

Gheorghe-Ilie FÂRTE

Université « Alexandru Ioan Cuza » de Iași (Roumanie)

Comment les médias grand public alimentent-ils le populisme de droite ?

How Does the Mainstream Media Feed Right-Wing Populism?

Abstract: The vertiginous rise of right-wing populism, especially in its “nationalist, xenophobic and conservative form”, and some “racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic and sexist” drifts associated with this phenomenon – whether real or perceived as such – make the mainstream media play a double role. On the one hand, the mainstream media *reflect* the struggle for political hegemony between different vested interests; on the other hand, they *engage* in the fight against right-wing populism blasting both right-wing populist candidates and their voters or supporters. Many mainstream journalists ask citizens to realize a “sanitary cordon”, a “wall” or a “republican front” to block far-right populism and preserve liberal democracy. Moreover, they urge people to be wary of all attempts to “demonize” or “normalize” some tokens of right-wing populism. The main idea of this article is that right-wing populism is more harmless than is generally believed and, if excessive, negative media coverage doesn’t baffle but feed it. Populism is essentially a latent side effect of liberal democracy. Populism rises and becomes obtrusive only if a significant part of society *perceives* a regime of illiberal majoritarianism instead of one of liberal democracy. Right-wing populists are chiefly frustrated “ci-devants” who feel dispossessed of their past, identity, properties, qualities, privileges or titles. Inasmuch as the causes of collective frustration are many and varied (e.g. the real or just perceived corruption of the elites, the “system”, the deep state, the outsourcing of jobs, immigration, national sovereignty, national identity, communitarianism, radical Islamism, the status of some traditional institutions, some chapters of official history, etc.), there will always be right-wing populists, whether they are self-declared or covert. By adopting David G. Hackett’s thesis that the media are “agents of hegemony”, we applied the critical analysis of discourse to a set of 346 media articles in order

to reveal the discursive sources of power, domination, inequality and partiality. The articles appeared in *The New York Times* and *Le Monde* during the period 2016-2017, at the time when the presidential elections took place in the United States and France. The articles were selected according to the occurrence of the keywords “Donald Trump” – “populism” and “Marine Le Pen” – “populisme” within the titles. The analysis of these articles reveals a divisive discursive structure that correspond to a real political cleavage in society. It is true that populism presents a “Manichean outlook”, in which there are only friends and foes” and no compromise is possible. It is also true that mainstream media reinforce this Manichean perspective on society and make populists feel marginalized and politically disempowered. The mainstream media may appease right-wing populism if they treat its followers as legitimate and equal political actors. For this, they have to give up the narrative structures that underscore insurmountable divergences and irreconcilable interests. In a liberal democracy, mass media should chiefly play the role of mediator. They may not aim to defeat or re-educate certain categories of citizens just because they advocate “wrong” political solutions.

Keywords: right-wing populism, mainstream media, media coverage, critical analysis of discourse, liberal democracy, political hegemony