt, 1968). They could have happened otherwise, but if they indeed happened in the past, they gain a definitive form (Arendt, 1968). Thus, we must not manipulate their content or their status of factual truth.

² Arendt (1968) argues that unlike the case of transformation of rational truth into an opinion, the holders of factual truth cannot console themselves with the idea that the factual truth was preserved in some transcendental realm.

While it is true that any fact could be otherwise, it does not mean that facts can be altered at will (Nelson, 1978). For Arendt, “facts are just ‘there’”, and are detached from “perspective or theory” and present themselves in their brute existence (Nelson, 1978, p. 282). The coercivity of facts originates from “their independence of perspective, theory, and persuasion” (Nelson, 1978, p.282). It also means that there is no epistemological glue, no perspective or theory that holds them together (Nelson, 1978). They all stem from an accident, which means the facts are vulnerable to erasure (Nelson, 1978). Nelson (1978, p. 283) characterizes Arendt’s view on the contingency of facts as “radical contingency”; however, even Arendt herself recognizes that facticity is not total randomness or unpredictability.

Nevertheless, the factual truth is more fragile than the necessary and universal rational truth because it lacks a transcendental layer and exists only in relation to others (Arendt, 1968). Arendt (1968) argues that the factual framework must be the foundation on which the opinions flourish, not a contradictory concept. She argues that without a consensus of facts, the “freedom of opinion is a farce” (Arendt, 1968, p. 234). The factual truth is validated and gains its meaning when we posit our understanding with others who are also the residents of our common world (Sarı, 2021). The factual truth by itself is not enough to form a political judgment (Sarı, 2021). The factual truth must be accepted by others in a community in order to form a political judgment (Sarı, 2021). Therefore, Sarı (2021) argues that factual truths are not overtly coercive; they rather encourage us to participate in a political debate. According to Arendt, we can have our own opinions, but we must not have our own facts (Kasper, 2018). Facts constitute the very basis of the fabric of reality due to their unshakable character; however, once one starts to consider the past as not something already formed but as something changeable, the very stability of reality is threatened, and nothing is certain that everything is changeable and a part of fiction (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007).

According to Arendt, factual truth “pertains to knowledge, not action”, and thus, it requires fairness and detachment from action (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007, p. 1036). For this reason, Arendt situates truth outside of the political domain (Enaudeau

& Bonnigal-Katz, 2007). However, if lying dominates politics, then stating the truth becomes a political action because it aims to change the status quo (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007). “Knowing is not an action but letting others know is one” (Enaudeau & Bonnigal-Katz, 2007, p. 1036). Unlike opinions, the truth generally has a coercive nature, and it is beyond dispute (Arendt, 1968). Once acknowledged, the number of its believers does not affect its status as truth (Arendt, 1968). This “despotic” nature of truth is hated by tyrants who want to monopolize all sorts of power (Arendt, 1968, p. 241). Furthermore, political power can also lie and fabricate its own truth³, and the reliance of factual truth on witnesses makes these attempts possible (Arendt, 1968). Sometimes political power can disguise lies as opinions if it does not have the means to produce its own truth (Arendt, 1968). The former is more common in totalitarian regimes and the latter in democratic regimes because the totalitarian regimes have much more power in controlling the flow of information, compared to democratic regimes that embrace freedom of press and expression as the core tenets (Arendt, 1968).

Totalitarianism uses propaganda for external actors and ideology for internal actors because propaganda cannot provide a vision of the stable world without contradicting the common sense of the populace (Nelson, 1978). Thus, via terror, totalitarianism first destroys the intersubjective world and its shared common sense and then replaces it with ideology (Nelson, 1978). Totalitarianism wants to replace the fact-based reality with its ideology, and unlike normal politics, lying is not limited to certain big secrets but rather constitutes the basis of totalitarianism (Nelson, 1978). Populists do share this same disdain towards the fact-based reality. They reinterpret lies as their own opinions or rather as a necessary evil to control political power.

2.5. Truth and human freedom

Nelson (1978) argues that the formal-factual truth dichotomy corresponds to an already existing division in philosophical tradition, which is the ‘analytic-synthetic’

³ The situation of philosophical truths, which struggle in terms of persuasiveness against opinions, is still better than factual truths because a fact always “might have been otherwise” and this apparent randomness makes it easier to portray as just another opinion (Arendt, 1968, p. 243).

truth dichotomy. The factual truths that are all singular can only form a whole factual reality if they are woven together via the necessity of analytic truth (Nelson, 1978). In other words, the isolated factual truths, which are unpredictable on their own, supply the content, and the formal truth, which is contentless in itself, establishes the coherence between them due to its certain nature (Nelson, 1978). However, the coerciveness of logical truth is dangerous for free debate and public reasoning; it demonstrates the danger posed by ideologies (Nelson, 1978). Nelson (1978) argues that this dichotomy of formal-factual truth is a product of logical positivists and empiricists and is open to debate. Nelson (1978) then points out that Arendt, who was erroneous in thinking that factual truths are radically contingent, is also wrong in thinking that logical truths are radically certain or coherent. This fault results in Arendt's view that freedom and truth are incompatible with each other because her definition of truth is too rigid and refuses any sort of opposition (Nelson, 1978). For this reason, although Arendt herself emphasizes the importance of truth in politics, she also argues that politics and truth are incompatible with each other (Nelson, 1978). Thus, Nelson (1978) posits that detaching truth from politics is dangerous and we must revise Arendt's conception of truth to ease these contradictions.

Arendt argues for the expulsion of coercive ideologies and factual and logical truth from politics to secure human freedom; however, Nelson (1978) argues that by expelling facts, Arendt also puts a wall between the world itself and politics. Arendt claims that all necessities and preconditions of politics must be realized outside of the political realm (Nelson, 1978). Trying to implement them with political means is an error. Otherwise, these preconditions such as "social justice or truth" may destroy the genuine realm of politics (Nelson, 1978, p. 288). For Arendt, the ends cannot be achieved through politics; thus, Nelson (1978, p. 288) claims that eliminating the political realm from everyday life events makes politics devoid of any "substance and content". In Nelson's perspective, Arendt's understanding of politics excludes most issues individuals consider solving in the political arena from political affairs for being too "worldly" (Nelson, 1978, p. 288). Nelson (1978) claims that to protect freedom and action, Arendt removed all sorts of necessities from the realm of politics, which, in turn, deprived the realm of politics of any meaningful conflicts because all these

fundamental necessities were moved to the pre-political realm, outside of politics. Arendt argues that by getting rid of these sources of conflicts, “pure speech” in the political realm can be protected (Nelson, 1978, p.289). Nelson (1978), on the other hand, argues that such speech devoid of the desire of truth could achieve little to solve our problems rooted in reality. Furthermore, like Arendt claims, there is still the fact that the number of political lies in our modern times has only increased compared to the past (Nelson, 1978).

Nelson (1978) argues that Arendt’s advice of revering factual reality gives a little content to pure speech, but it is not enough to protect truth from lies. Nelson (1978) claims that truth is paramount for politics, and as a solution, he argues that we can find truths important for politics in the middle ground between the extremities of analytic (logical truth) and synthetic (factual truth). He further argues that his revision of Arendt’s view on politics would make “speech (...) the channel through which the peculiarly political concern with truth is best expressed” (Nelson, 1978, p. 293). He claims that his revision would make speech even more important to politics but at the same time prevent reduction of truth to speech alone (Nelson, 1978). Thus, Nelson (1978) asserts that the issues Arendt considered pre-political or outside of the political realm would be included in the political discussions and political discussions would be richer in content and the concept of truth would not be excluded from political debates. Nelson (1978) argues that his project is similar to what we previously discussed in Arendt’s conception of political judgment. Although the truth was still absent from judgments in order not to influence politics, the judgments which operated in the realm of ‘opinion’ were similarly situated in the “middle regions of truth” and concerned with truthfulness with regard to appearances (Nelson, 1978, p. 293). Nelson (1978, p. 294) claims that Arendt equated totalitarian effort to eliminating truth with ideology and erroneously associated “ideology with formalistic logic”. This faulty association led Arendt to exclude truth from the realm of politics because of the supposed ‘coercive’ nature of truth in formalistic logic which is presented as a kind of truth (Nelson, 1978). Some political truth claims do not need to be certain or used for certain political ideologies; such political claims can be accepted by different views,

and instead of preventing debate, they can encourage debate on their practical implications (Elkins, 2012).

Overall, Arendt was worried that the coercive nature of truth can jeopardize freedom and action in politics. She was also worried that politics can endanger truth. However, political life is possible only if empirical reality and truth are safeguarded because without them, there can be no common world that each subject share with each other (Nelson, 1978). However, politics cannot be used to establish a singular truth because its coercive nature may kill freedom in politics that arises from the contingency of facts (Nelson, 1978). The contingent character of facts enables political actors to lie, which is, according to Nelson (1978), a paradox because lying originates from human freedom and consequently is a political action that destroys the very basis of human freedom and politics. Furthermore, truth cannot protect politics from lies because it is also considered dangerous to human freedom and politics. Nelson (1978, p. 280) argues that Arendt could protect this fragility of politics only by putting "ad hoc moral constraints" such as forbidding lying in politics. However, he claims that this constraint is against the nature of political action which must be free especially from morality (Nelson, 1978).

In this section, we have seen that factual truths constitute the epistemic ground of public discussion. They give content to our opinions, but they must also be given meaning. Otherwise, they would be irrelevant in our discussions. Later, we have seen how lies threaten truth and our reality. Then, the section has shown how public discussion can occur due to doxa and its truthfulness. Next, political attacks against factual truth and how it is both powerful and fragile at the same time have been discussed. Finally, how truth and human freedom interact with each other and their potential to threaten each other have been explored.

The next chapter dwells on the relationship between truth and democracy, which is rather neglected topic in Arendt's writing at least compared to the relationship between truth and totalitarianism.

CHAPTER 3

DEMOCRACY AND TRUTH

After viewing the constant tension between truth and politics, it is also important to explore the existing relationship between truth and democracy. As Simone Chambers (2021) states, Arendt focused more on the totalitarian side of the relationship; however, it is even more important to look at the other more neglected side of the discussion, which is the relationship between truth and democracy. There are two ways to examine the relationship of truth with democracy. We can say that truth is not an important concept for democracies and it is irrelevant; thus, post-truth is also a meaningless concept, or we can say that it plays a significant role and must be preserved not just for its sake but also for better functioning of the democracies. Those who want to preserve the role of truth can either argue that post-truth is a new ill which has highlighted the need to promote truth to combat it or they can reject the idea that post-truth represents a new phenomenon; it is just another word to signify the past deficiencies that existed in our truth regime. For this reason, in the first part of this chapter, I examine the arguments against the importance or relevance of truth in democratic regimes and, in the second part, I discuss the arguments which defend the importance of truth in democracy or defend the positive consequences of good epistemic practices and a truthful attitude.

3.1. The dubious place of truth in democracy

First, I discuss the arguments against the primacy of democratic truth. One of the most famous arguments against the importance of truth in democracies was raised by Richard Rorty (1995, as cited in Lynch 2021, p. 31-32), who claimed that “we can’t aim at that which we don’t know whether we hit”, which means that truth cannot be

used as the final aim of our inquiries because we can never fully know we arrived at truth or not. The second argument which is also endorsed by Rorty and other scholars is the view that truth is an “uninteresting concept, unfit to bear much theoretical weight and certainly not that of normative political theory” (Lynch, 2021, p. 32). This view reflects the ideas behind the deflationary theory of truth, which correspond to the view that there is no independent truth attribute (Lynch, 2021). If a statement is true, it simply is and it does not bear an additional truth attribute. Rosenfeld (2019) raises a historical argument against the assertion of a prior time when the rule of truth existed and claims that if we look at history, what was considered truth and the methods to arrive at truth were vastly different from those of today. Furthermore, there were also times in history when citizens feared the disappearance of truth from public discourse and its replacement by untruths (Rosenfeld, 2019). Thus, she argues that if we look at history, it is seen that truth has always depended on socio-political power structures. Hannon (2022, p. 13) claims that past philosophical inquiries about the relationship between truth and politics have shown us “that truth rarely helps us settle our most important disagreements, as Rawls (1993) reminds us, appeals to truth are often too divisive and too deeply contestable for political purposes”. Furthermore, he argues that truth is not more important than the idea of the plurality of opinions and respect for others’ opinions (Hannon, 2022). Muirhead (2014, as cited in Hannon, 2022, p. 13) argues that “democracy is not just a tool to ‘get things right’ but rather a contest over what it means to get things right”. Accepting truth as the ultimate epistemic authority would destroy “the creative, open-ended, uncertain, and ultimately contestatory nature of democratic politics” (Muirhead, 2014, as cited in Hannon, 2022, p.13). Thus, the idea that we must respect the authority of truth is not valid for democracies, what democracies value is respect for the equality of citizens and their right to give meaning to their political claims.

Now, we can have a preliminary look at the view that truth is important for democracies. It is argued that the ideals of liberal democracies designate truth as something desirable and objective we try to arrive at through discussion in the public sphere, but it is also seen as an “elusive and provisional” concept (Arias-Maldonado, 2020, p. 74). If we adopt a singular conception of truth, it may hinder the most

cherished liberal principle of pluralism of opinions in the public sphere and teach some dogmatic values (Arias-Maldonado, 2020). If we characterize truth as “singular and final” like Arendt did (Hyvönen, 2018, as cited in Chambers, 2021, p. 152), we must push truth outside the political realm as she did. Otherwise, it could impose its coercive power and silence the discussion of opinions in the public sphere (Beiner, 2008; Sleat, 2018, as cited in Chambers, 2021). A possible way out of this problem that many scholars reiterated is the claim that liberal democracies must not recognize truth as singular but rather as manifested in many different truths (factual, scientific, moral) with different degrees of importance (Arias-Maldonado, 2020). Truth must be recognized as something fallible, situated and subject to change (Arias-Maldonado, 2020). As Arendt (1968) stated, a possible problem may occur when factual truth is transformed into mere opinions. A danger may be posed by the post-truth phenomenon if we want to include truth within the realm of politics. Thus, we once more notice a clash between truth and the liberal principle of respect for pluralism of opinions. Furthermore, if factual truths can be degraded into mere opinions, then the distinction between their truth value also ceases, and thus post-factualism may emerge as the glorification of personalized truths. In the absence of supervision by factual truths, everything is permitted. So, if we reach the conclusion that pluralistic societies with competing truth claims cannot reach a consensus on truth, then “post-truth might be seen as the outcome of pluralism”, and everyone possesses their own truth and commonalities limited to their own moral tribe (Arias-Maldonado, 2020, p. 75). The subjectification and multiplication of truth has certainly been accelerated by the rise of social media. The democratization of communicative channels has ironically increased the spread of fake news which are now subject to less scrutiny. Discredited factual truths have in turn promoted skepticism towards all forms of media, and in the absence of clear objective truths, the emergence of personal truths is inevitable (Kleeberg, 2019). Truth and consensus have become things that can only be found within one’s inner group, and other groups’ appeal to truth has become an insult (Kleeberg, 2019). Thus, post-truth in the context of democracies is very different from “the totalitarian distortion of truth: the latter represents a state monopoly, the former flourishes in the “marketplace of ideas” (Arias-Maldonado, 2020, p. 75). In this regard,

post-truth has become the logical conclusion of pluralist democracies and the complete relativization of truth (Arias-Maldonado, 2020).

3.2. Epistemic challenges against truth, and its importance for democracy

As a solution to the aforementioned problems, the advocates of deliberative democracy⁴ claim that not only the aim of arriving at truth but also the way we try to achieve it are very important⁵ (Sides, 2021). For this reason, they argue for the paramount importance of instilling good epistemic practices which include respect for factual truths, which is not only necessary to ensure that we reliably arrive at truth but also for its role as an additional bulwark against the post-truth politics (Chambers, 2021).

Lynch (2021, p. 17) claims that democratic rule can be justified because it provides its citizens with the “epistemic good” of true belief. However, he also argues that in addition to this “epistemic value”, truth also has “a political value” from which democracy greatly benefits” (Lynch, 2021, p. 20). He argues that protecting citizens’ path to true belief through good epistemic practices is a political necessity because it is warranted by the core democratic value of “basic respect for persons”, i.e., the respect given just by the virtue of their rationality or in other words for them being a “person” (Lynch, 2021, p. 20). Since the deliberative democrats view citizens’ participation in the deliberation process as the basis of democratic legitimacy, deliberative democracies are obliged to provide their citizens a path to pursue truth. Otherwise, they may lose their access to the deliberation process and be excluded from political affairs. Therefore, good use of one’s rationality must be promoted to ensure their access to truth and their subsequent participation in discussions in the “space of

⁴“In its canonical versions, it is the thesis that democracy’s value—its legitimacy, authority, authenticity—lies in its ability to base political decisions on citizens’ reasons rather than simply on their preferences or votes” (Talissee, 2017, p. 108)

⁵ There is a disagreement among adherents of deliberative democracies about the degree of importance attributed to the pursuit of truth and the truth itself. While all agree that these two concepts are extremely important, some scholars like Lynch argue that the pursuit of truth is even more important than the truth, whereas others like John Sides argue that they have equal importance, and others argue for the primacy of truth itself.

reasons” that democracies provide them (Lynch, 2021, p. 21). In addition, he offers many solutions to the question of how the exercise of good epistemic practices can be ensured, like compulsory “primary education to all citizens, protecting free assembly, speech, a free press and the norms of academic freedom” (Lynch, 2021, p. 21). He argues that “reliable social epistemic practices” are “primary⁶ social good” by themselves and also the reason why truth is a democratic value itself, which is explained by the fact that truth is worth pursuing (Lynch, 2021, p. 21). So, the search for truth itself is the reason why truth is important for a democratic rule (Lynch, 2021, p. 21). To clarify this thesis, he claims that for an alpinist, not only arriving at the peak of a mountain but also the journey itself are important (Lynch, 2021).

Deliberative democrats are aware of epistemic challenges posed by various threats against democracy and therefore they try to clarify and solve them. One epistemic challenge against democracies is the problem of “epistemic disagreement⁷” which occurs when citizens disagree over which sources and methods to trust to determine factual truths (Lynch, 2021, 22). Therefore, it is a fundamental conflict about reliable epistemic practices and the pursuit of truth (Lynch, 2021). He clarifies the fact that this problem is very old, and it even predates modern democracies (Lynch, 2021).

In our current times, he argues that only the “perception” of epistemic disagreement is enough to threaten social cohesion and provoke “political polarization” (Lynch, 2021, p. 24). Whether citizens from different political affiliations have different views or not is not very important. Only the perception of that increases polarization and warrants us to view the citizens with opposing beliefs as unreliable epistemic actors who have faulty sources of knowledge (Lynch, 2021). This causes each side to adopt different

⁶“ Primary social goods are those goods that democracies have a vested interest (qua democracy) in fairly distributing” (Lynch, 2021, p. 17). Lynch (2021) argues that while reliable epistemic practices count as primary social goods, true beliefs do not count as one for many reasons. One of them is that in pluralistic societies, determining who hold truth will always be a point of contestation.

⁷ Lynch (2021) states that epistemic disagreement contains a very deep philosophical problem pertaining to circular reasoning. In order to defend one’s own epistemic practices as rational, one must employ the same epistemic practices that they try to defend; therefore, one is forced to admit that no epistemic practices can be proven reliable. One possible answer can be how accurately these epistemic practices arrive at truth, but the contentious nature of truth will not permit a definitive solution to this problem that can persuade every citizen.

experts as epistemic authorities and to view the other side's experts as unreliable (Lynch, 2021). As a next logical step, one can even adopt the view that no experts are trustworthy, so no epistemic practices can ensure a pursuit of truth which in turn makes deliberation a futile endeavor (Lynch, 2021). As a similar concept to political polarization, Talisse (2017, p. 112) asserts that "group polarization" occurs when members of a shared epistemic community adopt more extreme beliefs through a deliberation that is closed to one's own community and isolated from outer groups. Cass Sunstein (2007, as cited in Talisse 2017, p. 112) claims that polarization occurs because of the existence of "the epistemic enclave, a cognitive environment of relative unanimity where one hears "louder echoes" of one's own voice". As a solution, he argues that we must introduce individuals with opposing opinions to cement plurality and destroy echo chambers (Sunstein, 2007, as cited in Talisse, 2017). However, it is not easy to realize because polarization may bring about two dangerous phenomena which will "mutually reinforce" (Sunstein, 2003, as cited in Talisse 2017, p. 113) themselves. The first one is called "epistemic closure" (Hardin, 2002, as cited in Talisse 2017, p. 113), which is defined through intolerance towards any forms of disagreement and the glorification of one's view as the only rational view. The second phenomenon is "the epistemic marginalization of dissenting voices", which is defined through a rejection against deliberation and the denial of one's opponent epistemic qualities (Talisse, 2017, p. 113). Group polarization eliminates the deliberative virtue of civility and makes deliberation in the public sphere an impossibility (Talisse, 2017).

There is another important threat against good epistemic practices which is portrayed through an attitude of "intellectual arrogance", which is the belief that "we already know what is true, so we have no need to pursue it" (Lynch, 2021, p. 25). If one starts to think that there is nothing to learn from others, that person will dismiss the usefulness of deliberation in the public sphere and will rather prefer to impose its will upon others (Lynch, 2021). If this attitude spreads from an individual level to group level, then that group will start to identify itself as epistemically superior and others as ignorant, and this epistemic superiority will be used as justification for one's inner group's moral superiority and proof of the other group's moral inferiority because they will characterize others as evil actors who refuse to be reasonable and insist on their

‘arrogance’ (Lynch, 2021). Lynch (2021) claims that right-wing groups are guilty of this attitude. I agree with this claim, and for this reason, in my chapter about populism, I take right-wing populism as my object study because their problematic epistemic attitude that promotes untruth is not just limited to that but is even more generalized.

When these two problematic epistemic attitudes combine, they create “a third epistemic threat: What we might call contempt for truth” (Lynch, 2021, p. 27). It manifests what Lynch (2021, p. 28) calls a “bald-political lie.”⁸ A bald-political lie simply denies the reality supported by many factual evidences without any hesitation and it receives positive reception from the supporters of the liars (Lynch, 2021). Unlike traditional lies, the motive is not to deceive others, but rather to express contempt to emphasize the power one has (Lynch, 2021). Lynch (2021, p. 29) asserts that a “bald-faced political liar is expressing contempt for the rules or norms that govern those social-epistemic practices that help us to know what’s true”. If a bald-faced political liar displays enough socio-political power, “he can make people *treat what he says as true*—to treat it, in other words, as a goal of inquiry, an answer to a question”, so it makes power an alternative source in answering questions on truth claims (Lynch, 2021, p.30). The supporters who approve of the epistemic conduct of the bald-faced political liar may primarily do it as a sign of their allegiance to their moral tribes (Lynch, 2021). Thus, leaders may be encouraged to continue their lies because if they admit that they lied, then it will be considered as a loss of power and submission to rules that they previously rejected (Lynch, 2021).

The main difference between a bald-faced political lie which occurs in democratic regimes and the lies that transform the whole factual reality in totalitarian regimes is that the aim is not to be accepted as truth but rather to show one’s rejection of the existing truth and the approved epistemic conducts by imitating truth and its role in public discourse without entirely replacing it (Lynch, 2021). However, the main reason for that is that the bald-political liar does not have enough power to change the perception of the entire reality by the entirety of the populace. If bald-faced political

⁸ As a concept, it is nearly identical to Harry Frankfurt’s concept of ‘bullshit’, which I cover in the post-truth chapter in detail.

liars had enough power, they would not abstain from changing the whole factual reality like the totalitarian regimes do and would entirely replace truth with their lies (Lynch, 2021).

As another advocate of deliberative democracy, Simone Chambers (2021) rejects the idea that post-truth is something new. Chambers (2021) admits that the proliferation of fake news through the rise of social media created a new epistemic challenge against the importance of truth and factual truth. She argues that Arendt does not solve the problems against the democratic truth because she mainly focuses on totalitarian regimes and their manipulation of truth through their extensive use of power (Chambers, 2021). Furthermore, Chambers (2021) rejects Arendt's characterisation of truth as something coercive and hostile to the plurality of opinions. She values Habermas' (2005, as cited in Chambers 2021, p. 153) emphasis on "ways, means, and procedures" which justify our truth claims rather than theories of truths themselves as something relevant to democratic truth. Habermas (2005, as cited in Chambers 2021, p. 153) claims that procedures that we expect from democracies are similar to procedures of discourse, which makes democracy "potentially truth-tracking", which means that democratic procedures facilitate the obtainment of truth. Chambers (2021, p. 153-154) enumerates democratic principles beneficial to the truth as "open and free debate, equal status of citizens, a porous and critical public sphere, an independent, active, and accessible free press, the circulation of information, and pluralism — can be understood in terms of the conditions needed to test truth claims". Chambers (2021) argues that Habermas' pragmatic view of truth which tracks the best truth among many truths, is more beneficial for the problem of democratic truth than Arendt's essentialist truth which conflicts with politics. Chambers (2021) defines the public sphere as a place where multiple political communications occur, which also includes social media in its boundaries; however, it is not the place where deliberation occurs because decisions are not taken in the public sphere. However, Chambers (2021, p. 154) claims that "the public sphere produces public opinion. Public opinion articulates the problems for which a truth-tracking democratic system seeks solutions. Public opinion sets the broad agenda in the deliberative system". The danger is that if fake news causes an erroneous public opinion to emerge, deliberation will produce bad policies

and the public will lose its trust in the democratic process and the truth-tracking power of democracies will be harmed (Chambers, 2021).

One of the important counter-arguments against the concept of democratic truth is the idea that citizens cannot arrive at truth for various psychological reasons such as cognitive biases, a tendency to favor prejudiced opinions, and conforming to beliefs of our epistemic community for an affective reason (Chambers, 2021). In response to that criticism, Chambers (2021, p.156) argues that truthfulness is not only influenced by psychology but also by our ethical conduct and external structures (e.g., “digital literacy”, reduction of fake news, fact-checking information), and even if we are limited by our psychology, trying to be truthful will certainly bring us closer to the truth.

Chambers argues that two virtues of truthfulness developed by Bernard Williams (2022, as cited in Chambers 2021, p. 159) play a crucial role in tracking truth. The first one is “sincerity”, which consists of transmitting only one’s true beliefs, and the other is “accuracy”, which is defined as one’s commitment to finding the truth and accumulating true beliefs (Bernard Williams 2022, as cited in Chambers, 2021, p. 159). Truthfulness requires the application of both virtues to epistemic practice (Chambers, 2021). Chambers (2021) argues that promoting methods to protect truth from the deceived side is way more practical than trying to change the conduct of the deceivers themselves. She even argues that accuracy is more important than deliberative virtues like ‘respect’ or ‘civility’ (Chambers, 2021, p.148). In other words, “their epistemic disposition (i.e., virtue of accuracy) is more important to the process than the ethical disposition of respect” (Chambers 2021, p. 160).

To conclude, we can say that whether truth is essential for democracies or not is not unanimously agreed. Those who argue for the importance of truth promote deliberative democracy and its pursuit of truth or attitude of truthfulness as means to arrive at truth. The existence of post-truth is also contested, but scholars generally agree that there are some new challenges against democratic truth mainly through social media as a medium and its proliferation of fake news. On the contrary, those who deny the

importance of truth in democracies find the reasons either in democracies side or in truth side or both.

In the next section, I will extend my perspective related to the truth on the domains of public reason and public space.

CHAPTER 4

TRUTH IN PUBLIC REASON AND PUBLIC SPACE

As a liberal political philosopher, Rawls (1995) was concerned with protecting the pluralism of opinions of the citizenry and was afraid of using truth, mainly the metaphysical one, to impose a singular opinion on the political domain; he saw it as a highly contentious concept, incapable to reach a consensus, so he favored its abandonment. However, with the rise of social media which substantially transformed the public space, deliberative democrats who wanted to use technology to their own advantage wanted to both increase public participation in the deliberation processes and also reintroduce truth as a bulwark against the increasing number of untruths (Landemore, 2017, 2021). In this section, I try to explore the role of truth in public reason and space. The first subsection looks at Rawlsian concepts of reasonable pluralism and epistemic abstinence that emphasizes the need to banish truth claims from political discourse. The second subsection is about criticisms against Rawls' idea of ejecting truth claims from political discourse, why it does not work, and why truth must be reintroduced. The third subsection examines the return of truth in epistemic democrats' works, the boons, and some criticisms against it. The fourth and final subsection investigates the transformation of public space due to the rise of social media and the epistemic changes it brings, and the possible solutions proposed by epistemic democrats to improve it.

4.1. The fact of reasonable pluralism and epistemic abstinence

As a political philosopher, John Rawls left a significant impact on the literature of deliberative democracies and the role of truth in liberal democracies. His works inspired many scholars and also attracted crucial criticisms. For this reason, the

assertions made by Rawls in his earlier work *A Theory of Justice* changed significantly in his later writings, notably in *Political Liberalism*⁹ (Landemore, 2017; Rawls, 2005).

As a huge contribution to the field of political epistemology, Rawls developed a central idea that marks the limits of the political debate in modern liberal democracies. The “fact¹⁰ of (reasonable) pluralism” or “the fact of disagreement” recognizes the fact that “people in free societies are committed to different and conflicting –some would say incommensurable– beliefs, values, conceptions of social justice, conceptions of the good and ways of life” (Landemore, 2017, p. 277). Rawls (1993, as cited in Landemore, 2017, p. 279) found the origins of the fact of disagreement in the “burdens of judgment,” which are defined as “the many hazards involved in the correct (and conscientious) exercise of our powers of reason and judgment in the ordinary course of political life”. In other words, the human mind is considered factually limited, which in turn obstructs a universal agreement among rational beings (Landemore, 2017). These disagreements are inevitable even among the most intelligent human beings and thus, it is considered an inevitable part of human rationality (1993a, as cited in Landemore, 2017). Therefore, Rawls adopts a position that can be called “epistemic abstinence”, which consists of ignoring the truth values of moral and political claims (Landemore, 2017, p.277).

Disagreements should be resolved through the respectful exchange of arguments without using the concept of truth, which is seen as “divisive and intolerant” (Landemore, 2017, p. 277). To clarify, the “Truth” that Rawls banished from public deliberation is metaphysical and can manifest itself in philosophy, religion, or political ideologies. It is a singular “Truth” that refers to the transcendental domain. It is contained in various ‘comprehensive doctrines’ and shapes the ideologies and morality of their adherents. Rawls (1993b, as cited in Landemore, 2017) views that in democracy, not only do people live together but they also decide how to live together

⁹ For more information about these changes, look at the introduction of *Political Liberalism*, in which Rawls (2005) states the changes he made.

¹⁰ The ‘fact of reasonable pluralism’ in *Political Liberalism* is less of an inherent empirical phenomenon of liberal democracy and more of a normative expectation, unlike Rawls’s prior view in *A Theory of Justice* that considered the ‘fact of pluralism’ as more of an empirical and observable fact related to the human condition (Landemore, 2017).

as free and equal members of the society. However, those who have doctrinal differences can have difficulty in establishing these common grounds; thus, Rawls (1993b as cited in Landemore, 2017) excludes doctrinal points referring to the concept of Truth.

We see in Arendt (1968) that philosophical truth transforms into an opinion in public debate which cannot persuade everyone in the public sphere. Consequently, these kinds of truth claims create divisions within society. Intolerance stems from the fact that the “Truth” can only be singular and thus is incompatible with a platform where the opinions of the many are discussed. In Rawlsian philosophy, metaphysical truth ceases to be a commodity in the marketplace of ideas. The political conceptions of justice, which aim to determine the basis of the political system we live in, must not use or deny the concept of truth or even question it in public space; they must simply function without it. The concept of truth is left to ‘comprehensive moral doctrines’ (Rawls, 1993b, as cited in Landemore, 2017, p. 282) In his first writings, Rawls (2005, p.lii) entirely rejected to give any role to comprehensive doctrines during deliberation; however, in his later writings, he introduced his “proviso” and argued that citizens can use principles from their comprehensive doctrines if they are compatible with other comprehensive doctrines. However, they must discuss them reasonably without alluding to their own comprehensive doctrine as the sole arbiter and the source of their principles (Rawls, 2005, p. 453). The political conception of justice cannot be formed via a unique comprehensive doctrine, but rather as an agreement among the reasonable principles of various comprehensive doctrines (Rawls, 2005). Thus, Rawls (1993a, as cited in Landemore, 2017, p. 291) endorses the idea of “an overlapping consensus (...) in which people simply come to support identical principles or conclusions based on compatible but distinct, and more or less comprehensive views or premises”.

Rawls (1999, as cited in Cohen, 2012, p. 222) views his own political conception of ‘justice as fairness’ as a “practical conception not metaphysical or epistemological.” It contains moral and normative expectations; however, it does not stem from any moral system itself but rather from a political one, in the form of civic duty (Rawls, 2005). It means that this political conception does not claim to be true but offers itself

as a way of agreement between reasonable agents who are considered free and equal (Cohen, 2012). Rawls (2005, pp. 441-442) argues that political conceptions are the products of “public reason”, which “specifies at the deepest level the basic moral and political values that are to determine a constitutional democratic government’s relation to its citizens and their relation to one another”. The public reason is possible if we hold the idea that all citizens are free and equal and that they can reasonably cooperate and accept the same laws as reasonable without the use of force (Rawls, 2005). Those who dogmatically embrace comprehensive views and reject all forms of deliberation consequently reject the notion of public reasons as well because they do not seek a reasonable agreement but to enforce their own views (Rawls, 2005). Brennan (2021) argues that liberalism’s idea of public reason has an assumption that does not reflect reality. It has an idealized version of citizenry as a collective that has robust prior beliefs and comprehensive views that can achieve a consensus through the overlap of similar beliefs (Brennan, 2021). However, Brennan (2021) argues that in reality, those who are ideologically driven are a tiny minority, and the vast majority simply have no strong opinions about the matters of the state. They choose their own beliefs in accordance with the identity they ascribe themselves (Brennan, 2021). They support the ideas of the group they belong to simply because it is their group and conforming with the values of the group has much more benefits both psychologically or interest-wise than drawbacks (Brennan, 2021). This criticism reflects the main weakness of the Rawlsian project. It is an entirely theoretical project that has no relation to a real political situation. It is rather an idealized suggestion regarding a possible foundation for a fictive liberal society.

For Rawls (2005), a political conception of justice must aim to be applicable as the foundation of society. He argues that political conceptions of justice can only be invoked when discussing the constitutional basis of liberal democracies and its guiding principles (Rawls, 2005). They cannot be used for daily policy matters. Moreover, they are only used by those who have decision-making power and the civil society does not use them (Rawls, 2005). However, many deliberative democrats later expand the political conceptions to apply to every deliberation process and every part of the public sphere (Landmore, 2017). This conception of justice does not claim to be the only

reasonable conception but rather part of a family of reasonable though differing liberal political conceptions (Rawls, 2005). Otherwise, there would be no overlapping consensus (Rawls, 2005).

Rawlsians have suggested that emphasizing the limits of our reason can lead to the acceptance of the status quo rather than a genuine overlapping consensus (Landemore, 2017). If we limit our perception of reality, we lose the drive to progress and tend to compromise with conformist norms or, worse, with political power because a compromise around the first disagreement will inevitably favor the current way of life (Landemore, 2017). For example, if an abolitionist compromise with a slave trader that half the slaves must be emancipated, it will only legitimate the institution of slavery by a so-called overlapping consensus. To solve this problem, Joshua Cohen (1993, as cited in Landemore, 2017) insists that Rawlsian pluralism must be among reasonable views; a reasonable person must reject their old views upon the discovery of contradictory information. Based on this approach, Rawls later accepted these criticisms and adopted Cohen's position by adding the adjective 'reasonable' to the fact of pluralism (Landemore, 2017).

Other Rawlsians like Jeremy Waldron (1999, as cited in Landemore, 2017) continue to hold the earlier Rawlsian position and claim that we owe every opinion, reasonable or not, a form of respect. Waldron justifies this approach by defending the initial view that disagreement is just an empirical fact and that the epistemic virtues of 'reasonable' views are irrelevant because the circle of disagreement will include not only those we qualify as 'reasonable'. We must respect 'unreasonable' people not for their views but for their humanity (Waldron, 1999, as cited in Landemore, 2017). This view can be criticized using Popper's paradox of tolerance: if those who receive our respect in return reject giving the same respect to their compatriots, are they worthy of being included in public debate? For example, populists tend to designate their opponents as 'others' who must be excluded from the public space. For this reason, Rawls and many other deliberative democrats embraced the idea that unreasonable citizens must be ejected from the deliberation process (Brennan, 2021) mainly because

they do not respect the “criterion of reciprocity” and because “reasonableness” consists of:

viewing one another as free and equal in a system of social cooperation over generations, they are prepared to offer one another fair terms of cooperation according to what they consider the most reasonable conception of political justice; and when they agree to act on those terms, even at the cost of their own interests in particular situations, provided that other citizens also accept those terms. (Rawls, 2005, p. 446)

This ‘reasonableness’ occurs at both sides on this contract; the offered contract must correspond to a reasonable demand that we could accept if we were on the other side (Rawls, 2005). This contract must be formed without any coercion under the condition of equality and freedom; thus, Rawls calls this approach the “criterion of reciprocity” (Rawls, 2005, p.xliv).

According to Rawls (1993b as cited in Landemore, 2017), a reasonable person must give reasons for their beliefs and evaluate others according to the stated beliefs while accepting evaluation by others and changing their own beliefs, if necessary. A reasonable person must also accept the “burdens of judgment” and its “consequences” (Rawls, 1993b as cited in Landemore, 2017, p. 281). Rawls (1993b as cited in Landemore, 2017, p. 281) accepts “a procedure-independent standard of objectivity” which manifests itself in the form of “reasonableness” as the standard of correctness. Thus, it plays a similar function to that of truth in other philosophical systems. However, Rawls insists that reasonableness is different from the truth, as “the reasonable has nothing to do with truth”; it “neither uses nor denies the concept of truth” (Rawls, 1999, 1994 as cited in Landemore, 2017, p. 281).

4.2. Rejection of epistemic abstinence

Rawlsian idea of evaluating political claims without referring to their truthfulness drew many criticisms as a radical idea. For example, Habermas addressed some criticisms against Rawlsian concept of ‘reasonableness’ (1995, as cited in Landemore, 2017) and argued that:

Either we understand reasonable in the sense of practical reason as synonymous with morally true that is as a validity concept analogous to truth and on the

same plane as propositional truth. [...] Or we understand reasonable in more or less the same sense as thoughtfulness in dealing with debatable views whose truth is for the present undecided. (p.281)

Habermas (1995, as cited in Landemore, 2017, p.281-282) agrees with the first interpretation that characterizes reasonableness as a claim about moral truth which is similar but different from a factual truth claim because a moral claim pertains to different objects and “it describes a different type of relation between these concepts and reality”. However, Rawls endorses the second interpretation, so according to Habermas (1995, as cited in Landemore, 2017) and to Rawls’ interpretation, something reasonable becomes something potentially true in the future that we have no way to know. Furthermore, the epistemic attitude of the individual itself gains importance because it expects the supposed individual to withhold his or her judgment about its true value. In addition, ‘reasonableness’ as a criterion transforms into something even more important than the validity of the proposition itself (Habermas, 1995 as cited in Landemore, 2017). Thus, Habermas (1995, as cited in Harcourt, 2021, p. 160) asserts that “Rawls’s political liberalism achieves only acceptance, in other words, a form of social stability, and not acceptability as a form of validity”. For Habermas (1995, as cited in Harcourt, 2021), this is a problem because moral claims must be validated by reason. Furthermore, Habermas (1995 as cited in Landemore, 2017, p. 282) argues that Rawls could not entirely get rid of truth claims as he has claimed; he rather “postponed” them to an indeterminate future and promoted “toleration” to these potentially true statements.

In response, Rawls (1995 as cited in Landemore, 2017) insists that there is no need for truth about moral claims. Landemore (2017) argues that for Rawls truth is a thicker concept, implying uniqueness, and thus, there can be only one answer, unlike the multitude of reasonable ones. Thus, truth is not appropriate for a tolerant society. Reasonableness, on the other hand, “recognizes the burdens of judgments” and favors the freedom of thought (Rawls, 1995 as cited in Landemore, 2017 p. 282). Rawls (1995, as cited in Landemore, 2017, p. 282) reiterates that reasonableness is a “standard of objective reality”; it does not contain any moral or epistemic meaning, unlike truth. Rawls (1995, as cited in Harcourt, 2021) accuses Habermas of having a

comprehensive doctrine in which there is no real difference between moral truth and normal truth claims.

In his response, Habermas (1995, as cited in Harcourt, 2021) insists that Rawls cannot avoid epistemic claims even if he insists on staying in practical domain, and later he changes his philosophy and accepts the fact that moral truths are not just similar to truth claims but they are also truth claims. He goes beyond that and argues that every philosophical domain must assert truth claims in order to be meaningful (Habermas, 1995, as cited in Harcourt, 2021).

Cohen (2012) disagrees with Rawls and argues that a political conception of justice, which plays a fundamental role in Rawls' political philosophy, cannot function without judgments and assertions on the concept of truth. This concept of truth utilized in public justification must be political (Cohen, 2012). He clarifies that this "political conception of truth" must correspond to "a set of claims about truth", not to an analysis of the concept (Cohen, 2012, p. 218). Thus, according to Cohen (2012), this definition is suitable for a pluralistic democracy because the participants will have their own truth claims and they will try to present their own version of the truth which is suitable for public reasoning, enabling them to present their own possibly richer conception of truth. Cohen (2012) argues that truth does not appear as the only divisive standard of correctness. When something is claimed as the most reasonable, it also gains a singular character, and thus it can appear as divisive as well (Cohen, 2012). He also states that we will still disagree with those who have different conceptions of justice even if they appear to us as reasonable (Cohen, 2012). Thus, truth is the expression of disagreement; it is not the cause (Cohen, 2012). Cohen (2012) suggests that the divisiveness of truth is not necessary. While holding a position as the true position, one can still tolerate other views in public reason by evaluating them with reasonableness (Cohen, 2012). Cohen (2012) presents his political conception of truth as a conception that does not claim anything about the nature of truth or its lack, and as strictly non-metaphysical. By separating the concept of truth from metaphysics, we can make the political conception of truth a new standard of beliefs and judgment in

public reason while respecting the fact of pluralism (Cohen, as cited in Landemore, 2017).

4.3. The return of truth in public reason

In recent years, scholars of democratic theory have increased their use of truth in public reason. Landemore (2017, p. 284) celebrates “the epistemic turn in deliberative democracy, which signals the return of truth-concerns in politics”. She argues that the introduction of the concept of epistemic abstinence was an unnecessary move that could not eliminate the need for truth in public reason (Landemore, 2017). She further argues that introducing truth in public reason may have many positive implications (Landemore, 2017). According to Landemore (2017, p. 286), it makes “deliberative democracy more coherent with its own premises” and “that deliberation, to be motivated, must have some kind of epistemic properties”. It also helps to fight against political claims that reject the existence of any objectivity for moral claims and any objective standards of evaluations for political policies (Landemore, 2017, p. 286). The epistemic turn enables democracy to be justified through some outcome or performance-based criteria and not just solely by its own natural principles (Landemore, 2017). She also claims that the Rawlsian principles of mutual respect among citizens and tolerating their opinions did not vanish (Landemore, 2017). The pluralism of opinions is still respected, but the truth is no longer a taboo (Landemore, 2017).

There are two types of criticisms against the epistemic turn in public reasoning. The first one points to the danger that elitists or oligarchic rule can be justified through their claims of expertise or superior knowledge (Landemore, 2017). Landemore (2013, 2014a, as cited in Landemore, 2017) argues that the matters of the common good are easier to be known by the entirety of the collective rather than a limited number of people. She states that the “collective intelligence” of the society would triumph over the limited “cognitive diversity” of the oligarchs (Landemore 2013, 2014a, as cited in Landemore, 2017, p. 288).

The second type of criticism is against the idea of legitimatizing democracy through their epistemic performances or outcomes. The scholars¹¹ who ascribe to this view argue that democracy is valuable because of its own inner principles like “equality” or “freedom” (Landemore, 2017, p. 288). Justifying democracy due to instrumentalist reasons undervalues the true importance of the democracy (Landemore, 2017). Landemore (2017) argues that evaluating the epistemic performance of democracy is not mutually exclusive with appreciating the intrinsic values of democracy. She further argues that those who glorify the inner principles of democracy do it with a near-religious zeal but without having a substantive reason behind it (Landemore, 2017). She claims that both views can work together and there is no need to see it as an inevitable antagonism (Landemore, 2017).

In the next subsection, I explore how the Internet and social media transformed the epistemic grounds of public deliberation. I analyze the new epistemic challenges they create and consider possible solutions that could improve both the truthfulness of our political discourse and the public participation of the citizenry in the public deliberation processes.

4.4. Public sphere in the age of social media

The Internet and social media in their early days were celebrated as the harbinger of freedom and the democratization of information and an important tool to encourage more democratic participation. It was argued that they would reduce the power of gatekeepers of information, provide access to more diverse opinions, and facilitate mass action and power of citizenry over their rulers (Cohen & Fung, 2021). However, things did not progress that positively. A significant drop in the quality of overall information has been observed. Despotism regimes have adapted well to social media and used it as a tool of propaganda, and fake news and all sorts of misinformation spread rapidly through the Internet (Cohen & Fung, 2021). These situations led to

¹¹ See Urbinati, Nadia. 2014. *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth, and the People*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.; Urbinati, Nadia, and Maria Paul Saffon. 2013. Procedural Democracy, the Bulwark of Equal Liberty. *Political Theory* 41(3): 441–481.

different approaches. The more reactive side wanted to eliminate sources of untruth in social media and protect the integrity of factual truths, while the other side still saw a positive force for democratization and public participation in politics despite these negative developments (Cohen & Fung, 2021). Cohen and Fung (2021) have adopted an optimist approach. They imagine “an idealized democratic public sphere” that contains “a stronger marriage of broad participation and public discussion” (Cohen & Fung, 2021, p.25). They aim for the realization of a deliberative¹² democratic society in which “free and equal members use their common reason to argue about the substance of public issues and in which the exercise of power is guided by that use” (Cohen & Fung, 2021, p. 27).

They adopt a conception of public spheres which is heavily influenced by Habermas. It has two important spheres. The first one is “informal, dispersed, fluid”, which chaotically handles political affairs and produces public opinion but has no real decision-making power (Cohen & Fung, 2021, p. 27). The second is where the “formal political process, including elections and legislative decision making, as well as the processes and decisions of agencies and courts” occurs (Cohen & Fung, 2021, p. 27). The deliberation process takes place here, transforms public opinion of the informal sphere into a policy, and supervises its implementation (Cohen & Fung, 2021, p. 27). Thus, the informal sphere provides the content of the deliberation and demands solutions, whereas the formal sphere realizes the process of deliberation and produces policies that would answer the expectations of the first sphere (Cohen & Fung, 2021). They argue that for a good association of both spheres, some norms and dispositions must be respected (Cohen & Fung, 2021). Individuals must have equal rights of “expression” and “association” and access to reliable information about public matters and to diverse and competing opinions (Cohen & Fung, 2021, pp. 30-32). As dispositions, they must respect truth and try to be truthful, care for “common good” and have to be “civil” in the sense that they must respect other citizens’ right to disagree with them; therefore, they must try to justify or change their beliefs in a reasonable manner (Cohen & Fung, 2021, pp. 30-32). Based on these rights and

¹² They argue that deliberative democracies have more “demanding expectations than minimalist conceptions of democracy, which emphasize electoral competition, or fair aggregation conceptions, which emphasize an equal consideration of interests” (Cohen and & Fung, 2021, p. 27).

dispositions, they compared mass media with social media in the US (Cohen & Fung, 2021).

They describe mass media as dominated by few owners and groups, who employ journalists who view themselves as 'professionals'¹³ and non-partisan (Cohen & Fung, 2021). These journalists address giant audiences, receive insignificant amount of feedback from their audiences, try to respect objective truth and reality, and self-regulate their epistemic claims (Cohen & Fung, 2021). However, they are not always that respectful of objective reality, because they are composed of a “racially homogenous” group who benefited from the current political and economic order, so they ignore the experiences and perspectives of racial minorities and the poor (Cohen & Fung, 2021, pp. 34-35). Furthermore, to have secure sources, they try to be friendly with political elites (Cohen & Fung, 2021). To this end, they try to be accommodating to power (Cohen & Fung, 2021). That is why, during the period leading to the invasion of Iraq, they led one-sided reporting that favored the US government’s position (Cohen & Fung, 2021).

In contrast to mass media, “the digital public sphere offers easier access to a vastly wider range of information, narrative, and political perspective” (Cohen & Fung, 2021, p.36). It changed the flow of information from “one-to-many” to “many-to-many” communication (Cohen & Fung, p. 36) The social media platforms do not simply provide content, but they are also responsible for “curating, moderating, and amplifying” information —“but that business is not the same as the editorial business of mass media” (Cohen & Fung, 2021, p. 36). Cohen & Fung (2021, p.36) claims that “the emergence of the digital public sphere has been accompanied by —some argue that it has caused or perhaps amplified —political polarization”. Many studies have suggested that polarization has always been high but the American society has never been this divided before (Cohen & Fung, 2021). Overall, the digital media offers more information and different perspectives which are not bound directly to corporate interest, and it is more critical of power compared to mass media. However, the amount

¹³ Professionalism is a modern expectation for mass media, priorly truthfulness was a widely neglected expectation, see Rosenfeld, 2019.

of misinformation and fake news that it produces is also significantly higher. It is less editorialized and therefore more vulnerable to untruthful content and less concerned with truth. Thus, securing true information in digital media is more difficult.

As a solution to the problems of digital media, Cohen and Fung (2021) suggest several solutions. First, they argue that hateful and harmful content must be regulated because it does not respect the duty of civility and has no benefit for public deliberation (Cohen & Fung, 2021). They also argue that social platforms must discourage fake news and untruthful content from reaching the public or mitigate the damage they cause by fact-checking their information (Cohen & Fung, 2021). Ironically, social media giants replicate an earlier problem observed in mass media, which gives them “extraordinary gatekeeping power” (Cohen & Fung, 2021, p. 46). That’s why until recently, the social media platforms who saw themselves as the place where public speech occurred, were less keen on gatekeeping than the mass media which act as mere medium (Cohen & Fung, 2021).

They can use it to fight untruth; however, this power ultimately leads to the question of whether this communicative power is democratic or not; however, it also obstructs the influence of fringe online communities that promote misinformation (Cohen & Fung, 2021, p. 46). Instead of suppressing fake news, another alternative solution is “to increase access to better information that is both informative and reliable: raise the floor instead of imposing ceilings”, and to promote more epistemic responsibility to the citizenry, to encourage them to be more careful about the reliability of their sources (Cohen & Fung, 2021, p. 47).

Unlike Cohen and Fung, Landmore (2021, p. 65) criticizes “Habermas’s model of a two-track deliberative sphere”, which she characterizes as “self-avowed rationalization of representative democracy, a system born in the eighteenth century under different epistemological, conceptual, and technological constraint”. Before the rise of deliberative democracies, the equality of citizens and their political power was manifested during elections in which everyone had one vote (Landmore, 2021). Later, deliberative democrats emphasized the importance of deliberation in democracies;

however, they still left this process entirely to representatives or appointed bureaucrats and judges due to their thinking that is limited by the confines of representative democracy (Landemore, 2021). Landemore (2021) argues that this two-track model of a deliberative sphere is very problematic. First of all, it creates a clear line of separation between the elected and the electors for whom the elected holds the political power and occupies the most powerful sphere. Furthermore, although the theory suggests that informal sphere must influence the formal, the concrete power they have to realize that is not clear at all (Landemore, 2021). In addition, Landemore (2021) asserts that she does not see how an unregulated and chaotic discussion in the informal sphere can create unified and meaningful content in the formal sphere. Landemore (2021) wants to expand the deliberation process to the entirety of citizenry. The representative democracy justifies its legitimacy through physical limitations of assembling the entire citizenry, transferring one's political power to a representative, which appears to be the "second best solution" to this problem; however, digital technologies permit us much broader participation and deliberation opportunities (Landemore, 2021, p.68).

Landemore (2021) criticizes the process of elections in representative democracies. She argues that a limited group of representatives cannot properly represent a very large and different perspectives (Landemore, 2021). Furthermore, some very qualified individuals would be left outside of deliberative processes (Landemore, 2021). Nowadays elections have evolved into "a competition between policy platforms backed by partisan justifications", and this competition kills "the open-mindedness required to conduct proper deliberation" (Landemore, 2021, p. 70). You cannot expect a partisan supporter to be open-minded about other ideas (Landemore, 2021). The average citizen starts to think that politics is a highly contentious domain, thus it is better to ignore it for better harmony with other citizens or limit it to your peers with similar beliefs (Landemore, 2021).

Representative democracy has another danger. If deliberation processes are stifled and elections are seen as the only way for people to manifest their will, the representative or the leader they vote for will gain immense power and can present himself as the

collective will of the people. Populist leaders exactly do that; they claim to represent marginalized and powerless people and their ideas in the public sphere.

Elizabeth Edenberg (2021) argues that modern political discourse is deeply marked by disagreements and polarization. Even basic facts have become the subject of debate. The rise of digital media fueled this phenomenon by diversifying sources of information with “no editorial oversight to ensure that information shared is objective, accurate, and well-researched” (Edenberg, 2021, p.260). Individuals become trapped in ‘epistemic bubbles ’where there is no room for opposing views (Edenberg, 2021). Furthermore, even if people are skeptical about some information at the start, they are likely to accept the fact if it gains enough attention in social media (Rini, 2017 as cited in Edenberg, p. 261).

A possible way to look at the problem of disagreement is characterizing it as an “epistemic” problem, and if the problem is identified as epistemic, then the solution becomes an epistemically responsible citizenry that is capable of spotting untruth and distinguishing it from true statements (Edenberg, 2021, p. 261). Edenberg (2021, p. 262) argues that there are three types of approaches for those who identify the problem as epistemic. The first approach tries to “improve individuals’ capacity to spot “fake news” and encourage more reflective scrutiny of the information we encounter” (Edenberg, 2021, p. 262-263). As part of this objective, “Media literacy programs” aim to improve participants’ ability to “question information sources”, the purpose of those who shared the information, and “the broader context of the story shared” (Edenberg, 2021, p. 262-263). In this way, they want to eliminate individual “epistemic vices” and promote good “epistemic habits” (Edenberg, 2021, p. 263). The second approach focuses on establishing a system where every individual is held responsible for the information they shared (Edenberg, 2021). In this view, in social media, it is very difficult to ascertain whether the source of information is trustworthy or not (Edenberg, 2021). The solution must be provided by the social platforms themselves because an individual has limited power to classify the trustworthiness of multiple sources of information. If the social platform evaluates the credibility of the individual sources, individuals have an additional tool to evaluate the trustworthiness

of the information before disseminating it. The third approach, endorsed by Michael Lynch¹⁴ (2019, as cited in Edenberg, 2021, p. 264) argues that our epistemic problem stems from “tribal arrogance”, a group-based epistemic vice in which the members of the group mistakenly believe that they are epistemically superior and possess real knowledge and the others are epistemically inferior. Lynch (2019, as cited in Edenberg, pp. 264-265). argues that “we must cultivate the epistemic virtue of ‘intellectual humility’”, accept different opinions and views, and be ready to change our opinions if necessary; therefore, we must “respect one another as epistemic agents”. Edenberg (2021) claims that individual-based epistemic solutions ignore institutional problems. She asserts that algorithms of social platforms play a major role in exacerbating the problem of disagreements (Edenberg, 2021). They promote divisive content because they attract more attention, and algorithms prioritize highly engaging content, so the way algorithms work must change to reduce divisiveness (Edenberg, 2021).

Edenberg (2021) argues that the real answer to the problem of disagreement must be morality-based rather than an epistemic one. She adopts a Rawlsian approach to this problem and claims that the respect we give to other citizens must not be based on their epistemic credential but rather it must be based on "moral respect" that stems simply from their personhood (Edenberg, 2021, p.269). She argues that, in a deeply polarized political discourse, referring to an objective way of evaluating epistemic credentials is not that simple (Edenberg, 2021). She further states that disagreement is not a problem that can be solved by the principle of ‘reasonable pluralism; it is a constitutive part of liberal democracies (Edenberg, 2021). Finally, she argues that focusing on disagreements only augments the polarization of the masses (Edenberg, 2021). Individuals have really different experiences and values and thus, they will interpret affairs differently (Edenberg, 2021). Disagreements do not stem simply from lack of knowledge from one part. We must rather learn to live together despite our differences but be bonded through some basic principles (Edenberg, 2021).

¹⁴ For more information, see the Truth and Democracy chapter.

To conclude, we have seen that the public space has passed through an important transformation with the advent of digital medias, which is generally viewed as a negative influence against truthfulness of our political discourse. However, there is no need to be that way. It can also promote democratization of information and a larger participation of citizenry in political deliberation. The observed surge of political disagreement and polarization in our societies has also been attributed to digital medias. As a solution, we can either view the problem as epistemic and try to improve epistemic capacities of our citizenry or accept it as an unchangeable fact of liberal democracies and learn to cooperate in the framework of mutual (moral) respect and common principles.

In the next chapter, I examine the concept that is viewed as the most explanatory of the current alleged epistemological crisis: the concept of post-truth.

CHAPTER 5

(POLITICS) OF POST-TRUTH

The term post-truth has become influential in recent years due to the increase in politicians who are accused of engaging in untruthful rhetoric. The apparent growing interest in the term ‘post-truth’ was highlighted when Oxford Dictionaries chose ‘post-truth’ as the “word of the year” in 2016 (Brahms, 2020, p.1). They defined it as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2020, as cited in Brahms, 2020, p.1). In its first modern use by Steve Tesich, it simply meant that the public agreed with the lies of politicians and that the truth lost its relevancy (Brahms, 2020). McIntyre (2018, p. 5) says that the term ‘post’ does not mean that “we are ‘past’ truth in a temporal sense” but rather it means that truth as a concept is no longer powerful as it used to be. McIntyre (2018, p. 6) claims that post-truth is a “normative” concept. It is used by those who care for the sanctity of ‘truth’ and are wary of the attacks against it to describe the ongoing situation. MacMullen (2019, p.1) prefers to use the term “post-factual” instead of “post-truth” to emphasize that when we are talking about the decaying role of truth in politics, we mainly talk about factual truth.

Those who advocate for the post-truth thesis argue that our current public sphere is even more threatened by untruths, manipulations, lies, and fake news fueled by conspiracy theorists and populist leaders and spread more easily due to the advent of social media than ever before (Hannon, 2022). Hannon (2022, p. 1) claims that the post-truth narrative consists of the idea “that democracy is facing an epistemological crisis” and the duty to “resolve this epistemological crisis by restoring truth to its rightful place at the heart of democracy.” Therefore, Hannon (2022, p. 1) argues that

those who want to restore truth regard “evidence, reasons, and facts as the solution to democracy’s ills.”

On the other hand, Finlayson (2019) argues that the term ‘post-truth’ is problematic; it is mainly used as an insult directed to those who defy the status quo and prior epistemological assumptions, and it may signal a desire to return to politics of old times before ‘post-truth’ interruption. Hannon also (2022, p. 1) claims that the post-truth thesis “relies on controversial epistemological, moral, and political assumptions”.

Therefore, no one would declare itself as a post-truther as it signals a negative meaning, unlike the notion of ‘populist’ which populists can use to describe themselves. Backström (2019) argues that the label ‘pre-truth’ would be more accurate than the term post-truth because there was no time in human history that the concept of truth, which is an ambiguous and unclear concept, has reigned supreme. However, what is implied by the term post-truth is also present in pre-truth, so pre-truth is also post-truth.

Many scholars developed different definitions; some philosophers like Dennett (as cited in Brahms, 2020) argue that what characterizes the post-truth phenomenon is that truth is no longer viewed as something esteemed by the public. Ancona (as cited in Brahms, 2020, p. 8) posits that masses started to prefer “subjective interpretations and narratives over objective facts,” and Marmot (as cited in Brahms, 2020, p. 8) claims that post-truth is marked by an “indifference to truth and factual evidence”.

We can see that there is no clear and universally approved definition of post-truth. It is not even clear when it started or if it is even a new phenomenon or not, but what is clear is that, as a concept, post-truth gained significant relevancy and everyone perceives it as something negative and detrimental to truth (Brahms, 2020). What is generally accepted is that a post-truth statement is an untruthful statement that is different than traditional lies in the sense that it aims to create an environment in which the status of factual truths in opinion formation processes is less influential than previous times. The specific nature of the post-truth statement is disputed, but its aim

to create its own version of reality and its aim to alter individuals' relation to truth substantially is generally recognized. The treatment of inconvenient facts is a subject of debate. Some say they are rejected and others claim that they are ignored or rearranged as less significant. Its opposition to factual truth eventually manifests in its rejection of existing epistemic authorities that try to defend the existing understanding of epistemological order. Therefore, post-truth statements as a tool are generally used by populists who contest the legitimacy of epistemic authorities. However, some academicians argue that the accusation of using post-truth can be used as a weapon by anti-populists to silence legitimate concerns against the current political structures. For this reason, scholars either recognize post-truth as a useful conceptual tool to understand new dangers against truth or as a cheap weapon by power holders to silence the opposition.

In this chapter, first, I try to explore the post-truth thesis, and then at the different forms of the post-truth condition, I try to understand possible reasons for the emergence of post-truth. Finally, I address the criticisms against the relevancy of the term post-truth and its rejection.

5.1. Post-truth thesis

Post-truth is generally understood as deviance from the concept of truth and for some as its rejection, but it is perceived as something different from advocating simply its opposite which would be a falsehood or lie. Therefore, an important requirement for the academicians who believe in the existence of post-truth is to demonstrate that post-truth denotes something substantially different than traditional lies found abundantly in politics and that it means more than a term that is simply used for a political environment infested by a disregard to truth and susceptibility to lies. If post-truth is accepted simply as a phenomenon describing the decaying role of truth in favor of untruthful claims, the term does not offer something different from lies. In essence, it may simply suggest that lies gained more prominence in our current times; thus, it may raise questions whether it warranted a new name for this phenomenon. On the opposite side, those who fail to observe an important change in people's views towards the

concept of truth may argue that post-truth is a phenomenon observable throughout political history as lies are accepted as a part of human politics. However, post-truth recently gained the attention of the public for various reasons, so post-truth can be considered as an unnecessary construct. They can also say that what has changed is only a change of quantity rather than a change of substance regarding the untruthful claims, and in this interpretation too, post-truth is not very meaningful as a concept. Nevertheless, many philosophers define post-truth as something different than the traditional act of lying.

McIntyre (2018, p. 6) says that post-truth does not mean that “facts do not matter, but instead a conviction that facts can always be shaded, selected and presented within a political context that favors one interpretation of truth over another”. He argues that the problem is not merely the untruth of any particular statement but rather the overall belief that we can put a hierarchy among facts, put forward the facts that conform with our prejudices and already held beliefs, and approach the facts that we find unfavorable to our beliefs with extreme suspicion toward, putting the facts in the service of a grander narrative (McIntyre, 2018). So, unlike Oxford’s definition, he and the other philosophers argue that post-truth is grander than a simple rejection of facts; it is more complex (McIntyre, 2018).

Philosophers as professionals who are more apt to understand the concepts tried to conceptualize and clarify this phenomenon, while other social scientists concentrate on analyzing the socio-political reasons for the alleged emergence of the post-truth phenomenon and its socio-political consequences (Brahms, 2020). To understand post-truth, we must first discuss the concept of truth. There are many types of theories of truth such as coherentist, pragmatist or semantic; but the most famous correspondence type of definition of truth was given by Aristotle in *Metaphysics*: “to say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true” (1011b25). Many scholars who adhered to the post-truth thesis thus based their understanding of truth and the supposed deviance of post-truth from the truth to the correspondence theory of truth. Many like McIntyre (2018, p. 7) said “the question at hand is not whether we have the

proper theory of truth, but how to make sense of the different ways that people *subvert* truth”, by not seeing the necessity to question the theory of truth in practice. They indirectly maintained the status of the correspondence theory of truth by the virtue of its pre-existing dominant position. Still, it is important to note that McIntyre holds this view because he adheres to the post-truth thesis and thus sees a rupture from ‘truth era’ politics and desires to return it. Therefore, he does not see any necessity to question the prior theory of truth. Those who are critical of the prior assumptions about truth may choose to question which truth theories are more appropriate or not. However, they can also choose to exclude the concept of truth from the political discourse entirely or simply find it irrelevant to question.

Backström (2019, p. 97), for example, who denies that post-truth is a new phenomenon, locates a significant problem regarding truth in the “representational” model of correspondence and coherence models of truth. He argues that these models make truth something “to be determined rather than understood”, thus, they hide the real epistemic problem, which is a lack of genuine understanding between individuals (Backström, 2019, p.97).

However, there is a fact that supports McIntyre’s position: the populists like Trump or his supporters who appeal to post-truth statements. They do not do it because they are knowledgeable of these truth theories and they have deep opinions about them. Being obsessed with deep philosophical issues could prove futile in regard to real practical problems.

So, our current political climate, which is marked by untruthfulness, can be analyzed through two distinct approaches. One approach adheres to the so-called post-truth thesis, which argues that post-truth is something remarkably different from the previous political lies or untruthful statements and causes a fundamental danger against the status of truth in politics. Consequently, the legitimacy of the previous regime of truth and its theory of truth, which is the correspondence theory of truth, is maintained and the deterioration of the role of truth in politics is lamented. Thus, post-truth is regarded as something new and dangerous against the concept of truth. Having

said that, many academicians that adhere to this thesis concede to the fact that there must be some deficiencies in the previous regime of truth, which provoked the birth of post-truth. Thus, those who accuse them of being complete defenders of the status quo and the previous regime of truth are not completely accurate.

The other approach is represented by those who deny that post-truth is something new or significantly different from the previous lies and untruths. They argue that truth was never a dominant force in politics, so they say that we must examine the deficiencies which are present in our current theories of truth and regime of truth. Therefore, they contain meta-ethical and meta-epistemological critics against the practice of epistemology and its assumptions about truth in general and precisely about its role in politics. Below, I investigate many different forms in which the post-truth condition manifests itself.

5.2. Many forms of post-truth condition

The act of lying in politics is considered by many as an undeniable fact of the political discourse (at least Arendt and George Orwell claim it as such) (Brahms, 2020). The advocates of the “post-truth thesis”, who differentiate post-truth from traditional lying, have offered various ways to be untruthful (Finlayson, 2019, p. 65). Some counted many ways to be untruthful, while others talked about a specific type of untruthful statements (Finlayson, 2019). For this reason, critics of the post-truth thesis argued that the notion of ‘post-truth’ suffers even more than the concept of ‘truth’ from ambiguity and unclarity (Finlayson, 2019). Thus, post-truth can manifest itself in many district forms and, in some cases, it can combine many different forms of post-truth. Therefore, to understand the post-truth, we must first distinguish different forms of post-truth. This way, we can more clearly observe the validity of the claim that truth or more specifically factual truth has lost its power in public sphere.

5.2.1. Affective dimension of post-truth and emotions' dominance over reason

According to Finlayson (2019, p. 65), one alleged form of post-truth consists of the idea that “people’s beliefs - in particular, those relevant to politics - have lost their previous contact with reality”. According to this view, people adopt not only untruthful beliefs but also lose the compass that directs them toward truth and embrace other guides such as “emotion, or political ‘fashion’” (Finlayson, 2019, p. 66). Arias-Maldonado (2020) argues that the correct use of human reason is obstructed through emotions, and post-truth is the manifestation of this phenomenon. Those individuals tend to evaluate the validity of the statements by the emotive comfort they bring rather than the factuality of their content (Arias-Maldonado, 2020). Therefore, Arias-Maldonado (2020, p. 69) state that “post-truth can thus be seen as an unconscious strategy of reception: a way of sorting factual information and normative arguments according to feelings that mostly account for our tribal affiliation”. MacMullen (2019, p. 5) calls this form of post-truth as “unconscious post-factualism” mainly because the individuals who suffer from this form of post-truth do not adopt a consciously hostile attitude toward truthfulness, but rather they tend to adopt questionable epistemic authorities as their source of knowledge because of their proximity to their prejudices or political preferences and interests. They prefer to accept faulty claims if they correspond to their own anecdotal experiences (MacMullen, 2019). So, the citizens who suffer from this form of post-factualism are influenced by several cognitive biases and consider those who share similar political values as trustworthy sources of empirical knowledge, whereas those who have opposite political beliefs are deemed as untrustworthy also concerning their empirical claims (MacMullen, 2019). Thus, the unconscious post-factualism is marked by political tribalism that influences one’s political epistemology (MacMullen, 2019). Those who are unconsciously post-factual have a faulty epistemic attitude and adopt untrustworthy sources as epistemic authorities just because they share similar beliefs and they feel validated by the emotional comfort this brings (MacMullen, 2019). They avoid their opponents’ knowledge claims. If they are also trapped in their epistemic bubbles, this phenomenon also reinforces itself (MacMullen, 2019).

Finlayson (2019) points out the history to reject the novelty of post-truth promoted by this thesis. She argues that the society that vehemently rejected the emancipation of women and slaves was not any less emotional than our contemporaries (Finlayson, 2019). They strictly tried to protect their social position not only for material gains but also for emotional reasons (Finlayson, 2019). It may be argued that a change occurred as a matter of quantity rather than essence, but this argument also remains widely speculative. Are pro-slavery people less motivated by their emotions than the present populace excited by populist appeal to emotions (Finlayson, 2019)? Of course, it would be absurd to claim that the advocates of the post-truth thesis do not notice this self-contradiction in their argument. Thus, Finlayson (2019, p.67) argues that what the advocates of the post-truth thesis want to return is a “modified Whiggish view of history”, the belief that societies linearly advance to a better future by the guidance of “enlightenment, rationality, and freedom”. For them, the post-truth phenomenon signifies a sudden rupture in the course of history which was disturbed due to many “innovations such as social media” (Finlayson, 2019, p. 67).

Therefore, it is argued that because post-truth people no longer formulate their beliefs after reason and reality, but rather they are influenced by their emotions and other irrationalities and biases, facts lose their determining role in opinion formation (Finlayson, 2019). However, according to Finlayson (2019), the ‘pre-post truth’ world is also marked by injustices and exploitation, which signifies that a revolt against the neoliberal order has legitimate reasons because if the socio-political order was working, the so-called phenomenon of post-truth would not emerge. Thus, Finlayson (2019) claims that this thesis suffers from multiple self-contradictions. If the previous political system was functioning well, why would people want to escape from reality? Furthermore, if we start to question the “epistemic competence” of citizens, democracy would enter into a serious crisis of legitimacy (Finlayson, 2019, p.68).

5.2.2. Post truth as ‘indifference towards truth’

Unlike the unconscious post-factualism, MacMullen (2019) classifies three other forms of post-truth where citizens adopt consciously problematic attitudes toward truth

in politics. “Motivational post-factualism” is one of these forms where affected individuals accept the notion of truthfulness and factuality in politics, but they simply “do not much care” about the truth value of the statements (MacMullen, 2019, p. 9).

As MacMullen (2019, p. 10) states, for these citizens, “Politics is a matter of what feels good and right and of rooting for one’s team”. For this reason, they prefer to enjoy political statements that support their political tribalism and give them emotive joy instead of caring about whether these statements correspond to factual reality or not (MacMullen, 2019). The populists who adopt this motivational approach of post-truth can use it to reject the facts provided by the experts who are deemed as the outside group (MacMullen, 2019).

Finlayson (2019, p.69) associates this form of indifference toward truth with the concept of “bullshit”, which is a term coined by Harry Frankfurt in his book *On Bullshit*. A “bullshitter” is different from a “liar” (Brahms, 2020, p. 4). Both liars and bullshitters hide some things and try to convince the masses that their claims are true (Brahms, 2020). Liars recognize that there is a distinction between what is true and false and want to hide the truth behind falsehoods (Brahms, 2020). However, bullshitters do not see any difference between truth and falsehood or simply do not care about it (Brahms, 2020). They want to appear as truthful while being utterly apathetic about it (Brahms, 2020). So, if liars are caught red-handed, they are forced to accept the truth (Brahms, 2020). However, bullshitters in the same scenario simply double down and continue to utter their claim (Brahms, 2020).

Finlayson (2019, p. 70) gives an example of “bullshit” with Trump’s aide Kelly-Anne Conway’s insistence that the White House press secretary did not lie about the number of participants in Trump’s inaugural speech but that he simply offered “alternative facts” despite clear photographic counter-evidences. Finlayson (2019) claims that politicians downplaying their lies after being exposed is nothing new, so she argues that bullshit also appears to be similar to classical lies. However, the proponents of this type of post-truth thesis counter claim that what is novel is that the indifference toward truth is not only present in bullshitters themselves but also in those who receive

these lies and simply do not care about their truth (Finlayson, 2019). Therefore, it is special in the sense that the indifference towards truth is noticeable in both the bullshitter and the receivers (Finlayson, 2019). However, Finlayson (2019) argues that the indifference towards these lies, like the numbers of supporters in the rally, does not show us that they no longer care about truth at all.¹⁵ It simply shows us that this specific fact is not that important in the broader picture (Finlayson, 2019). People support Trump for his broader messages and his promises like “make America great again” (Finlayson, 2019, p.70). That specific lie seems to them of minor importance. So, the truth they care for is situated somewhere different. However, even if we accept Finlayson’s argument here, it will only mean that the receivers of “bullshit” are not entirely indifferent to the concept of truth. However, the fact that they ignore certain inconvenient facts will be certified, and according to the definition of McIntyre, who defines post-truth as more of an arbitrary hierarchy put between facts, this phenomenon can be labeled as post-truth.

According to Hannon (2022), the claim that they do not care about truth is not true at all; they just take these unfounded ‘bullshits’ as factual statements. Thus, Hannon (2022, p.2-3) argues that the idea of “wholesale abandonment of truth” mischaracterizes those who believe in these untruthful statements. He argues that “we cannot kill the idea of truth, but our respect for truthfulness might be dying” (Hannon, 2022, p.23). He locates the untruthful attitude of these citizens in the epistemic conduct (Hannon, 2022). In a way, we can say that Hannon (2022) does not believe in motivational post-factualism at least in the end of the receivers, who simply suffer from an unconscious post-factualism. For example, Blackburn (as cited in Hannon, 2022, p. 4) who believes that the problem originates from the lack of ‘sincerity’ of politicians suggests that “post-shame” and “post-trust” are better terms to use. If the

¹⁵ Read (2019, p. 83) questions whether we can be sure that they have “a ‘standard’ factual attitude to the ‘promise’ to ‘make America great again’”. They may be just motivated by rhetoric alone and its emotive effects. Furthermore, if he is permitted to lie, how can they be sure that he will not lie about this promise too? (Read, 2019) Furthermore, Read (2019, p. 84) offers another interpretation that deems this phenomenon as dangerous: a “slippery slope towards fascism”, which combined “populism” with “emotive subjectivism”. He says that those Trump supporters go beyond ignoring the lies but actively enjoy it because they see it as a “sign of strength”, and they “despise” truth and the notion of searching for truth and preserving the truth because they see politics as a struggle for power, and any action that trouble their enemies is a correct action. (p. 84)

politicians increasingly refer to lies and bullshits, then as an inevitable consequence, the public can be heavily desensitized to care about truth and instead prefer emotional comfort (Hannon, 2022). Furthermore, a real crisis of trustworthiness of expertise also emerges, in which public no longer possesses the tools to find trustworthy experts. Finlayson (2019) argues that they no longer acknowledge evidence presented by the experts, which means that they no longer recognize their specific epistemic authority; it does not mean that they reject concepts such as truth and evidence altogether.

Hannon (2022) also questions whether the problem posed by bullshitters does not emanate from their lack of sincerity but rather from an opposite perception by the audience, namely the perception of an excess of sincerity. According to this view, by stating falsehoods clearly and unabashedly, bullshitters create in the audience the impression of a politician who does not try to fit in the established image of politicians who must report factual truths and who regularly lies and appears as someone who is genuinely showing his inner self (Hannon, 2022). Furthermore, if the truth is difficult to find, then it is easier to accept someone who is at least showing sincerity, and this appeal to sincerity influences citizens that accept all types of conscious forms of post-truth whether motivational, metaphysical, or epistemological (Hannon, 2022). When the truth is in question, accepting views of someone who is ‘sincere’ appears to be a good alternative (Hannon, 2022).

5.2.3. Post-truth as a rejection of objective and universal truth

The “metaphysical post-factualism” advocates the idea that if “empirical propositions (in politics, at least) rarely, if ever, have a truth value, at least in the universal sense that has traditionally been associated with the concept of truth” (MacMullen, 2019, p.7). The proponents of this form of post-truth do not need to denounce truth altogether; they can also be against the dominant correspondence theory of truth and advocate another theory of truth, like coherence theory of truth (MacMullen, 2019). However, ‘relativism’ as a theory of truth is accused as the view that most contributes to the phenomenon (MacMullen, 2019). Philosophically speaking, relativism defines truth as “relative to something” due to various factors such as culture or society

(Finlayson, 2019, p. 73). The total rejection of the concept of 'truth' is different from relativism, but it is also viewed by those who defend the post-truth thesis as something that inspires the post-truth phenomena. According to these people, the rejection of positivism ("view that there are facts") can also propagate post-truth (Finlayson, 2019, p. 72). They can also adopt the relativistic correspondence theory of truth, in which "the truth of a proposition *for me* (or us) consists in its correspondence to my personal (or my group's) experiences and/or feelings" (MacMullen, 2019, p. 8).

As discussed earlier, Arendt argued that opinions must be built upon facts to regulate opinions against lies. However, if someone rejects the factual reality, a liar can easily disguise their lie as an opinion and can argue that their opinion deserves to be protected by the freedom of speech paramount to democracies (Brahms, 2020). These liars can argue that what they say is just an opinion among all other opinions, and as an opinion, it is immune to attacks from counterfactual evidences. So, according to Arendt, if used nefariously, opinions can even be more dangerous to the facts than the lies themselves, because untruthful opinions are more difficult to spot compared to open lies (Brahms, 2020). Some perpetrators of post-truth may adopt the view that facts can never be fully objective as they necessitate subjective interpretation and as such, they are "blurring (the lines) between fact and opinion" (Brahms, 2020, p. 3). The necessity of subjective interpretation is certainly true. If someone says that the 'refugees are committing crimes in our country', the claim will be factually true in the sense that it is inevitable that there are some criminals in a wide group of people. However, for example, if their rate of crime is lower than the native population's crime rate, then this claim will not be as meaningful as it pretends to be. Nevertheless, as an 'opinion', it will still hold some sort of legitimacy in the public domain. There is still a place for objective truth, a more precise erroneous factual claim like "80% of reported crimes were committed by the refugees". On the other hand, it is easier to spot and repudiate a lie and it cannot be transformed into an opinion unless the objective factual reality is not denied. Post-truth manifests itself in the statements that claim to be just an opinion but also claim to portray the factual reality itself in the absence of a common ground for reality.

For this reason, Bufacchi (2021, p. 349) argues that statements that refer to a “fact” rather than a “concept” (in the previous example the alleged criminal nature of immigrants compared to specific criminal statistics) are more dangerous and prone to post-truth because as Bufacchi (2021, p.349) says “this is what post-truth does: it does not simply deny or question certain facts, but it aims to undermine the theoretical infrastructure that makes it possible to have a conversation about the truth”. Arendt claims that modern lies occur in this context where the liar deceives, unlike in the case of traditional lie, not only others but also oneself; it transforms the whole factual reality to fit the erroneous claim. Bufacchi (2021) argues that what Arendt meant with the modern lie is closer to post-truth. She does not use that term simply because at that time this concept has not existed yet. For this reason, Arendt occupies an important role in the post-truth literature as she foresaw this development. However, she mainly focused on totalitarian regimes as the source of this phenomenon (she did not say it is impossible to be seen in liberal democracies; she predicted the role mass media would play in realizing this transformation of factual reality). Still, she could not predict the advent of social media and the surge of information whether true or not. The way post-truth affects the factual reality is different for liberal democracies and totalitarian regimes. In totalitarian regimes, post-truth is realized through the complete suppression and elimination of inconvenient facts and its replacement through a new state-sanctioned truth and shared reality. However, in the case of liberal democracies, the truth is distorted through an explosion of erroneous information, making the recognition of truth difficult or trivializing it as just one piece of information in this vast sea of information.

Arendt also argues that opinions must be backed by factual evidence, and politics can only operate in boundaries set by factual reality. For the proponents of this type of post-truth, there is no real difference between facts and opinion. All of them require some kind of interpretation, and they entirely depend on the individuals’ whims. Lee McIntyre (2018) argues that what is new in the post-truth phenomenon is not refuting the truth or the facts themselves, but rather establishing a hierarchy between facts in accordance with our existing prejudices or perspective on things. Therefore, considering the previous examples, it can be stated that if someone tends to believe

that refugees present a menace against society, then they will prefer the fact that there are criminals among the mass of refugees over the fact that the average rate of crime among refugees is lower compared to the rate of crime among citizens. So, for the proponents of post-truth, opinions must not be based on facts but rather facts must support personal beliefs.

The relativism that post-truthers adhere according to this post-truth thesis is a form of relativism that is distinct from philosophers' understanding (Finlayson, 2019). The version of relativism professed by post truthers advocates that "everyone gets to determine their truth; what it means for something to be 'true' is simply that I have decided that "it is true", a sort of "subjectivism" (Finlayson, 2019, p. 73). Instead of not caring about the truth, you simply adjust the truth to your advantage (Finlayson, 2019). Finlayson (2019, p. 73) claims that we cannot know, whether people are increasingly adopting this relativist view or not because people do not generally talk about grand questions about the "nature", the "status", or the "availability" of the concept of truth. They issue 'first-order' statements about whether certain things in certain contexts are true or not (Finlayson, 2019). So, by analyzing the truthfulness of particular statements, we cannot determine people's views regarding the concept of truth (Finlayson, 2019).

For the thesis to hold, Finlayson (2019) argues that they must show that people begin to stick to their belief dogmatically as the sole truth and disdain others' views and evidence. Echo chambers argument employed in this context claims that when like-minded individuals gather together, they become increasingly detached from any forms of criticism and begin to adhere more strictly to their own beliefs (Finlayson, 2019). Finlayson (2019, p. 74) argues that this is not relativism, but rather "a more mundane narrow-mindedness". Finlayson (2019) says there is nothing new about this exaggerated 'echo chamber' phenomenon. Even before the rise of social media, people gathered their knowledge and beliefs from sources they deemed trustworthy such as their close friends and relatives (Finlayson, 2019). Furthermore, on the contrary, social media's accessibility to larger audiences means that inevitably individuals with

opposing thoughts could gather and leave comments that would oppose the echo chamber's prevalent views (Finlayson, 2019).

5.2.4. Post-truth as extreme skepticism toward the concept of truth

MacMullen (2019, p. 11) argues that there is another form of post-factualism, which he calls "epistemic post-factualism". In this form of post-truth, the citizens care about the truth value of political statements concerning empirical facts (MacMullen, 2019). However, they argue that it is impossible for them to truly know the truth value of these empirical facts (MacMullen, 2019). Citizens who have this type of post-truth attitude will think that either they are not knowledgeable enough to know the truth or that no one has enough qualifications to know it (MacMullen, 2019). They can also argue that there can be some epistemic authorities that know the truth; however, if there is any even the most minor contestation about the truth values of those propositions, then for them it becomes impossible to know which epistemic authority is telling the truth (MacMullen, 2019). Furthermore, they adopt the idea that every epistemic authority is marked by their own biases, and they move according to their interests (MacMullen, 2019). Therefore, this form of post-factualism is very easy to combine with motivational post-factualism. If all epistemic authorities have biases, why not pick the one you agree with and which will bring the most emotive support (MacMullen, 2019)? Furthermore, advocating your lack of expertise can be seen as a form of honesty and paradoxically gives you more credibility (MacMullen, 2019). If there is no truly neutral and independent epistemic authority, picking the one who truly admits their own deficiencies makes it easier to connect with the politician emotionally, and also, if there is no way to know the truth, not bothering with it all together can be seen as something positive (MacMullen, 2019). Populist politicians benefit immensely from this attitude towards truth. They bring down mainstream epistemic authorities to their level by repudiating all sources of knowledge. They achieve an equal playing field, in which whether you accept a proposition depends entirely on your tribal allegiance and emotive feedback. For this reason, accusations of "fake news" does not only aim against a specific media outlet, but rather it serves the idea that there is no trustworthy source of information (MacMullen, 2019, p. 14).

Unlike the unconscious post-factualism, in epistemic post-factualism, the citizens do not discredit solely their opponents' trustworthiness regarding knowledge claims (MacMullen, 2019). They can easily admit their deficiencies in that regard (MacMullen, 2019). Therefore, instead of favoring their own personal epistemologies and ways of acquiring knowledge, they view that bothering with the truthfulness of truth claims is a waste of time, and thus, acting in a motivational way and taking partisan sources are simply easier and less pain-inducing (MacMullen, 2019).

What is supposedly new in this general wave of post-truth is that it fosters a "radically post-factual political culture" (MacMullen, 2019, p.18). It challenges the idea of political liberalism that there can be facts accepted by every citizen. The once commonly held belief that if multiple sources claim the truthfulness of some empirical facts, then it must be true, is no longer valid (MacMullen, 2019). The consensus reached by these parties in the eyes of post-factual citizens will appear as an indication that there is a deep conspiracy going on or that they simply share the same values and interests, therefore warranting their cooperation (MacMullen, 2019). For this reason, criticisms against political candidates will appear as a malicious attack that validates the beliefs about these sources' biases and untrustworthiness (MacMullen, 2019). Upon discussing many different forms of post-truth, now I will examine many possible causes that have contributed to the birth of the post-truth phenomenon.

5.3. Reasons for the emergence of the post truth

Scholars struggle to understand the reasons for the emergence of post-truth. It appears to have been influenced by many different domains. In this subsection, I dwell on many different possible explanations that range from socio-political developments to philosophical explications.

5.3.1. Post-truth as a product of neoliberalism and its promotion of ‘personalized truths’

Contrary to Finlayson’s claims that post-truth is nothing new, Read (2019, p. 81) argues that it is something “relatively” new but “neither radically new nor brand new”. He agrees that nothing radical and unprecedented has happened in recent years. The “deeper ideological trends themselves have been going for some time” (Read, 2019, p. 82). Nevertheless, it can be said to be new compared to the whole philosophical tradition (Read, 2019). What happened is that these existing trends have gained more momentum (Read, 2019). He says that “neoliberalism” created something novel and “exceptional” and “an attitude of individualism or consumerism concerning truth itself” (Read, 2019, p. 82). He argues that we can trace back its origins to political liberalism and philosophically to John Rawls’s doctrine of “indifference to others’ conceptions of the good” (Read, 2019, p.82). While he agrees with Finlayson that the previous political system can be determined as responsible for changing the epistemic attitudes of the people, there are other factors as well such as “new forms of propaganda”, “personalized propaganda”, the decline of the public sphere, the politicians that address directly the individual citizens, and the rise of individualism (Read, 2019, p. 91). Read (2019, p. 92) argues that “people have changed their epistemic habits as they internalized the values of liberal individualism and consumerism”, and “post-truth is consumerism as applied to opinions”. Read (2019) further states that people have started to pick their personal truths like they are picking some items to purchase from shops. Individualism and an excessive reverence for personal freedom fuel the rise of post-truth (Read, 2019). He gives the example of climate change denial as the first example of post-truth¹⁶; to protect their consumer rights (climate policies threatened to augment the prices of certain goods and abandonment of some), some people chose to deny man-made climate change which threatens to destroy the world (Read, 2019). During the pandemic we saw that a large number of people rejected to wear masks and get vaccinated in the name of ‘individual rights’. He argues that these absurd cases of denialism can only occur in neoliberal

¹⁶ Strandberg (2019), argues that it is impossible not to care about the potential destruction of the planet, so rather than a problem of indifference, it is a problem of self-deception and thus a moral problem. Truth and reason cannot eliminate climate change denialism.

paradigms (Read, 2019). On the other hand, Strandberg (2019, p. 133) argues that those who label post-truthers as ‘stupid’ or ‘absurd’ have an “‘intellectualist’s conception of belief”, which means that belief has a sense, regardless of the roles it plays in our lives. Denialists who live like there is no climate change show us that they do not believe that climate change exists (Strandberg, 2019).

These examples show us a clear rejection of the common good for petty gains and some limits for Rawlsian and Habermasian thought. These individuals fulfill their personal agendas, and with a belief that separates themselves from the public sphere, they follow a certain rationale despite harming both the society and ultimately themselves. This gives birth to the question of whether those individuals must be included in the public sphere and its deliberation or they must be excluded to obstruct the dissemination of these harmful ideas. However, imposing vaccines and mask mandates appears to be restrictive and contrary to individual freedom, so the liberal democracies reach a compromise between controlling the public debate to discourage anti-vaccine opinions on one hand and permitting these unhealthy practices in the name of freedom on the other hand. We see that even liberal democracies that are accused of being technocratic can only operate within certain boundaries set by the public.

5.3.2. The struggles of the correspondence theory of truth in the new information age

Brahms (2020, p. 8) defines the correspondence theory as a theory that “anchors truth in reality” and claims that it needs to fulfill two conditions: first, “it must be possible in principle to find the fact in the world that corresponds to the proposition and determines its truth value”, and secondly “the proposition or the person asserting the proposition must stand in a direct relation to this fact in the world”.

Brahms (2020) argues that although simple propositions are easy to verify, some propositions, for example those regarding national security issues, are not so easy to know. This difficulty is not new to post-truth. Brahms (2020) puts forward that the increase in post-truth phenomenon is mostly due to increasing difficulty of fulfilling

the second criteria. He notes two main reasons: “technology in the information age and the crisis of faith in the “truth tellers” (Brahms, 2020, p. 9).

In our current times, we have exponentially more information in our reach due to the use of new technologies (e.g., “media, the Internet, and social networks”) as a new medium of information; therefore, the amount of information that we do not have direct access to is also exponentially higher compared to previous times where we had less access to information and fewer mediums to carry information, which necessitated a more direct relation with the facts (Brahms, 2020, p. 9). Thus, the correspondence theory of truth faces great challenges in this age of “information explosion”, and to verify the truth, we seek verification by checking the source of information, so we delegate direct access to the fact to the source of information and deem the knowledge true if we find the source has genuine relationship with the fact (Brahms, 2020, p. 9). However, there are instances where the source also does not have a direct link to the fact or it can be a part in the chain of sources (Brahms 2020). Brahms (2020, p. 9) argues that faith in the “truth-tellers” such as “newspapers, the judicial system, academia intelligence agencies, and experts in the various spheres of knowledge” has paramount importance for the correspondence theory of truth. To be sure of the truth of the information, the receiver must know that the top source of the chain has a direct link to the relevant fact and that the information provided by this source remains unaltered when it traverses through the chain of information (Brahms, 2020).

However, the ongoing phenomenon of reducing trust towards these knowledge elites enkindles the post-truth phenomenon as much as it encourages the populist rhetoric. An increasing number of citizens believe that these elites produce knowledge to further their self-interest. Also, the fact that the cases of corruption gain more attraction due to easier access to media further cements this disbelief towards the elites (Brahms, 2020). In addition to these reasons, Brahms (2020, p. 10) adds “fake news, filter bubbles, and echo chambers” as other reasons to strengthen the post-truth phenomenon. Overall, average citizens find themselves in a very difficult situation and unable to differentiate truth from opinion or lie from error, and they tend to refer to their personal beliefs and prejudices towards the sources of information or the

politicians rather than a set of objective facts (Brahms, 2020, p. 10). Thus, Brahms (2020) argues that in our current times, the link between fact and truth advocated by the correspondence theory is even more difficult to establish, and thus post-truth emerges as an inevitable phenomenon.

5.3.3. Technological dimension of post-truth and its role in its emergence

As Arias-Maldonado (2020) writes:

Post-truth refers to the process whereby truth is searched for in the public sphere, as well as to the influence that such process exerts on the private beliefs of citizens. Therefore, the analysis of this phenomenon must incorporate the digitization of the public sphere. (p.70)

For this reason, the advent of the new socialized mass media is important to clarify. Tribal allegiances carry themselves into this new platform. We stick to groups who share similar beliefs and therefore inadvertently create “echo chambers”, in which people reiterate their similar beliefs without any criticisms (Arias-Maldonado, 2020). New outlets of media have also emerged, which has threatened the monopoly of mainstream media outlets on information. In the face of this phenomenon of increasing choices, the public sphere has become “fragmented” and this process of audience compartmentalization has deprived “citizens of a shared social world” (Arias-Maldonado, 2020, p. 70). To attract more attention to this highly competitive media landscape, media outlets have begun to overdramatize their stories (Arias-Maldonado, 2020). This phenomenon of “emotionalization of news may have undermined the prestige of truth, or at least the citizen’s belief in it” (Arias-Maldonado, 2020, p. 71). Furthermore, old school journalism could have contributed to the emergence of post-truth according to Arias-Maldonado (2020). To highlight their objectivity and impartiality, they emphasize that they differentiate opinion from facts, so they try to include opposing sides of every argument (Arias-Maldonado, 2020). However, Arias-Maldonado (2020) claims that not every opinion has equal weight; however, by doing that, they create the false impression in the public eye that everyone is entitled to their opinions and there is no real distinction among different opinions. For this reason, it is understandable for citizens to ditch media outlets with opposing views and focus on media outlets that promote similar ideas with their own (Arias-Maldonado, 2020).

“Fake news” emerges in this context (Arias-Maldonado, 2020, p.71). On one side, they serve to confuse the media environment with the explosion of erroneous information and on the other side, they provide an outlet for those who want to validate their own beliefs (Arias-Maldonado, 2020). Citizens, who have now new tools such as fake news in their pockets, spread it within their communities with more ease due to the convenience of social media and increase the fragmentation and division of public spheres and reinforcement of epistemic bubbles (Arias-Maldonado, 2020).

Thus, many claim that “digitization changes the *reach and range* of false news, biased information, and fringed views. They can travel farther than before, sharing space with the mainstream and blurring the boundaries that used to separate them” (Arias-Maldonado, 2020, p. 71).

However, many scholars reject the idea that social media has impacted the polarization of the public. Old citizens who consume old partisan media were not less in an echo chamber than those who consume new media outlets (Arias-Maldonado, 2020). Furthermore, in the space of the Internet, you have exponentially more chance to encounter opposing views compared to old media outlets (Arias-Maldonado, 2020). Gentzkow and Shapiro (2011, as cited in Arias-Maldonado, 2020) found in their studies that centrist news outlet generates more views compared to extremist news outlets. Furthermore, exposure to opposing views have increased not decreased; however, Arias-Maldonado (2020) stresses that this exposure does not automatically mean that citizens now interact more rationally with this news. Moreover, even if the public receives the same factual information, the interpretations of this news can create wildly different outcomes, and echo chambers can provide an environment in which those with similar interpretations can gather together (Arias-Maldonado, 2020). Thus, Arias-Maldonado (2020) writes:

In this context, technology both enables and multiplies the effects associated to a mass public debate where rumors and fakes have more reach and circulate more rapidly, while at the same time like-minded people can connect more easily. Strictly speaking, none of this is new. But these communicative distortions, most of which are inherent to communication, are technologically enhanced in the digital media landscape. In this context, post-truth can prosper. (p.73)

5.3.4. Alleged post-modernist roots of post-truth

Truth is not that easy to determine. For this reason, post-truth has had a chance to emerge. Quine's thesis on underdetermination showed us that "the same set of empirical data can support different and even contradicting scientific theories". This thesis can be applied to political matters as well (Brahms, 2020, p. 14). Thus, a successful narrative cannot be determined by simply referring to facts alone (Brahms, 2020).

According to Steve Fuller (2017, as cited in Brahms, 2020), what differentiates the post-truth era from the previous ones is that the main point of contention moved from discussing what is true or not to the discussion of how we can determine truth and who are qualified to do so. It has become a political battle to select who holds the power to determine the truth (Brahms, 2020). Similarly, McIntyre (2018, p. 13) claims that "post-truth relationship to facts occurs only when we are seeking to assert something more important to us than the truth itself". He argues that post-truth is used to force others to adopt our beliefs without questioning whether it is supported by credible evidence or not, so he characterizes post-truth as a form of "ideological supremacy" employed to obtain "political domination" (McIntyre, 2018, p. 13).

In the post-truth era, the political battle regarding the status of knowledge authority is waged between the current knowledge elites (scholars, journalists, scientists, judges) and those who oppose them, i.e., populists who advocate alternative narratives. As much as democracy rejects "brute force" as a means of grabbing power, it cannot eliminate those who want to grab the power; thus, those who want power must deceive others and hide their intent for power behind other ideals (Strandberg, 2019, p. 136). Otherwise, no charade would be necessary and they would simply grab power using brute force (Strandberg, 2019).

A large group of academicians consider post-modernism as the reason why relativism and post-truth have gained power. While post-modernist philosophers themselves vehemently deny these allegations, many scholars of post-truth like Dennett,

McIntyre, and D’Ancona accuse postmodernism of causing the emergence of post-truth (Brahms, 2020). As Brahms (2020, p. 11) says, “postmodernism is elusive and difficult, if not impossible to define. It denotes a period or the sentiments of a period, and more than one idea or theory”. It is motivated by major themes such as “opposition to major ideologies, meta-narratives, and the establishment’s control over science, knowledge, and truth” (Brahms, 2020, p. 11). Generally, critics of post-modernism accuse postmodernism of rejecting a singular objective truth and adopting instead “a multitude of subjective and relative truth” (Brahms, 2020, p. 11). Similarly, they say that for postmodernists, there is no one objectively true scientific theory or narrative but instead there are various theories that originate from different perspectives (Brahms, 2020).

For post-modernists, a text can also be interpreted in many different ways depending on different readers’ subjective perspectives, so there is no one true meaning for the texts. Some social scientists have applied that principle to humans and argued that human beings can be interpreted differently from different socio-cultural perspectives (Brahms, 2020). Social constructivists like Latour argue that science cannot only be explained by reverence for objective facts. Scientists are also humans; therefore, they add their personal perspectives to their work. For this reason, a single meta-narrative or truth cannot explain how scientific enterprises work (McIntyre, 2018, as cited in Brahms, 2020). So, postmodernists reject the criticisms that they reject the existence of facts or factual truth. They instead argue that facts cannot be explained by one “objective” narrative, but they can be explained by different subjective narratives (Brahms, 2020, p.12). They argue “that the objective factual truth is not always enough to decide between the various theories and narratives, and that other, more subjective types of truth are applied too, such as the coherent truth and the pragmatic truth” (Brahms, 2020, p. 12). Brahms (2020) puts forward that after noting the difficulties of the correspondence theory of the truth, the approach of postmodernists does appear to be more reasonable.

Postmodernists argue that the fact that their ideas were used to reject factual truths in favor of opinion-based subjective truths is not their fault; the culprit is not the ideas

themselves but the abusers (Brahms, 2020). Postmodernist philosophers like Micheal Lynch and Bruno Latour argue that they do not reject the existence of facts or truth (Brahms, 2020). They simply argue that these facts are constructed through subjective perspectives, so there is no objectivity without any subjective imprint (Brahms, 2020). Arendt, who also agrees with postmodernists that facts cannot be known without any subjective interpretation and understood through individual perspectives, also claims that we “can only rearrange the facts, but cannot alter them” (Brahms, 2020, p. 13). Even McIntyre concedes that those who promote the advancement of the post-truth phenomenon use distorted interpretations of postmodernist ideas without sufficient knowledge of them, simply as tools for their agenda (Brahms, 2020). MacMullen (2019, p. 9) claims that McIntyre noticed two important claims in postmodernist philosophy: “(1) there are no objective truths, and (2) all truth claims are exercises in power”. However, he failed to see that these two claims do not necessarily warrant each other, and one simply can accept one of the claims without accepting the other claim, so one can highlight the role of power in the scientific enterprise without also advocating for the rejection of objectivity (MacMullen, 2019).

5.3.5. A possible origin for the emergence of post-truth in political consensus

Bufacchi (2021, p. 352) argues that we must consider the “consent theory of truth” as the main culprit for the rise of the popularity of post-truth. As discussed in previous chapters, John Rawls distinguished himself from the traditional correspondence theory of truth and argued that truth as a concept is very divisive and therefore not fit to employ as a justification in public debate. He instead elevated the concept of ‘reasonableness’ and favored ‘reasonable consensus’ as an ideal end to reach public deliberation (Bufacchi, 2021). However, Habermas¹⁷ goes even further and “advances a theory where consensus is the final quest of human communication, human communication is grounded on a commitment to an ideal speech situation and ideal speech theory is the constitutive condition of rational speech” (Bufacchi, 2021, p. 352). Habermas viewed truth as a “validity claim” and also as a struggle to reach an

¹⁷ Although the consensus theory of truth was previously endorsed by Habermas, he abandoned it in his later writings. In this context, whether Habermas still endorses it or not is not that important. What is important is showing that post-truth can also appropriate this theory of truth for its own purpose.

agreement among all participants of the public sphere, from which no one can be excluded (Bufacchi, 2021, p. 352). For Habermas, rationality dictates consensus and truth as consensus is the ultimate aim of communication (Bufacchi, 2021, p. 353). A consensus can be reached in “an ideal speech situation (where) all the parties involved are committed to a search for a normative consensus produced by rationally cogent reasons and the legitimacy of a better argument” (Bufacchi, 2021, p. 353).

Bufacchi (2021) cites an objection cited by Alessandro Ferrara against the consent theory of truth. Ferrara (1987 as cited in Bufacchi, 2021) argues that there is no guarantee that only the best argument is recognized as the consensus. We can reach multiple different consensuses from an ideal speech environment (Bufacchi, 2021). To illustrate his argument, Ferrara (1987, as cited in Bufacchi, 2021, p. 353) argues that "we could have two contexts of scientific debate in which consensus was eventually reached, but in the first situation the participants were motivated solely by a cooperative search for truth although their relations were largely asymmetrical, whereas in the second case the participants had almost equal chances to use the various kinds of speech acts, yet were also more strategically minded". According to Bufacchi (2021), this illustrates that through rational consensus, we can reach not only truth but also post-truth. Bufacchi (2021, p. 354) posits that “post-truth uses the arsenals of truth against truth itself, in other words, post-truth ironically finds validation in theories of truth. Post-truth appeals to the notion of consensus in order to weaken consensus around the truth”. Populists can argue that they have reached a consensus among themselves and could discredit others’ consensus about truth. Bufacchi (2021) states that political forces try to fabricate consent by advocating messages that will influence the will of the public to their advantage. He argues that as Arendt says, politicians fear the truth because they cannot control truth; thus, they can create post-truth via consensus in the same way truth is created (Bufacchi, 2021). So, truth and post-truth originate from the same source, which explains why post-truth has become an object of discussion even if we claim that post-truth is less refined than truth (Bufacchi, 2021).

After reviewing the alleged forms of post-truth and its causes, now I focus on the criticisms against the post-truth thesis and rhetoric, its relevancy, and even its existence.

5.4. Rejection of the post-truth rhetoric

Some philosophers argue that the post-truth thesis does not present itself as a revolutionary conceptual tool to understand its referent. They argue that lies and untruths were also impactful in the past in a similar capacity. They claim that defining post-truth as a departure from prior fact-based reality and epistemology is not true. Hannon (2022, p. 6) states that “the idea of ‘post-truth’ implies a nostalgia for an age of facts, a time when politics supposedly had little to do with emotions or personal opinions and instead revolved around evidence, objectivity, and rationality”, but for these critics, these assumptions are simply not true. They argue that we must criticize the prior truth regime and its epistemological assumptions about truth and formulate better ways to gain a better insight into this specific phenomenon referred to as ‘post-truth’.

Hannon (2022, p. 7) distinguishes “post-truth discourse”, which refers to “first-order epistemic problems with contemporary political discourse” from “post-truth rhetoric”, which he defines “as second-order discourse about political discourse”. So, post-truth discourse focuses directly on the epistemological deficiencies in the current epistemological order, whereas post-truth rhetoric takes the first-order statements as given and ground their arguments on the assumed state of post-truth in our current political epistemology (Hannon, 2022). He argues that those who accuse others of practicing post-truth statements themselves are committed to “a form of toxic political discourse”, so the post-truth rhetoric is problematic in itself (Hannon, 2022, p. 7). The first problem he notices is that the claims that “we live in a post-truth world” can rarely be “politically neutral” (Hannon, 2022, p.7). They are propagated after political events such as the election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States or the victory of leave campaign on Brexit (Hannon, 2022). Lamenting the advent of post-truth thus is the expression of grief for those who could not possibly understand the

result of these political events; therefore, it is rather a sign that they do not understand the world compared to those who they accuse of post-truth (Hannon, 2022). Furthermore, their accusations serve a political purpose (Hannon, 2022). It debases their adversaries by associating them with irrationality, untruth, and moral decay (Hannon, 2022). Therefore, Hannon (2022, p. 8) argues that the concept of post-truth is “deeply normative” and it is used to establish an “epistemic authority” over others; it delegitimizes its opponents and declares them unworthy of participating in public discourse due to their alleged epistemic deficiencies.

Hannon (2022) claims that the proponents of the post-truth thesis hold the idea that truth is easy to reach if one follows correct epistemic steps and has the intention to do it. However, according to Hannon (2022), what they do not understand is that the problem is not mainly an epistemological one but rather an ideological one. First, Hannon (2022) argues that using unreliable sources of knowledge is not a sign of irrationality. Both sides pick an epistemic authority to trust. Picking a faulty one is not a problem of “reasoning itself”, but rather a problem of picking bad evidence to arrive erroneous conclusions (Hannon, 2022, p.8). Furthermore, in modern democratic societies, we debate about very complex problems, and their solutions can never be straightforward (Hannon, 2022). There will always be some sacrifices to be made, so asserting that truth and optimal policy-making are obvious would be ignoring the complexities of our issues (Hannon, 2022). Truth, no matter how self-evident it appears to be, can change (Hannon, 2022). As we stated earlier, for a slaveholder society, their self-evident truth would definitely not be abolitionism (Hannon, 2022). They erroneously believe that with the same pieces of evidence, everyone who is morally and intellectually apt enough can reach the same truth (Hannon, 2022). Otherwise, there must be a problem in their moral character or in their intelligence, but in reality, reaching truth is not that simple as they assume to be. In addition, public disagreement is something to be expected to happen (Hannon, 2022).

There is another important point that the proponents of the post-truth thesis forget: individuals who hold different normative values can evaluate “scientific claims” differently (Hannon, 2022, p. 9) As Hannon (2022) states, if people are affected

negatively economically by environmental policies that aim to fight climate change, they could adopt a more strict evaluation toward the claims of the severity of climate change, because fighting climate change simply would not be their priority, or in their interest. Hannon (2022) argues that emphasizing the need to respect facts or science does not solve many things. Those who are accused of post-truth tend to refer to competing evidence or experts as well; the real solution can only be found in a political discussion (Hannon, 2022). As Jasanoff and Simmett (2017, as cited in Hannon, 2022, p.10) claim, “to say that facts speak for themselves is to live in a ‘post-value ’world that ignores contention and questioning as the very stuff of a democracy that has always connected public facts with public values”.

Thus, Hannon (2022, p. 10) puts forward that post-truth rhetoric is problematic not simply epistemologically but also “morally and politically”. It pushes aside its opponents outside of political discourse by belittling their intelligence and claims a monopoly on true knowledge (Hannon, 2022). In virtue of the supposed epistemic superiority, they view themselves as justified to impose their views and way of life on others, and it divides the public between “the informed elite” and “the misguided masses” (Hannon, 2022, p. 10) This perceived sense of self-superiority and the arrogance it provokes irritates populists and bolsters their revolt against the elites. It further divides the public into two camps, and each side accuses others of dishonesty and moral decay. Hannon (2022) emphasizes the irony of the post-truth rhetoric. On one hand, they reject post-truth as an attack against democracy, but on the other hand, they justify restricting opposing views that are deemed untruthful (Hannon, 2022). Thus, populists can feel self-vindicated in their belief that they are the true defenders of democracy against the usurpation by an outgroup of elites, who restrict access to truth and political participation.

Another morally wrong consequence of accusing others with post-truth is that it implies irrationality in those accused. Those who are accused will think that their views are not only being rejected but also being ignored because they are characterized as ‘irrational’ (Falomi, 2019). This claim can be used to exclude others from the community of rational beings, by glorifying truth and rationality. It may be used to

disqualify the opposition from establishment (Falomi, 2019). As a reaction, others may reject the concept of rationality entirely, ironically making claims that elites are truthful, further exacerbating the problem (Falomi, 2019). Left-wing populists, thus, argue that the flaws of the current political epistemology must be recognized, and the anti-populist rhetorics and the denigration of post-truth must not be used to silence the legitimate voices of the oppressed and hide the flaws of the political system (Falomi, 2019).

Therefore, according to Hannon (2022), the talks about post-truth indicates an ideological problem rather than an epistemological one. The adherents of the post-truth thesis assert this alleged problem of post-truth and undermine their political rivals on the basis of epistemic and moral qualifications to advance their political agendas (Hannon, 2022). This only serves to increase the political polarization between different camps by deteriorating the respect towards the plurality of opinions and the respect for the equality of citizens (Hannon, 2022). As Hannon (2022, p. 14) states, “it is a politically toxic neologism because it purports to use the language of ‘truth’ as a weapon against power, yet these truth claims are often themselves attempts to exert power over others by delegitimizing their perspectives (It was exactly this worry that animated writers like Nietzsche, Foucault and Arendt)”. As Arendt claimed, those who perpetuate post-truth rhetoric use the coercive nature of truth to impose their perspective despite others. They minimize the role of opinions and the search for meaning in favor of a unified sense of truth, which is highly problematic against the fact of pluralism of opinions which must be protected in liberal democracies.

To conclude, post-truth as an antagonist to truth is a powerful weapon used by politicians and mostly by populist ones. Whether we argue that it is a new phenomenon or an always-existing one, it poses a serious challenge against the assumption that we can reach truth consistently in the political domain. If we see it as a recent development, the picture is more optimistic. We can examine the recent changes that have provoked this phenomenon. These changes may be the advent of social media, an unlimited number of news sources, and consequently an overall decrease in quality combined with citizens’ unrestricted access to these news sources, echo chambers, a

possible change in the epistemic attitude of citizens, changes in political communication, or recent changes in our theory of truths and its application.

However, if we argue that post-truth has always existed, we are likely to accept that post-truth will never vanish; we can only hope to reduce its impact. We can blame our theories of truth and suggest alternatives, but ultimately, we conclude that post-truth is not an entirely epistemological problem, but rather a moral and political one. It illustrates the fact that human beings who feel threatened by truth would disregard it to preserve their material or psychological comfort. Some practical solutions that would make its emergence harder can be listed, but if a substantial change that radically transforms the ethical, epistemological, and linguistic conduct of human beings and their acceptance of truth does not eventually occur, post-truth may always remain an important factor in our political discourse. Without any transcendental arbiter to supervise the sanctity of truth which was the reason in prior epistemologies, in a sense we must admit that the disappearance of post-truth can only be a utopian aspiration, not a feasible objective to pursue. Furthermore, as Arendt puts it, we can only see the appearances of objects from individual perspectives even if we share the same world. Reaching truth still proves controversial. Maybe the view that there was a prior time when truth reigned supreme is the real utopian view. The truth was always contested and claiming to hold the truth and demeaning other perspectives is what characterizes the alleged 'post-truth' condition as a weapon against our political rivals. The next chapter focuses on the main alleged culprits of the post-truth condition, the actors who contribute the most to its production and consumption, the populist leaders, and their group of supporters.

CHAPTER 6

POPULISM AND ITS EPISTEMOLOGY

After the electoral success of populist leaders across the globe like the former U.S. President Donald Trump or the Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orban, studies on populism gained attraction in academia. Their relationship with lies and untruth has become a dominant subject of studies. Their tendency to embrace conspiracy theories and rejecting well-established scientific theories have also been points of interest. So, populism has begun to be perceived as closely related to the post-truth condition, another referent of untruth in the political domain. Especially, populist leaders have started to be perceived as the main propagator of post-truth statements in the forms of lies, bullshits, and propaganda across the political domain, and their voter base has begun to be seen as the part of the populace, who possess the most problematic attitude toward truth and truthful attitude.

In this chapter, first, I examine the basic tenets of political populism, its Manichean outlook toward the world, and populists' essential political and epistemic claims. Secondly, I investigate populism's epistemological challenges against the current epistemological order and its guardians, the scientific elites, in the form of science-related populism. As parts of these challenges, populist counter-knowledge and common-based populist epistemology also play a significant role. Then, I observe how the supposed populism-technocracy dichotomy is not that apparent and that populism in its nature cannot be separated from democracy. Finally, I focus on how populist leaders and their supporters communicate and what their relationship with and attitudes towards truth and lies are.

6.1. Political populism

In defining political populism, scholars use different approaches. Some consider it as a political style/form of communication, some as an ideology or discourse, and some as a political strategy and many other types of approaches (socio-economic, popular agency, Laclauan) (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). However, many scholars agree that populism consists of a set of core normative concepts that see the society in a Manichean conflict between morally good people and evil elites over the obtainment of political power (Mede & Schafer, 2020). Scholars that adopt this approach use the so-called “ideational approach”¹⁸ where populism is defined as a thin-centered ideology or a discourse (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p.475). Populism is considered a thin-centered ideology because it lacks intellectual tools that will help to understand the complex issues, and thus it is nearly always used by combining other ideologies, which means that populism can take very distinct forms in different political contexts (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). According to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, p. 6,) “populism must be understood as a kind of mental map through which individuals analyze and comprehend political reality”. It does not offer a very systematic and consistent set of beliefs. Moreover, it can combine opposite ideologies altogether. For this reason, “populism seldom exists in pure form” (Mudde & Schafer, 2017, p. 7, 2017). As an example, it can take the form of left or right-wing populism. However, as Mudde (2004, p. 549) asserts, “Today, populism is again mainly associated with the radical right”. Compared to the year (2004) Mudde wrote this sentence, right-wing populism¹⁹ has gained even more political prominence. Therefore, in this chapter, the term ‘populist’ refers to right-wing populists.

Populism’s main tenets are its “anti-elitism, anti-pluralism and its adulation of the common people” (Collins, Evans, Durant, Weinel, 2020, p. 39). It stands in opposition

¹⁸ I use this definition in regard to “science-related populism” as well.

¹⁹ Studies suggest “that populist/right-wing social media users are more likely to trade in fake news and perhaps more likely to believe fake news, but in any case, are more likely to hang on to fake news in the face of debunking and correction than other partisan groups” (Chambers, 2021, p. 148). This empirical fact alone makes right-wing populism a more dangerous epistemic challenger against ‘truth’ than left-wing populism and consequently more important to examine.

to a pluralist or liberal democracy (Collins et al., 2020). It gains significance in opposition to elitism and pluralism because every political movement, even the most dictatorial ones, claims the consent of the people. Without these opposing concepts, populism would have little meaning (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

The “people” as a term is used as an “empty signifier” because it does not refer to a concrete set of individuals; it rather implies a homogenous and ‘virtuous ’majority in the society that is oppressed by the elites (Mede & Schafer, 2020). Paul Taggart (2000, as cited in Mudde, 2004, p. 545) uses the term “the heartland” as an alternative term to “people”. He defines the heartland as the place “in which, in the populist imagination, a virtuous and unified population resides” (Paul Taggart, 2000, as cited in Mudde, 2004, p. 545). This helps us to understand that “the people in the populist propaganda are neither real nor all-inclusive, but are a mythical and constructed subset of the whole population” (Mudde, 2004, p.546).

This homogeneity gives birth to a common “popular will”, and its immediate and unmediated expression in the political arena is the ultimate goal of political populism (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p.476). The term ‘elites’ is also a vague concept that is marked by moral wickedness (Mede & Schafer, 2020). The ‘elites’ can be divided into different subsets (“political, economic, legal, cultural, intellectual”) (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p.476) The vagueness of the term makes it possible in the eyes of the populists to consider them as a singular and unified group (Mede & Schafer, 2020). However, once populists take the power, they can use the excuse that the different subsets of elites from the political elites still retain power, and thus their righteous crusade against the elites must continue (Hameleers, 2020).

Populism rejects the principles of deliberative democracy²⁰ because populists think that a consensus²¹ can never be achieved between citizens of different opinions and that there can never be a rational and impartial debate between two different camps (Waisbord, 2018). Each side tries to impose its own will and dictate its own political decisions to the wider public (Waisbord, 2018). It polarizes the population between two different groups: the corrupt elites as the out-group (who are hostile “others” or in collaboration with the others such as minorities or external forces) and the virtuous ordinary citizens with an elevated in-group identity (Hameleers, 2020).

The populists claim that there was once an ideal state where the will of the people was respected (Mede & Schafer, 2020). The elites betrayed the people and now they serve as obstructions against the manifestation of the “will of the people” (Mede & Schafer, 2020). Populists argue that representative democracy hampered the immediate expression of the will of the people which should be expressed directly by introducing intermediaries. The political elites that ground their rule to representation²² are therefore illegitimate (Collins et al., 2020; Mede & Schafer, 2020). The democratic institutions that serve as ‘check and balances’ also obstruct the uninterrupted and immediate execution of the will of the people, and thus they are in the service of the elites (e.g., free press, an independent judiciary, etc.) (Collins et al., 2020; Mede & Schafer, 2020).

Collins et al. (2020, p. 3) argue that society has two faces: the “organic face,” and the “enumerative face”. The organic face is comprised of implicit agreements that are shared by a vast majority generally in an unconscious manner, and it gives societies

²⁰ Mudde (2004) claims that deliberative democracies are preferred by left-wing populists, and right-wing populists have no demand for it. He argues that what right-wing populists demand is “more leadership and less participation” (Dahl, 2000 as cited in Mudde, 2004, p. 558).

²¹ The common ‘will of people’ represents only the consensus among the inner group. Outer groups who are considered immoral actors in the eyes of populists can never contribute to the formation of the consensus or will of the people.

²² According to Mudde (2004, p. 560), the view that right-wing populists reject representative democracy by principle is not true. What they truly reject is to be “represented by an ‘alien’ elite.” If they are represented by their leaders, they are fine with it (Mudde, 2004).

their collective identity and their character; thus, it is slow to change (Collins et al., 2020). The enumerative face, on the other hand, contains a range of different choices available to the citizens on the boundaries of the organic face (Collins et al., 2020). It highlights the diversity of opinions within a society and the existence of individualistic preferences, and thus it is flexible and subject to change (Collins et al., 2020). The main difference between populism and pluralist democracy is that populists interpret the concept of people organically and the result of the elections as the organic choice (Collins et al., 2020). Pluralists, on the other hand, see “people” and their choice in an enumerative manner (Collins et al., 2020). Thus, while pluralists respect the difference in opinions, populists see the election results as the manifestation of the ‘will of the people’ and something as uniform, and opposing opinions is labeled as something deviant and outside the boundaries of normalcy (Collins et al., 2020). Therefore, the proponents of these hostile opinions can only be traitors or outsiders to society (Collins et al., 2020).

Criticisms against monarchy and aristocracy during the early modern era contained a significant populist character (Rosenfeld, 2019). The critics argued against the idea of epistemic privilege of the aristocrats (Rosenfeld, 2019). They claimed that the aristocrats have no difference with the populace in reasoning capacities (Rosenfeld, 2019). Some even went a step further and argued that the people by the virtue of common sense had a superior form of knowledge because the ordinary people are not corrupted by education (Rosenfeld, 2019). When the older regimes were toppled, the populists accused the previous revolutionaries of creating their elites after getting political power (Rosenfeld, 2019). Furthermore, the new political class employed experts who claimed to have epistemic privilege during policy-making processes, and thus according to populists, they destroyed the aspirations of epistemic democracy and replaced it with a technocracy (Rosenfeld, 2019). As can be seen, populism was an ally to democracy in the early stages of democratization against the elitist governments ruled by a minority; however, once a pluralist democracy is established populism situates itself against this new type of a government (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

Both democracy and populism promise the “rule by the people” (Collins et al., 2020, p.31). For this reason, populists claim that they are the true democrats, but among scholars, populism is perceived as a danger to democracy because populism considers ‘people’ as a monolithic group and the will of the people as a unified and singular will, whereas pluralist democracies respect pluralism and try to protect and respect the rights and opinions of the minorities with several institutions who serve as check and balances (Collins et al., 2020). Thus, populism’s anti-pluralist character differentiates it from pluralist democracy (Collins et al., 2020). For this reason, democratic societies that contain some sort of technocratic spirit unleash a populist backlash because experts who act as a part of checks and balances against the unlimited power of the rulers are labeled as elites, who defy popular will, and consequently anti-democratic (Rosenfeld, 2019; Collins et al., 2020).

In the next subsection, I explore populism’s criticisms against orthodox scientific epistemology and how it proposes new alternative epistemologies.

6.2. Epistemological challenges of populism

As a movement against the elites, populism also possesses some criticisms against epistemic elites, i.e., scientific or academic elites. Populism has specific criticisms against current scientific enterprises, the dominant epistemic authorities, and the current epistemological order and its epistemology.

6.2.1. Science-related populism

Science-related populism is similar to but also different from political populism (Mede & Schafer, 2020). It is not a general concept that encompasses all criticisms against science because not all criticisms against science have a populist character²³ (Mede & Schafer, 2020). To understand science-related populism, one must first understand political populism, then the “participatory turn” or “demands for public participation”,

²³ E.g., “counter research” commissioned by corporations aiming to contradict scientific findings about smoking or global warming (Oreskes & Conway, 2010 as cited in Mede & Schafer, 2020).

which is a core principle of populism but also something distinct in different fields that interest society, and finally the scientific epistemology and challenges towards its epistemic authority in the form of alternative epistemologies (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 475).

While people struggle to obtain political sovereignty and decision-making power over society in political populism, in the domain of science which contains its own logic, populists try to obtain 'epistemic authority' which is comprised of "decision-making" and "truth-speaking sovereignty" with regard to "scientific knowledge production" (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 480-482). Thus, public participation in the scientific field aims at a different objective compared to political participation (Mede & Schafer, 2020). Nonetheless, similar to political populism, science-related populism adopts some analogous central figures as its main explanatory elements (Mede & Schafer, 2020). The antagonistic conflict between people and the elite persists in science-related populism as well, but it occurs specifically in the epistemological domain (Mede & Schafer, 2020). Consequently, people are referred to by their "ordinariness", and the elites that are alluded to in this conflict are a specific subset of the general group namely the "academic elite" (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 480). The most important homogeneity of the "ordinary people" in science-related populism is their "common epistemological sense" and the academic elites are characterized by their grasp on epistemic authority (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 480).

Unlike political populism, science-related populism concerns itself with epistemological issues and thus, people and the elites are also characterized by their epistemological traits (Mede & Schafer, 2020). People are constructed as an epistemologically uniform group marked by its honesty and ordinariness (Mede & Schafer, 2020). Their ordinariness stems from their "reliance on common sense, everyday experience or even gut feeling" (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 480-481). Common sense is shared by every ordinary person and therefore adds to their homogeneity as a group. Their virtuousness also comes from their common sense-grounded reasoning because everyday life experience is seen as authentic compared to the elusive and complex forms of elite knowledge (Mede & Schafer, 2020). Thus, they

consider scientific interventions that threaten the ordinariness of everyday life as dangerous (e.g., gene-editing, climate science, vaccination) (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 481).

The scientific elite (academic institutions, individual experts, or scholars) are portrayed as a morally inferior group that possesses epistemic authority and decision-making power in its domain (Mede & Schafer, 2020). Their epistemic power makes them a collective group in the eyes of the populists, and the knowledge they produce is seen as “elusive, ephemeral, divided [and] contested” and alien to the everyday life of ordinary people (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 481). The scientific method used by scientists is seen as artificial and conditional (Mede & Schafer, 2020). In the eyes of populists, scientific uncertainty hinders the possibility of simple answers and makes life unpredictable, and thus the knowledge of the elites stands in contrast to “simple, naturalistic, and reliable epistemology of ordinary people” (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 481). They prefer the anecdotes of ordinary citizens rather than empirical data, which is seen as artificial construction by the elites (Hameleers, 2020). Thus, according to populists, truth-speaking sovereignty of the academic elite is considered illegitimate, and only ordinary people possess this legitimacy over truth claims because their honest common sense-based reasoning is grounded on everyday experience and their epistemological homogeneity makes collective and coherent knowledge possible, unlike the divided knowledge of scientists (Mede & Schafer, 2020).

Populists argue that scientists hold also decision-making sovereignty, which gives them power over “what is being or should be, researched when, how, and by whom” (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 482). They claim that academic elites do what they want to do without any public supervision in a secretive manner (Mede & Schafer, 2020). Scientists are guided by their ideological biases or their profit motives without any regard to the betterment of the common people. Therefore, their power is illegitimate and must be transferred to common people who do not have selfish agendas and are more inclined to produce practical results (Mede & Schafer, 2020).

Mede and Schafer (2020, p. 478) argue that studies of alternative scientific epistemologies constitute an important aspect of science-related populism because they “question how science produces knowledge, its methods, and ultimately its authority to make science-related decisions and claims about “true” knowledge”. The new wave of alternative epistemologies like post-truth or populist epistemology gained force from political populism, the rise of social media, and the fragmentation of societal knowledge (Mede & Schafer, 2020).

6.2.2. Populist counter-knowledge

According to Mede and Schafer (2020), scholars divide the epistemic challenges toward the scientific establishment into two main categories. The first category denies the scientific establishment’s claims of impartiality and their tainted knowledge and offers allegedly better but still scientific “counter knowledge” (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 488). Yla-Antilla (2018, p. 4) defines counter-knowledge as “alternative knowledge which challenges establishment knowledge, replacing knowledge authorities with new ones, thus providing an opportunity for political mobilization”. The proponents of counter-knowledge believe that a correct scientific epistemology exists, but the current knowledge elites suppress this type of epistemology and therefore the truth due to their ideological inclinations (e.g., “multiculturalist-relativism”) or for their gains (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p.489). They may claim that they “hold knowledge, truth, and evidence in high esteem, even professing strictly positivist views, and strongly opposing ambivalent or relativist truth orientations” (Yla-Antilla, 2018, p. 3) Thus, they do not strictly adopt epistemological populism and its exaltation of common people’s knowledge (Yla-Antilla, 2018). They argue that their true knowledge is compatible with scientific epistemology, but it is needed to be supplied from alternative and more honest knowledge authorities because the current scientific establishment is marked by corruption (Mede & Schafer, 2020). Conspiracy theorists also adopt this type of approach and argue that only they can unravel the hidden truth as the supporters of ‘true’ science (Mede & Schafer, 2020).

6.2.3. Epistemic populism

The second category constitutes challenges that are more foundational as they directly renounce scientific elitism and its epistemology in favor of “people’s common sense, their personal experiences, and emotional sentiments”, which can be called as “epistemic populism” (Mede & Schafer, 2020, p.479). Kramer (2021) calls it banal epistemic populism due to the idea that ordinary people with everyday experience and practical knowledge outweigh the elites in knowledge production. It not only inverts epistemic professional hierarchies (e.g., valuing nurses over doctors or construction workers over architects) but also decries the elites for their professional status (Kramer, 2021; Edis, 2020). Kramer (2021) argues that there are different forms of counter-knowledge/authorities and forms of epistemic populism that differ in the degree and nature of their populist character. Thus, the concept of science-related populism is too broad and insufficient in encompassing all these populist anti-scientist attitudes.

A specific type of epistemic populism, “reactionary epistemic populism”, not only criticizes elites for being out of touch with the practical reality of the ordinary people but also for being specifically part of a group of people (left-wing/liberal) that enforces their worldview on people through attacks on “normal” and “traditional” ways of living (Kramer, 2021, p. 3). Climate change and gender studies are given as examples of liberal sciences because the ‘fact’ that there are only two genders is seen as common sense and basic science in this form of epistemic populism (Kramer, 2021). Scientific anti-intellectualism labels social sciences as being politically motivated and dangerous, and argues that these disciplines are not real sciences and they tend to corrupt “pure sciences” with their ideological machinations (e.g., an atmospheric physicist that propagates the ‘supposed’ danger of climate change) (Kramer, 2021, p.3). This type of anti-science adopts a singular conception of science to reject the others (Kramer, 2021). While its attacks against academia can be considered populist, it also promotes a type of elitist conception of science, where the practice of science is not for everyone, certainly not for social scientists who are characterized as lazy,

talentless, and egotistical (Kramer, 2021). The participatory turn²⁴ in sciences is criticized for tainting pure sciences by political activism (Kramer, 2021). Thus, this type of anti-scientism is “not epistemically populist but socio-politically populist at best” (Kramer, 2021, p 4). It attacks the elites not for rejecting common sensical knowledge or in the name of popular interest, but simply for the misrepresentation of the reality (Kramer, 2021).

Populists place themselves in opposition to mainstream scientists but not necessarily against the scientific authority (Kramer, 2021). Some respect “marginalized but established scientists” and some “outsiders with radically different epistemologies” (Kramer, 2021, p. 4). Thus, Kramer (2021) is against the broad concept of science-related populism because it includes many different anti-scientific sentiments with varying degrees of populism. Science related populism must be defined as either accepting positions that are both epistemically and sociopolitically populist or just sociopolitically populist (Kramer, 2021).

Thus, both counter-knowledge and epistemic populism in virtue of their opposition to “knowledge elites” can be used by populists (Yla-antilla, 2018, p. 4). According to Yla-Antilla (2018), social psychology shows that alternative knowledge authorities have the power to discredit mainstream knowledge and its evidence. There are many reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, individuals are not comfortable with “gaps in causal narratives” (Yla-Antilla, 2018, p.4). They want to put anything possible in these gaps because individuals do not want to accept that there can be inexplicable reasons (Yla-Antilla, 2019). Furthermore, individuals want to accept ‘facts’ that are compatible with our already existing political views (Yla-Antilla, 2019). Opposing facts prove to be difficult to recognize because individuals do not want to embark on a state of ‘cognitive dissonance’ (Yla-Antilla, 2018, p. 5). In general, persons want to reject even the claims that are corroborated with many evidences if the political consequences are undesirable (Yla-Antilla, 2019). Most importantly, knowledge that

²⁴ There is an increased demand by the ordinary citizenry to participate in scientific enterprises. It can show itself in the forms of “citizen participation in science-related decision-making (Einsiedel & Eastlick, 2000 as cited in Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 478), public control of scientific work (Fahnrich et al., 2015; Ford, 2013 as cited in Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 478), the crowdfunding of science (Schafer et al., 2018b), or citizen science (Füchslin et al., 2019 as cited in Mede & Schafer, 2020, p. 478)”.

is generally used in politics is ‘social knowledge “justified by contextually, historically, and culturally variable (epistemic) criteria of ‘reliability’” (Van Dijk, 2014, as cited in Yla-Antilla, 2018, p. 5). Thus, a belief that is accepted by a certain community at a certain time can be rejected by another community (Yla-Antilla, 2018). Yla-Antilla (2018, p. 6) claims that, in public debate, “instead of true value alone, the social origins, meanings, and implications of knowledge claims are crucial”.

Overall, populists can position themselves against the technocratic²⁵ overreach in the political domain and thus as champions of democracy against illegitimate claims of expertise illustrated as power grabs. They may dismiss certain specific types of domains of expertise and actors in favor of other actors and domains. The concepts of epistemic populism and counter-knowledge justify populist claims for power by arguing for their superiority in the epistemic domain against other epistemologies purported by opposite epistemic authorities that warrant technocratic influence in the decision-making processes.

In the next subsection, I argue that the populism-technocracy dichotomy may not be as straightforward as imagined by many scholars.

6.3. Technocratic expertise and the meta-expertise of citizen technocrats

‘Technocracy’ usually means rule by the experts or a rule by a class that claims to have epistemic privilege and authority (Friedman, 2019). Technocracy, thus, is usually seen as anti-democratic because the arcane nature of knowledge means that only a handful of experts can know their possession and certainly not the ordinary citizen (Friedman, 2019). However, Friedman claims that the esotericity of knowledge is only an assumption that “depends on certain contestable epistemological claims”, an assumption which can be refuted by ordinary citizens, thus fueling populist claims of knowledge (Friedman, 2019, p. 323). The complex social context in the eyes of technocrats necessitates professional expertise and such complex knowledge can only

²⁵ Mudde (2004) argues that populists are not necessarily against technocrats; they can use experts as tools to subvert politicians as long as technocrats respect their wishes and populists even prefer experts over mainstream politicians.

directly be grasped by experts or can be transmitted to the ordinary citizenry through their mediation, and this knowledge permits them to enact optimal policies that may correct social problems (Friedman, 2019).

A democratic criticism against the technocrats is that they outreach their scope of expertise to make normative claims instead of limiting themselves to empirical claims (Friedman, 2019). For example, in this account, a virologist is qualified to make claims about the effectiveness of vaccines but not about normative claims and moral judgments about those who refuse to get the vaccines, because an epistemic authority does not translate itself into a moral authority; thus, it would be viewed as a misuse of power.

Habermas (1968, as cited in Friedman, 2019, p. 326) distinguishes two sorts of technocracy: one is the traditional definition of technocracy in which experts determine both the ends and the means of the public policies, and the second one is what Habermas promotes and which he calls as “pragmatistic” democratic technocracy. In this form of technocracy, the community of citizens use democratic “communicative action” to deliberate the end of policies they want, and the means are determined by the experts to actualize these ends (Habermas, 1968, as cited in Friedman, 2019, p. 326). Habermas (1968 as cited in Friedman, 2019), however, did not question experts’ authority over the means, but Friedman (2019) claims that the current U.S. is a ‘democratic technocracy’ in which the citizens have authority over both the end and the means. Citizens who experience the social issues themselves tend to think that they have tools to propose the means by themselves; thus, “the general public is treated—in the ambient culture in which such public discussion takes place—as the ultimate epistemic authority over both ends and means” (Friedman, 2019, p. 327). So, the political climate treats the citizens as “citizens-technocrats” (Friedman, 2019, p. 328).

The public is assumed to know both the ends and the means of public policy decisions (Friedman, 2019). Otherwise, their epistemic authority would lack legitimacy (Friedman, 2019). Friedman (2019) then argues that if we address general citizenry as

the ultimate epistemic authority, then common sense can be the only tool they can use because of their lack of expertise. This means that citizens are considered as “meta-experts”, the authority who will choose which experts to trust (Friedman, 2019, p.329). So, Friedman (2019, p.329) concludes that the current democratic technocracy implies the acceptance of “epistemic populism”. Thus, epistocratic claims are considered illegitimate in a climate where citizens are also vested with technocratic powers (Friedman, 2019). Therefore, populists who consider themselves citizen-technocrats and reject expertise claims by distrust behave in an entirely rational manner (Friedman, 2019). We cannot obtain all our knowledge through self-research and scientific studies; we must, at a certain point, trust other epistemic authorities, and thus the question of trusting the ‘reliable’ knowledge authorities becomes a real problem (Friedman, 2019). Trusting alternative knowledge authorities may not be unreasonable as it seems (Yla-antilla, 2018). In the current political climate, which is marked by distrust towards traditional knowledge authorities exacerbated by conspiracy theories, changing the epistemic authority to trust may be a simple process (Yla-Antilla, 2018).

Friedman (2019) puts forward that in a democratic society, assuming oneself’s epistemic authority is the default belief, contrary to the popular belief. On the other hand, deferring to experts is a learned practice, which means that epistemic populism is not an aberration but a natural effect of democratic climate (Friedman, 2019). So, Friedman (2019, p. 332) argues that populists adopt the “naive technocratic realism”, i.e., the belief that technocratic truths are clear to grasp by the general public without any mediation. Thus, populist conspiracy-thinking that emerges from this belief is not an example of irrationality, but rather a simple epistemic mistake (Friedman, 2019). For this reason, when someone rejects epistemic populism, populists do not perceive it as a simple mistake but rather as a diabolic plan because in their eyes, technocratic knowledge is simple and self-evident, which means ironically that in their eyes the opposite is culpable of resorting to the ‘post-truth’ rhetoric (Friedman, 2019).

Populists do not reject all expert claims. Instead, they pick the ones they find reasonable (Friedman, 2019). Conspiracy thinking emerges from the common sense-based epistemology. If the dominant mainstream narrative is against the ‘self-evident’

truth of the people, then populists conclude there must be a malignant plan going on behind the scenes (Friedman, 2019). Populists assume “ontic simplicity”, meaning that “social reality is so simple that political intentions always tend to be actualized” (Friedman, 2019, p. 338). Therefore, if a social problem is not solved, populists tend to think that politicians must be failing in purpose in service of some evil intentions, and any sort of opposition to ‘common sense’ practices must also be evil (Friedman, 2020, p. 338).

Friedman (2019) argues that there is no real natural divide of ignorance between the average citizen and populist citizen; the ignorance level changes in a spectrum. Educated citizens have more knowledge compared to uneducated citizens, and uneducated citizens tend to be more populist because they tend to adopt simplistic views in both ontology and epistemology (Friedman, 2019). Naive realist beliefs cannot explain public disagreements (Friedman, 2019). If truths are self-evident, there is nothing to disagree with in good faith (Friedman, 2019). Thus, the opponents of common sense-based policies must be evil (Friedman, 2019). Populists thus prefer politicians that advocate swift actions instead of those who advocate deliberation in public policies because if problems and solutions are self-evident, then deliberation appears to be a waste of time, and citizen technocrats’ tendency to prefer problem-solving signifies that they can tolerate undemocratic practices if they accelerate the implementation speed of public solutions to the social problems (Friedman, 2019).

Technocracy necessitates instrumentalist logic (Friedman, 2019). Thus, as ‘citizen technocrats’, they favor reaching the ends instead of protecting ‘democratic values’ (Friedman, 2019). For Friedman (2019), this approach is helpful because it prevents social scientists from attributing metaphysical claims about populists’ personalities like the popular attribution of “authoritarian personality” to populists’ characters (Friedman, 2019, p. 350). He also rejects the idea that populists want to actualize the ‘will of the people’ (Friedman, 2019). He argues that for populists, public interests are more important than the will, and only the leader’s will is essential to “get things done” (Friedman, 2019, p. 350).

Populists do not prefer certain policies because they represent the will of the majority, but because they appear to them as self-evident, in the first place it is absurd to wait for the collective will in a logical sense because if everyone waits for the emergence of the collective will, no will whatsoever emerges (Friedman, 2019). Therefore, Friedman (2019) argues against many scholars of populism that overemphasize the role of ‘the will of the people’ in their explanation of populist ideology. He instead argues that ontological and epistemological simplicity is the main foundation of epistemic populism, mainly the idea that social problems and their solutions are simple to know and fix (Friedman, 2019). Thus, overall, Friedman (2019) argues that the main advantage of the democratic technocratic account of populism is that it does not reduce populists to simple irrational agents and shows that populism is an inescapable result of a mix of democracy and technocracy.

In the next subsection, I discuss the features of populist communication and the medium where it spreads.

6.4. Populism as a communication

The liberal democratic tradition promotes a specific conception of public communication where a set of rational individuals accept the idea that there is an underlying factual ground shared by everyone, and thus it is possible to reach a consensus (Edis, 2020). The academia and scientific experts in this context are given the role of providing the facts needed for a rational debate from an apolitical perspective (Edis, 2020). The participants of the public debate must act sincerely and respect the opinions of the others insofar as it is in accordance with the shared set of factual knowledge (Edis, 2020). This means that, according to Habermas, religious citizens must concede the authority over the secular realm of knowledge to scientific experts (Edis, 2020).

Populists, however, do not consider experts as sources of knowledge outside the political domain; they are accused of being pawns of the political elite and consequently untrustworthy epistemic authorities (Edis, 2020). The fact that most

politicians are graduates from the same prestigious academic institutions proves for them the reality that politicians and experts are the cogs of the same political machine that self-perpetuate itself (Edis, 2020). Religious populists, for example, reject the secular authority of decadent scientific experts in favor of alternative divine authority (Edis, 2020). The media elites are accused of propagating “fake news”, and in response, populists promote their own “alternative facts” and realities (Hameleers, 2020, p.105). Waisbord (2018) argues that populist communication rejects the principles of democratic debate such as reverence for facts and reason and respect of pluralism. Waisbord (2018, p.2) claims that “populism’s Manichean politics stands in opposition to the possibility of truth-telling as a collective effort to produce agreed-upon facts and reach consensus on the correspondence between assertions and reality”.

The scholars who define populism as a style or a form of communication use the conceptual tools of ideational approach as a starting point and then redefine it “as a set of ideas that can be communicated, experienced and primed, on both the supply-side (i.e., political parties) and the demand-side (i.e., voters)” (Hameleers, 2020, p. 106). It focuses on how populist leaders diffuse their ideas, their language, and their medium for the supply side, and it analyses the populist voters’ way of obtaining information for the demand side (Hameleers, 2020). The symbiosis of populist rhetoric between the demand and supply side constitutes “populist communication”, the main point of analysis for these scholars (Hameleers, 2020, p.106). An important point of populist propaganda is that there is a ‘hidden truth’ concealed by elites for their evil plans and gains (Hameleers, 2020). The different subsets of elites are portrayed as cooperation with each other like the media and the political elites, and they are accused of deceiving the public (Hameleers, 2020). These ‘corrupt’ experts also use their ‘fake’ empirical evidence to sustain their ‘fake’ realities, moreover, they try to obstruct the populist leaders from communicating the truth to the public (Hameleers, 2020). These elites are also accused of highlighting unimportant issues (e.g., climate change) to distract the public from the real issues like immigration (Hameleers, 2020).

Hameleers (2020, p. 108) and other scholars accuse populists of using misinformation “defined as the intentional spread of untrue or dishonest information” to discredit the

established news sources and their truths. Populist leaders find the use of manipulation and fabrication of knowledge as fair use for their political agenda (Hameleers, 2020). They can use different strategies such as “the decontextualization of information to fit a certain (partisan) issue position, the pairing of different sources of multimodal information to present an alternative storyline” or simply create false realities (Hameleers, 2020, p. 109). They aim to disrupt the existing ‘regime of truth’ and its epistemic authorities and replace it with their facts and realities (Hameleers, 2020). To this end, they question the truthfulness of the elites and accuse them of lying and being evil to discredit the elites’ sources of information and portray the populists as honest actors (Hameleers, 2020). The people’s own experiences, knowledge, and emotions are presented as more trustworthy sources (Hameleers, 2020).

“Populism, therefore, does not only involve the expression of a binary divide between ‘us and them’, but it also aims to reveal a perseverant struggle between the truth and honesty of the people and the fake reality forced upon the electorate by the elites” (Hameleers, 2020, p. 108). However, paradoxically, populist leaders can even use the fact that they lie to their advantages by portraying themselves as “authentic” (Fieschi, 2019, p.37). ‘Authenticity’, according to Fieschi (2019), is a central concept for populist thought. It promises a personal relationship between the electorate and the populist leader, in which the leader promises to reflect his or her inner self transparently through unmediated and direct communication, so even lying can be presented as a genuine human behavior (Fieschi, 2019). Sincerity, which can be defined as being truthful to others, is no longer sufficient for populists. They prefer ‘authenticity’ which can be defined as the “coincidence between the inner self and its public behaviour” (Fieschi, 2019, p. 158).

Interestingly, populists reinvented sincerity as a mark of hypocrisy, being truthful to the public but not towards the inner self (Fieschi, 2019). Trump’s appeal to a wide electorate can also be explained by this appeal to authenticity, while his opponent in the 2016 presidential elections, Hillary Clinton, was often labeled as the epitome of a career politician. Even when he gave clear and factually false information, he was often praised by his voter base for being true to one’s self and his beliefs (Fieschi,

2019). The abandonment of sincerity for authenticity can be partially explained by the advent of social media, where everyone tries to present themselves as much palatable to the public as possible. Populist leaders promise transparency to attract ordinary citizens (Fieschi, 2019). Fieschi (2019) claims that authenticity is also an important promise of enlightenment and democracy. Enlightenment elevates the idea of the individual self and its reason as opposed to the concept of the ‘collective self’ (Fieschi, 2019). Before modernity, the convergence between the autonomous individual and the inner reason was an important promise of modernity (Fieschi, 2019). The ruling aristocracy was also criticized for hiding their defects under the veneer of aristocratic image (Fieschi, 2019). For this reason, populism is dangerous as it uses the promises of democracy against itself, and authenticity, which was historically used for promoting tolerance towards minorities and their alternative lifestyles, has become a tool for accusing others and dissenting against their opinions (Fieschi, 2019).

The ordinariness and flawed character of populist leaders make them “not above suspicion but below it” (Fieschi, 2019, p. 161). They can lie or make erroneous decisions, but by doing this, they display their authenticity, unlike the elites who mask themselves through hypocrisy (Fieschi, 2019, p. 161). Even if elites accuse the populist leader of being deceitful, the populist leader can simply say he is being authentic, or as Fieschi says the populist politician conquers “the perceived humiliation inflicted by the elite by being, literally, shameless” (Fieschi, 2019, p. 38).

Fieschi (2019) argues that populist communication does not appeal to emotions in opposition to reason, which is generally told in scholarship because she argues that emotions are also part of the reason. What rather the populists are appealing to is instinct over reason (Fieschi, 2019). The ‘authentic’ political actors on an instinctual level become more attractive to the populist electorate because they transform the perception of other actors into hypocrites and enables them to bypass the public rules of debate due to their claim to authenticity (Fieschi, 2019). Populist leaders promise “directness, immediacy, and transparency”, and nothing must interrupt this direct form of communication between the leader and the electorate; thus, representative democracy in its indirectness transforms into an obstacle towards the realization of this

form of communication (Fieschi, 2019, p. 37). Transparency promises mutual understanding between the populist leader and the electorate; and thus, political betrayal, like the ones carried by the elites, becomes impossible (Fieschi, 2019). Accusing your political opponents of not being authentic characterizes them as immoral actors (Fieschi, 2019). By constantly questioning the authenticity of their opponents, populists aim to create a climate of general distrust (Fieschi, 2019). Although everything is revealed, nothing will change because still there will be competing claims. If nothing can be trusted, populists can present themselves as the better choice because they are at least authentic (Fieschi, 2019).

Populists want to create a general sense of distrust and cynicism against the reigning political order (Hameleers, 2020). For populists, the allegedly genuine relationship between the populist leader and their electorate is the most important thing even more than the policies themselves. For them, the ultimate aim of politics is to maintain this sort of personal bond by disrupting other forms of communication and trust towards other actors. This bond creates a community of “people” which must be maintained by attacking political opponents, the ‘elites’ and their allies (Fieschi, 2019). Fieschi (2019, p.162) argues that “shared outrage is the mark of authenticity”, which keeps the community alive. Populists must always pick some targets to be angry at to maintain the momentum of their political movement.

Waisbord (2018) argues that common truth is an impossible endeavor because populism in Manichean nature defines an agonistic political climate, where people have their own truth and the elites have their lies presented as truth. For populists, facts do not exist independently from narratives; they must be the complementary parts of the greater picture, illustrating the core struggle between the virtuous people and the corrupt elites (Waisbord, 2018). They must serve either the interests of the people or the elites, and thus, they are inseparable from power dynamic (Waisbord, 2018). Populists reject every fact that counters their main ideological claim (Waisbord, 2018). The truth is always represented by populists. Even the lies of populists are for a righteous cause and proofs of authenticity, in a way they are also truths. This self-perpetuating system creates an environment where populists always claim that they

are the representative of the people and virtuousness. Truth is a political project. Unlike the liberal philosophers who argue that truth must be impartial and come from outside sources and experts, populists argue that populist leaders communicate the truth of the people and there is no impartial knowledge-producing domain outside the politics (Waisbord, 2018). No institutions can escape the political domain, and they ultimately take part in this Manichean conflict (Waisbord, 2018). So, there is no objective news or media (Waisbord, 2018). Ultimately, for the populists, their allegiance to the populist cause or their opposition determines their value as truth-communicating sources (Waisbord, 2018).

Overall, populist communication claims to transmit the truth of the people against the lies of the elites. The populist leader rejects the established truths of the elites and advocates the truth of the people based on everyday experiences and common sense, despite the concealment of the truth by these corrupt elites. This communication between the populist leader and its electorate rejects all outside actors as illegitimate and presents itself as the only source of truthfulness. If facts and realities are not in line with the populists' agenda, then they are dismissed. The authenticity of the populist leader is the ultimate proof that the populist communication is true.

To conclude, populists embrace an agonistic attitude towards political and scientific elites. They show resistance to their rule in the form of rejecting their epistemic authority. They either adopt a common sense-based epistemology and repudiate the elites' scientific methodology or they simply adopt rival epistemic authorities. The technocratic power given to citizens by democracies also ultimately promotes a common sense-based epistemology, and their burdensome role of meta-expertise justifies their skepticism of experts. Populist leaders promise their supporters direct and authentic communication, in which they will defend people's truth against the lies of the elites. They perceive truth as something entirely linked to power and purely subjective; however, their own self-perceived moral superiority makes them the virtuous and truthful ones and their opponents are defined as vile and corrupt enemies, who are impossible to communicate with or reach an agreement.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

My thesis has attempted at analyzing the perceived epistemic problem in our political discourse: the supposed decline in people's respect towards factual truths and the massive spread of untruths in public space, and proposed answers to it. As also argued by Arendt, we believe that our opinions must be grounded in factual reality. Politicians who dislike the power of truth try to eliminate the difference between factual truth and opinion to give legitimacy to their opinions that contradict the objective reality. The fact that we see the world from different perspectives obliges us to have different interpretations of the facts and consequently different opinions; therefore, accepting the concept of truth as a common arbiter in our political discourse remains a contentious topic. Furthermore, the overemphasis on truth can diminish respect for plurality of the opinions. For this reason, Arendt views singular truth as a dangerous weapon which can be used by the political power to impose its truth upon others. Similarly, Rawls promotes the liberal idea of tolerance towards others' opinions and argues that we must use reasonableness instead of truth as a criterion to judge our political claims, and the aim of a public discourse must be a reaching reasonable consensus among overlapping ideas.

However, the recent developments in our communicative mediums, notably the advent of social media and the Internet, have caused a quantitative increase in untruths and lies. Untruths have not emerged from a unified center of political power as Arendt states, but rather from various fragmented sources in this new digitalized public space. To combat these untruths, several epistemic democrats felt the need to emphasize the positive role of truth and good epistemic practices in our public discourse and our democracies in general. Therefore, they offered several solutions to combat the rise of

untruths such as dismantling epistemic bubbles, establishing fact-checking mechanisms, promoting critical thinking education, and so on. Thus, these epistemic democrats wanted to preserve the new communicative mediums as a positive source for the democratization of information and a wider participation of the populace in the political discourse.

The term ‘post-truth’, which tries to illustrate this supposedly new epistemic decay in our political discourse, is very vague and unclear as a concept. It generally presents the problem as a radical shift in attitudes towards factuality and truth among individuals. However, the idea that there was a prior time when factual reality was respected is rejected by many academicians, who argue that there have always been lies in politics, so even if we observe a surge in lies in our current political discourse, it is mainly due to the advent of new communicative mediums, and thus, it is a quantitative transformation rather than a qualitative one. Therefore, the problem cannot be limited to epistemic concerns; it is essentially a moral/political one. It emerges from the deep polarization of the populace into two hostile camps and their rejection of the opposite side’s moral and rational character. Even the term ‘post-truth’ itself can be interpreted as a weapon that demonizes the other camp and consequently aggravates the problem of polarization. Furthermore, the liberal idea that most individuals hold strong prior ideological beliefs and doctrines in public discourse is highly contestable. Rather, it seems that the main reason for individuals to adopt certain beliefs is their identification with the in-group they belong to, and the reason for this identification is emotional and psychological rather than an epistemic one.

Populist leaders who welcome the agonistic type of politics shine in this deeply polarized political climate. They embrace truth as a tool for power and subjugation of others and use it for their benefit. They argue that they represent the single unified will of the people and present their views as the consensus of their group. In other words, the Rawlsian idea of consensus is degenerated by populists to include only their in-group and to defeat pluralism rather than protect it as envisioned by Rawls. Arendt’s ‘truthtellers’ like the academia and the press, which are tasked with protecting truth, are demonized by populists as nefarious elites, and their claims of expertise are

rejected. Populists argue that their epistemic authorities are the only legitimate ones, and the scientific method and the epistemologies of the elites are deficient. They reject the idea that we can arrive at a consensus with the other group because they do not believe that we can all share the same facts. Thus, in the absence of common factual ground, politics turns into a battle to impose one's truth upon others. So, even if we encourage good epistemic practices and try to minimize the spread of untruths in public space, the problem will not disappear. The real solution can only be achieved by recognizing others' rationality and humanity, giving them due respect, and accepting the inevitable fact of disagreement, but still insisting on endeavors to arrive at a reasonable consensus by trying to understand others' perspectives.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Donald Trump'ın ABD başkanı seçilmesi ve İngiltere'deki referandumundan Avrupa Birliği'nden çıkma kararı çıkması birçok akademisyen ve siyaset bilimciyi popülizm ve hakikat ötesi (post-truth) kavramları hakkında düşünmeye itti. Oxford sözlüğünün hakikat ötesini 2016 yılının kelimesi seçmesi artan bu ilginin en belirgin işaretiydi. Bu tez bu iki kavramı anlamaya ve bunların siyasi alandaki hakikat kavramına nasıl bir tehdit oluşturduklarını sorgulamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu tezde hakikat ötesi kavramının ve ona sıklıkla başvuran popülist politikacıların epistemik bir meydan okuma teşkil etmekte birlikte asıl meselenin siyasi ve ahlaki olduğu ileri sürülmektedir. Hakikat ötesinin özgünlüğü başat olan hakikat kavramına ilişkin varsayımları ve savlarından çok nasıl bir ortamda şekillendiğidir. İnternet, sosyal medya ve yeni iletişim araçları hakikat ötesi durumunun günümüz siyasi ortamında güçlenmesinin en önemli nedenleri olduğundan aranacak bir çözüm çeşitli boyutlarıyla bu yeni medya organlarını gündeme getirmelidir. Hakikat ötesi siyasi alandaki çıkarlar için kullanıldığından, felsefecilerin veya akademisyenlerin hakikate yükledikleri anlamları popülistler ve hakikat ötesine başvuran çevrelerce dikkate alındığını söylemek zordur.

Tezin ilk bölümünde, Arendt'in hakikat ve siyaset ilişkisi hakkındaki gözlemlerine değinilerek, olgusal hakikat, doxa (sanı), rasyonel hakikat gibi öne çıkardığı birçok kavram üzerinde durulmuştur. İkinci bölümde hakikatin demokrasideki yeri ele alınmıştır. Bu konuda iki farklı genel görüş ön plana çıkmaktadır. İlk görüş, hakikatin demokrasideki rolünü ya tümenden reddeder ya da önemsiz olduğunu iddia ederken ikinci görüş hakikatin veya hakikate erişmeye yönelik epistemik davranışın önemini vurgular. Sonraki bölümde, Rawls'un hakikati kamusal tartışmalarda ulaşılamaz bir

ölçüt olarak nitelendirmesi ve bu savına karşı geliştirilen argümanlara yer verilmiştir. Daha sonra, internet aracılığıyla kamusal alanın nasıl dönüştürüldüğüne bakılarak, bu alanda çoğalan yalanlar ve uydurmalara karşı olası çözümler ele alınmıştır. Sonraki bölüm hakikat ötesi kavramına ayrılmıştır. Hakikat ötesinin gerçekten yeni bir duruma karşılık gelip gelmediği, ortaya çıkma sebepleri, aldığı farklı biçimler ve son olarak hakikat ötesi durumun yarattığı sorunlar tartışılmıştır. Son bölümde ise hakikat ötesi durumunun kök salmasındaki çok önemli rolüne dikkat çekilen popülist ideoloji ve popülist liderlere odaklanılmıştır. Popülizm çerçevesinde ileri sürülen epistemik argümanlar ele alınarak, popülizmi benimseyen vatandaşların ve liderlerin hakikate karşı nasıl bir tutum aldıklarına bakılmıştır.

İlk bölümde Arendt'in hakikat ve siyaset ilişkisi hakkındaki görüşlerine yer verilerek önemli kavramlar açığa kavuşturulmaya çalışıldı. Arendt rasyonel hakikati olgusal hakikatten ayırır. Ona göre, rasyonel hakikat matematiksel, bilimsel ve felsefî doğrular hakkındadır ve zihinle varılabilir olduğundan tarihte bir kalıcılığı vardır. Siyaseti ilgilendiren hakikat ise insan yaşamıyla ilgili olan ve rasyonel hakikatin aksine insan toplulukları tarafından onaylanması gereken olgusal hakikattir. Olgusal hakikat zorunluluktan doğmamış olaylardan oluştuğundan tahribata açıktır ve ayrıca anlam kazanması insanlar arasında diyalogu gerektirir. Ancak gerçekliği sorguya açık değildir. Bir tarihi olay tarihte gerçekleştiği şekilde gerçekleşmiştir ve dolayısıyla insanlar bu olgusallığı değiştiremezlerse de onu yorumlayabilir ve ona belli bir anlam yükleyebilirler. Arendt, olgusal hakikatin siyasi tartışmalarımızın zemini olması gerektiğini iddia etmektedir. Ancak, kendini zorla kabul ettiren bir kavram olarak gördüğünden, beşerî özgürlüğe ve çoğulculuğa engel olacağı endişesiyle, hakikat kavramını siyasi alanın dışına atarken, aynı zamanda, onu siyasetin zemini olarak görerek hakikatin rolünü tamamen yok da saymamaktadır.

Arendt'e göre rasyonel hakikatin zıttı hata ve cehaletken olgusal hakikatin zıttı ise kasti aldatmadır. O, geleneksel diye nitelendirdiği yalanları modern yalanlardan ayırır. Geleneksel yalanlar devlet sırları ve bireylerin kişisel niyetleri hakkındayken modern yalanlar herkesin bilgi sahibi olduğu konular hakkındadır. İnsanların gözleri önünde tarihi görsel manipülasyonla değiştirmeyi amaçlarlar çünkü hakikatin bağımsız bir

varlığı olduğu fikrini reddedip insan beyninin ürünü olduğu kanısına dayanırlar. Geleneksel yalanlar kısıtlı konularla ilgili ve düşmanı yanıltmak amacıyla üretilirken modern yalanlar bütün gerçekliği yalana uygun şekle getirmeye çalışır, ki yalancının kendisi bile yalan söylediğini unutabilir. Ancak bütün bunlara rağmen, Arendt hakikatin kendini koruyacağını ve yok edilmesinin çok güç olduğunu düşünmektedir. Yalanlar hakikate kıyasla aynı istikrarı sağlayamaz ve yalanı sonsuza kadar sürdürmek aynı süreklilikte siyasi bir güç gerektirir ama güç sahipleri her zaman değişirler. Hakikati korumak için Arendt hakikat söyleyiciler diye bir grup görevlendirir. Bu grup birçok meslekten (felsefeciler, bilim adamları, tarihçiler, gazeteciler) oluşmalı, tamamen tarafsız ve bağımsız olmalıdır. Bu bağlamda akademi, yargı ve basın hakikati koruyacak kurumlar olarak görevlendirir. Bu kurum ve meslekleri siyasetin dışındaymışçasına tasvir etmesi, siyasetin alanını, olgusal hakikat ve onun koruyucularının dışarda bırakılması yüzünden, çok daraltacağını iddiasıyla eleştirilmiştir.

Arendt, Platon'daki rasyonel hakikat ile sanı (doxa) çekişmesine karşı Sokratik bir yaklaşım olan düşünceyi doğru yapma fikrini ileri sürer. Sokrates için sanı saf öznellik ifade etmez ve aynı zamanda hakikat içerir çünkü aynı dünyada yaşadığımızdan sanılarımız da aynı dünyanın ürünü olmak zorundadır. Böylece sanı hakikate varmamız için aşmamız gereken bir kavramdan ziyade içinde hakikat barınan bir kavram halini alır. Herkes önce kendi hakikatini bilebilir. Başkasının hakikatini bilmek onlarla konuşmayı gerektirir ki bu bizi diğer insanları anlamaya iter. Kant'ın insan aklının sınırlarını belirtmesiyle, insanlarla tartışarak fikirlerini almak hakikate ulaşmak için önemli bir araç halini alır ve mutlak hakikat ulaşılamaz olurken önemini kaybeden rasyonel hakikat yerini sanıya bıraktı. Rasyonel hakikat, bizim zihnimize kapalı, aşkın bir boyutta var olduğundan, insanlar sadece görünen hakkında bilgi sahibi olabilir ve bu sanıları üretmek için özgür bir kamusal alana ihtiyaç vardır. Arendt'e göre insanlar daha önce sahip oldukları fikirlerle tartışmaya katılmazlar. İlk önce kamusal alanda fikirlerini geliştirmeleri gerektiğinden bu alan fikirlerin üretimi için olmazsa olmaz bir koşuldur. Olgusal hakikatler bu alanda tartışıldıklarında bir anlam kazanırlar aksi halde doğru olsalar bile siyasi açıdan anlamsızlardır.

Siyasetle rasyonel hakikat arasındaki biten çekişmenin yerini günümüzde siyaset ve olgusal hakikat çekişmesi aldı. Siyaset sanıya kıyasla olgusal hakikati daha tehlikeli gördüğünden onun statüsünü saf sanı seviyesine indirmeye çalışır. Olgusal hakikat, Arendt'e göre, görüşlerin temelini oluşturmalıdır. Hakikatimizi anlamlandırmamızı sağlayan olgusal hakikatler de insan toplulukları tarafından kabul edilmelidir. Arendt her ne kadar siyaset ve hakikat arasındaki ilişkiyi açıklamada önemli bir düşünür olsa da odaklandığı mesele totaliter rejimler olduğundan demokrasi ve hakikat ilişkisini pek değinmemiştir.

İkinci bölümde, demokrasi ve hakikat ilişkisi ele alınmaktadır. Bu ilişkiye, ya hakikatin demokrasi ile ilişkisiz bir kavram olduğu ya da tam tersi hakikatin demokrasi için elzem olduğu iddialarıyla yaklaşılabılır. Hakikatin demokrasi için önemli olmadığına ilişkin farklı argümanlar ileri sürülmüştür. Örneğin, Rorty, ulaştığımızı bilemeyeceğimiz bir şeyi (hakikati) hedefleyemeyiz demiştir. Hakikat kavramının siyasi anlaşmazlıkları çözmekte yetersiz kaldığına, demokraside önemli olanın çoğulculuk olduğuna ve demokrasinin doğru olana ulaşmaktan çok doğru olanın ne olduğuna karar verildiği bir düzen olduğuna işaret eden başka düşünürler de bulunmaktadır.

Arendt mutlak hakikati, liberal demokrasiler için önem teşkil eden farklı görüşlerin saygı prensibini yok edeceğinden dolayı siyasi alanın dışında konumlandırmıştır. Bu soruna çözüm olabilecek bir alternatif, hakikatin tek değil ama birçok şeklinin olduğu ve farklı durumlarda farklı şekilde kendini gösterdiği fikrini kabul etmek olabilir. Fakat hakikati göreceleştirmek, herkesin kendi şahsi hakikatini ortaya koyduğu bir ortamı yaratarak, hakikat ötesine zemin hazırlayabilir. Herkesin kendi hakikatine sahip olduğu bir ortamda bireylerin kendi grupları dışındakilerle anlaşması imkânsız bir hal alabilir. Totaliter rejimlerde zorla kabul ettirmeye çalışılan tek hakikat anlayışına karşın, demokrasilerde hakikat ötesi fikir çokluğu şeklinde kendini gösterir. Bu sorunlara çözüm olarak müzakereci demokrasi taraftarları sadece hakikate varmanın değil ona nasıl varmaya çalıştığımızın da önemli olduğunu belirtirler. Bu yüzden insanları hakikate götürecek yararlı uygulamaları ve davranışları önerirler. Hakikatin kendince bir iyi olmasının yanında vatandaşların politik müzakereleri katılmasını sağlayacak araçları vermesi de önemlidir. Müzakereci demokratlar müzakereyi

demokrasinin temel taşı olarak görürler fakat sadece rasyonel bireylerin katılmasına izin verildiğinden bireylerin hakikati aramasını sağlayacak araçları vermek vatandaşların demokratik katılımını güçlendirmek için vazgeçilmez bir fırsattır. Hakikati aramayı mümkün kılacak birçok uygulama sıralanabilir; bütün vatandaşlara temel eğitim hakkı verilmesi, toplanma hakkı, konuşma hakkı ve özgür basın.

Demokrasiye yönelik, birinin de epistemik anlaşmazlık olduğu, birçok epistemik tehdit bulunmaktadır. Vatandaşlar olgusal hakikate ulaşmak için kullanılması gereken kaynaklar ve metotlar hakkında anlaşma sağlayamadığında epistemik anlaşmazlık problemi ortaya çıkmaktadır. Lynch'e göre çok eski olan bu problemin günümüzü ilgilendiren kısmı, epistemik anlaşmazlığın sahiden gerçekleşmesinin bile zorunlu olmadığı ve algısal düzeyde bir anlaşmazlığın bile politik kutuplaşmaya yol açabiliyor olmasıdır. Diğer tarafın uzmanlarının otoritesine karşı çıkılmaya başlanması bir sonraki aşamada bütün uzmanların otoritesinin inkâr edilmesiyle sonuçlanabilir. Bir grup içindeki bireyler sadece birbirlerine benzer fikirler duydukları daha da uç fikirler benimseyebilir ve grupları dışındaki bütünü fikirleri toptan reddedebilirler. Kendilerini ve fikirlerini akılcılıkla eşleştirirken karşıt fikirler ve bireyleri akıl dışı olmakla suçlamaya başlarlar. Böylelikle kutuplaşma bütün müzakere imkanını yok eder.

Hakikate ulaşılması yolunda bir diğer epistemik tehdit entelektüel kibirle ortaya çıkar. Böyle bir tutuma sahip bir birey, zaten hakikati bildiğinden hakikati aramanın artık gereksiz olduğu sonucuna varır. Bu tutum bütün bir grubu etkisi altına alabilir ve diğer grup o gruba anlaşamadığı sürece makul olmamakla suçlanmaya başlanır. Lynch'e göre popülist sağ gruplar bu tutumu daha çok sergilerler. Bu iki sorunlu epistemik tutum birleştiğinde hakikati hor görme ortaya çıkar. Bu tutuma sahip biri birçok kanıtla ispatlanmış olgusal hakikatleri reddeder. Bunda asıl amacı diğerlerini kandırmak değil, diğerlerine net gerçekleri reddedecek güce sahip olduğunu göstermektir. Böyle biri hakikate ulaşmak için kullanılan yol ve kurallarla alay eder ve onları reddeder. Eğer yeterince güce sahipse söylediği yalanların sanki hakikatlermiş gibi ele alınmasını sağlayabilir.

Üçüncü bölümde, Rawls'un geliştirdiği anlaşmazlık olgusu ele alınmaktadır. Rawls'a göre hakikat çok bölücü ve uzlaşılması imkânsız bir kavramdır. Vatandaşların çok farklı ideolojileri, dünya görüşleri ve fikirleri olduğundan hakikat kavramı çerçevesinde anlaşmaya varmak imkansızdır. İnsan aklının birçok sınırı olduğundan herkesin akıl yoluyla ulaşabileceği bir hakikat mümkün değildir. Onun yerine, vatandaşlar makul fikirler öne sürüp makul görüşler çerçevesinde anlaşmaya varmalıdırlar. Anlaşmalar sonrası varılacak mutabakatta da vatandaşlar aynı sonuca farklı şekilde varmış olacaklardır. Rawls'un makul davranmaktan kastı diğer vatandaşları özgür ve eşit vatandaşlar olarak görüp onlarla en mantıklı adalet kavramı çerçevesinde anlaşmaya çalışmaktır. Makul biri kendi fikirlerini kanıtlamaya çalışıp diğer fikirleri de makullük çerçevesinde değerlendirmeli ve gerekirse kendi fikirlerini terk etmeye açık olmalıdır. Böylece Rawls, hakikat yerine makullük çerçevesinde politik savların değerlendirildiği bir politik tartışma ortamını hedeflemektedir.

Habermas, Rawls'un bu projesini eleştirip, siyasi söylemlerin geçerliliğinin Rawls tarafından test edilmemesinin sakıncalı olduğunu dile getirmiştir. Ayrıca, Habermas'a göre, makul olarak kabul edilen bir şey aslında hakikati saf dışı etmemekte sadece onu şimdiki hakikati bilinemez olan bir şey olarak algılayıp, hakikat hakkındaki hükmü geleceğe ertelemektedir.

Hakikatin tek bölücü ve uzlaşılması imkânsız kavram olduğu iddiasını reddeden Cohen'e göre, savlar kendilerini en makul olan olarak göstereceklerinden sonunda anlaşmazlık getirecektir. Cohen, makul bulduğumuz savları, hakikat anlaşmazlığın sebebi değil sadece ifade ediliş şekli olduğundan, yine de reddedeceğimizi iddia etmektedir. Cohen'e göre kendi düşüncemizi hakikat olarak görüp, diğer görüşleri makullük ölçütüne göre değerlendirip hoş görebiliriz. O'na göre, metafizikten arınmış bir şekilde yaklaşıldığında, hakikat herkesin kabul edeceği bir kavram olacağından onu ölçüt olarak kullanabiliriz.

Rawls ve Arendt'in hakikati siyasetin dışına atma yaklaşımı uzun bir süre hüküm sürse de yeni demokrasi teorisyenleri hakikati tekrar demokrasinin önemli bir parçası haline getirerek onun rolünü farklı şekillerde açıkladılar. Bazıları, nesnel bir ölçüt olması

sayesinde ahlaki önermelere tamamen göreceli bir şekilde yaklaşılmasını engelleyişini över, bazıları demokratik politikaların değerlendirilmesinde iyi bir ölçüt olmasını gündeme getirirken bazıları da demokrasinin daha iyi sonuçlar elde edilmesine hizmet ettiğini ileri sürmektedir. Hakikatin demokraside önem kazanmasına karşı çıkanlar ise hakikati önceleyen oligarşik bir düzene yol açılması tehlikesine ve demokrasinin kendi ilkelerinden ötürü değerli olduğundan hareketle hakikatin bu değerleri ikinci plana atıyor oluşuna dikkat çekmektedirler.

İnternet ve sosyal medya ilk çıktıklarında özgürlüğü bütün dünyaya yayacak araçlar olarak görülmüşlerdi. Onların sayesinde artık bilgiye ulaşım demokratikleşecek ve vatandaşların siyasi süreçlere katılımı artacaktı. Ancak, gelişmeler o kadar da olumlu yönde gerçekleşmedi; yalan haberler ve bilgiler çoğaldı ve bu yeni araçlar otoriter rejimlerce propaganda aracı olarak kullanılmaya başlandı. Bu durumda bazıları tamamen savunmaya geçip yalan ve yanlış haberleri yok edip hakikati korumak gerektiğini savunurken bazılarıysa iyimserliklerini koruyup, her şeye rağmen, bu süreçte demokrasi için olumlu gelişmeler görmeye devam ettiler.

Az sayıda sahibin elindeki geleneksel kitle medyası kendilerini profesyonel ve tarafsız olarak tanımlayan gazeteciler istihdam etmektedir. Gazeteciler kendilerini tarafsız olarak görse de bazılarının siyasetçilerle yakın ilişkileri bunun tam olarak doğru olmadığını göstermektedir. Çok farklı görüşlere ev sahipliği yapan, ki bu kutuplaşmayı tetikleyici bir etki de yaratmaktadır, dijital medya ise daha fazla yalan haber yaymayı sürdürmektedir.

Teknolojiyi temsili demokrasinin birkaç politikacıya yüklediği gücü vatandaşlara geri vermek için bir aracı olarak gören Landemore, teknolojinin halkın tümünün siyasete katılımını mümkün kıldığı iddiasındadır. Edenberg ise artan anlaşmazlık probleminin, yalan haberlerle savaşarak değil, anlaşmazlığın demokrasilerin ayrılmaz bir parçası olduğu kabul edilip herkesin birbirine saygı duyduğu ve anlaşmaya çalıştığı bir düzen yardımıyla çözülebileceğini ileri sürmektedir.

Hakikat ötesi, tek bileşenleri olan hakikat (truth) ve ötesi (post) dahil, çok tartışmalı bir kavramdır. Hakikat ötesi kavramının önemini savunanlar, eskiden hakikate saygı duyulan bir düzen olduğu ve yalanların bu kadar da yıkıcı olmadığına inanmaktadırlar. Hakikat ötesi kavramı olumsuz bir durumu ifade etmek için ve bundan sorumlu tutulanları suçlamak için kullanılmaktadır. Hakikat ötesinin pek bir şey ifade etmediğine inananlarsa yalanın geçmişten bu yana siyasi alandaki başatlığına dikkat çekerek mevcut durumda büyük bir değişiklik olmadığını ileri sürmektedirler. Onlar, önemli epistemolojik kavramlara ve bunların başında gelen hakikat kavramına ilişkin sorunlar olduğunu ve hakikat ötesi kavramının sadece bunları örtmeye yaradığını iddia etmektedirler.

Hakikat ötesi birçok türe ayrılabilir. İlki, bireylerin, olaylara mantıksal değil duygusal yaklaşımları veya siyasi bağlılıkları sebebiyle, olgusal hakikatlere ulaşmakta birçok güçlükle karşılaştıkları hakikat ötesi türüdür. Bu durumda bireyler olguları hakikiliklerine göre değil daha çok kendilerine getirdiği duygusal zevk açısından değerlendirirken aynı zamanda sorunlu epistemik otoritelere de yönelebilirler. İkincisi, kendini hakikate karşı umursamazlık olarak kendini gösterir. Bu ve sonra değineceğimiz hakikat ötesi biçimlerin ilkinden temel farkı, bunların bilinçli bir tercih olarak kendilerini göstermeleridir. Bu hakikat ötesi türüyle ilişkili bireyler, hakikat kavramının varlığını kabul etmekle beraber kendi söylemlerinde ona sadakate özen göstermezler. Duygusal hazza odaklandıklarından kendi gruplarına ve siyasetlerine uyacak söylemlerde bulunurken bunların hakikiliğini önemsemezler. Yalan söylendikleri ispatlansa bile geri adım atmazlar yalanlarında diretirler. Yalanlarının ortaya çıkması onları kaygılandırmaz. Üçüncüde, hakikatin nesnelliği ya tümünden reddedilir ya da onun göreceli olduğu düşünülür. Sonuncuda ise olguların gerçekliğini kabul edilmekle birlikte insanların olguların gerçekliğini tam olarak bilmesinin imkânsız olduğunu öne sürülür. Bu durumda hiçbir epistemik otorite tam olarak güvenilir bulunmaz. Hepsinin kendi çıkarlarını gözettiği veya önyargılı olduğuna inanıldığında hakikati aramak gereksiz olacağından bireyin kendine en yakın hissettiği görüşü kabul etmesi daha anlamlıdır.

Hakikat ötesini reddeden düşünürler göre bu kavram özünde farklı bir durumu temsil etmez. Onlara göre yalan her zaman vardı, şu anki durumun asıl özelliği sosyal medya sebebiyle yalanın çok daha hızlı yayılıyor olmasıdır. Hakikat ötesi kavramının, akıl dışı davranma suçlamasıyla, rakipleri siyasi alandan dışlamak için kötü niyetle kullanıldığını ileri sürmektedirler. Bireylerin farklı perspektifleri olduğundan aynı olguları farklı yorumlamalarından daha doğal bir şey olamaz. Hakikat ötesi kavramını kullananların kendilerini diğerlerinden ayırıp ayrıcalıklı bir konuma sokarken, diğerlerini demokrasi düşmanı olarak suçlayıp onları siyasetin dışına itmeye çalışmalarının büyük bir çelişki yarattığına dikkat çekmektedirler.

Son bölümde, popülizmden ve hakikat ile arasındaki ilişki ele alınmaktadır. Farklı yaklaşımlara konu olan popülizm çoğu akademisyenin üzerinde mutabık kaldığı bazı temel normatif iddiaları kapsar. Popülistler toplumun birbiriyle sürekli çatışma halindeki iki kampa bölündüğünü düşünürler; bir tarafta ahlak sahibi sıradan halk diğer tarafta ise ahlaken yozlaşmış seçkinler. Bu basit görüşe dayanan popülizm, kendi başına bütün toplumsal sorunlara cevap veremediğinden farklı ideolojilerle eklemlenerek sağ ve sol popülizm gibi değişik biçimler alabilir. ‘Halk ’kelimesinden kast edilen halk somut bir halk değil, birbirine benzeyen ve ahlaken üstün, soyut bir çoğunluktur. Bu homojen halk biricik bir halkın iradesine sahiptir ve popülizm halkın iradesini dolaysız tecelli ettirme iddiasındadır. Halkın karşısına yerleştirilerek tanımlanan seçkin kavramı da çok muğlak olup birçok farklı alt kümeye bölünebilir (ekonomik seçkinler, akademik seçkinler, siyasi seçkinler, yargısal seçkinler, kültürel seçkinler). Popülistler bu alt kümelerin hepsinin tek bir amaca hizmet ettiğine inanırlar. Müzakereyi reddederler çünkü seçkinlerle bir anlaşmaya varılabileceğine inanmazlar. Onlar için siyasetin amacı kendi iradelerini diğerlerine zorla kabul ettirmektir. Liberal demokrasinin sahip olduğu kurumların (bağımsız yargı ve özgür basın gibi) denge mekanizması olarak çalışmasına karşı çıkarlar. Halkın iradesi hiçbir güç tarafından engellenmemeli ve liderin o iradeyi temsil etmesine engel olunmamalıdır. Demokratlar gibi popülistler de kendi yönetimlerini halkın iradesine bağlarlar, fakat popülistlerin halktan anladığı tek bir çoğunluk grubuyken demokratlar çoğulculuğu savunur ve azınlık haklarına önemserler.

Popülistlerin bilim adamlarına ve uyguladıkları bilimsel yöntemlere karşı da bazı itirazları vardır. Sıradan vatandaşın sağduyusunu öne çıkarıp karşısına karmaşık bilimsel metotları koyarlar. Sıradan vatandaşın, gündelik yaşamdan gelen bilgiden beslendiğinden, daha doğal olarak görülen sağduyusu bilimsel bilgiden daha üstün sayılır. Popülistler bilim seçkinlerini, hak etmedikleri epistemik bir otoriteye sahip, ahlaken aşağı bir grup olarak tasvir ederler. Popülistlerin bilime karşı iki tür itirazı vardır. Birincisi, bilimin kendisine ve doğru bir yapılaş şekli olduğu fikrine eleştiri getirmez. Haksızca sahip oldukları otoriteyle bilim adamları, gerçek bilimsel epistemolojinin gün yüzüne çıkmasını kişisel çıkarları uğruna engellemeye çalıştığından, hakikati ortaya çıkaracak daha doğru alternatif epistemik otoritelere başvurulması gerektiği ileri sürülür. İkincisi, epistemik popülizm olarak adlandırılabilir ki bu genel bir bilimsel metodoloji eleştirisine dayanır ve sıradan halkın duygularını, sağduyusunu ve gündelik deneyimlerini asıl önemsenmesi gereken bilgi kaynakları olarak görürler.

Popülizm genelde teknokrasinin (uzmanların yönetimi) zıttı olarak tasvir edilir. Friedman, vatandaşların hem araçlar hem amaçlar üstünde söz hakkı olduğundan A.B.D.'nin bir demokratik teknokrasi olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Söz konusu güç onlara verildiğinden vatandaşların hem araçlar hem de amaçlar hakkında bilgi sahibi olduğunu varsaymak gerekir. Ancak, sıradan vatandaşın sahip olabileceği tek bilgi kaynağı sağduyusu olduğundan demokrasiler aslında epistemik popülizm varsayımına dayanmaktadır. Vatandaşlar güvenecekleri uzmanları seçmekle sorumludur. Kime güvenilmesi gerektiği kesin olmayan böyle bir durumda alternatif epistemolojileri (komplo teorileri) seçmeleri hiç de şaşırtıcı değildir. Friedman'e göre demokrasilerde kendini epistemik otorite olarak görmek normal bir durumdur. Başka bir uzmana güvenmek ise tam tersine öğrenilmiş bir durumdur ki bu da epistemik popülizmi anlaşılır kılar. Popülistlere göre teknokratik bilgi herkes tarafından anlaşılabilir bir bilgidir.

Popülistler işlerine gelen uzmanı seçebilirler. Sorunları kolayca çözülebilir gören popülistler, bunların çözülmesine karşı çıktıklarını iddia ettiklerini de hain olarak adlandırılır. Popülist iletişim çoğulculuğu ve olgusal hakikati reddeder. Seçkinlerin

gizlediği bir gerçek olduğuna inanılır ve o gerçek açığa çıkarılmaya çalışılır. Popülist liderler sıklıkla yalan haberlere başvurarak haberleri halk gözünde güvenilmez kılmaya çalışırlar. Onlar yalan söyledikleri gerçeğini 'sahici' ('otantik') görünerek kendi lehlerine çevirip, yalan söylemeyi insanlığın en temel olgularından biri gibi gösterirler. Kendi iç dünyalarını dışarıyla paylaşmayı vadederler, böylece açıkça yalan söylerken hep doğru söylemeye çalışan birinden, insan doğasını daha iyi yansıtmış olacaklarından, daha inandırıcı olurlar. Fieschi duygu/mantık ikilemini reddedip duygunun mantığın bir parçası olduğunu iddia etmiştir. O'na göre popülist liderler içgüdülere hitap ederler, kendilerini saydam ilan ederler ve diğerlerinin sahiciliğini sorgulayarak kendilerini tek güvenilir kaynak olarak gösterirler. Halkla dolaysız bir bağlantı kurmaları onlar için en önemli şeydir. Popülistler ve seçkinlerin ortak bir olgusal zemini kabul etmesi mümkün değildir. Popülistlere göre sadece kendileri hakikati temsil ederken seçkinler hep yalanı savunur ve aslında hakikat tamamen siyasi bir projedir.

Bu tezde, sonuç olarak, bir epistemik meydan okuma olarak algılanan yalanların çoğalması ve olgusal gerçekliğin artan bir şekilde çarpıtılması meselesini ele alarak bu durumun çözümüne ilişkin önerileri tartıştık. Arendt'de gördüğümüz üzere olgusal gerçeklik görüşlerimize zemin oluşturmalıdır. Ancak, hakikatin gücünü hazmedemeyen siyasetçiler olgusal gerçeklerle görüşleri aynıymış gibi göstermeye çalışırlar. Herkesin dünyaya farklı bakmasından dolayı olgusal gerçekler de farklı yorumlanırlar ki bu farklı görüşlerin varlığını kaçınılmaz kılar. Bu yüzden hakikat Arendt tarafından farklı görüşleri korumak adına siyaset ötesi bir kavram olarak konumlandırılmıştır. Rawls da benzer bir şekilde hakikatin siyasi iddialarımızı değerlendirmemesi, onun yerine makul olanın esas alınması, gerektiğini ileri sürmüştür.

Teknolojik gelişmelerden dolayı iletişim araçlarının çoğalması, yalanın daha hızlı yayılmasını sağlamıştır. Bu durumu düzeltmeye yönelik olarak hakikate yeniden önem kazandırılması ve doğru epistemik uygulamaların kullanımının teşvik edilmesi önerilmiştir. Hakikate eskisi kadar önem verilmediğine işaret etmek için tasarlanan hakikat ötesi kavramı şu an gerçekleştiği varsayılan özel bir epistemik krizi

tanımlamak için kullanılmıştır. Söz konusu kavramını savunanlar, hakikat ötesi durumun hakikate karşı eski tip yalandan daha farklı bir tutuma karşılık geldiğini ileri sürdüler. Buna karşın, bazı akademisyenler ise çoğalan yalanların niteliksel bir fark yaratmadığını, bunun sosyal medya gibi araçların ortaya çıkışından kaynaklandığını öne sürdüler ve ayrıca hakikatin hüküm sürdüğü bir eski dönem tahayyülünü reddettiler. Çoğalan yalanların kaynağı ve çözümü sadece epistemik alanlarda aranmamalıdır. Bu durumunun önemli siyasi nedenleri de vardır. Gruplar arası kutuplaşma bunun en çarpıcı örneğidir. Belli bir gruba aidiyet duygusuna sahip insanlar fikirlerini bu temelde belirleyebileceğinden olgusal gerçekler geri plana itilebilir.

Siyasete iki düşman grup arasında asla sonlanmayacak bir siyasi mücadele olarak bakan popülist hareketler kutuplaşmadan en iyi beslenen hareketlerdir. Karşı grubun uzmanlarını ve epistemik iddialarını reddedip kendi uzmanlarını öne çıkarırlar. Diğer grupla konsensüse varmanın imkânsız olduğunu öne sürerler. Herkesin kendi olgusal gerçeği olduğundan ortak olgusal gerçekler üzerinden bir anlaşmaya varmayı imkânsız görürler. Bu yaklaşım, hakikati güce ulaşmak için bir araç olarak görür ve diğer gruplara kendi hakikatini zorla kabul ettirme fikrine dayanır.

Siyasi kutuplaşmadan dolayı sadece epistemik çözümler üretmek yetersiz olacaktır. Siyasi kutuplaşmayı aşmaya yarayacak önlemler geliştirilmeden ortak bir gerçeklik anlayışı geliştirilemez. Bu durumda çözüm, karşı gruptaki insanlara saygı göstermeyi öğrenme ve onların fikirlerini ve bakış açılarını anlamaya çalışmakta aranmalıdır.

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