

Public Lecture at Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University, Sweden  
27/03/2019

## **'Crisis' as a Populist Imaginary? Discursive Shifts in Media and Politics**

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My lecture will focus on the complexity of the populist uptake of 'crisis' as a social and political imaginary. Drawing on insights from critical discourse studies, media and communication research, conceptual history, critical social theory and cultural political economy, I will argue that 'crisis' has recently become part and parcel of ideologized utopian visions of the *'imaginary reconstitution of society'* (Levitas 2013) that is often mediated in order to discursively *pre-legitimise* populism and political opportunism (Krzyżanowski 2012, 2014; Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2009; Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017). I will look closely at the dynamics of European political and public discourse on 'crisis' in relation to events where either down/overplaying 'crisis' or constructing it as imaginary or imminent 'threat' was at the heart of politico-populist and wider public discourse. While on the one hand I will analyse the European (including Austrian, German, Polish and Swedish) media debates and discourse about *'Brexit'* since the 2016 UK referendum on leaving the EU (see esp. Krzyżanowski 2019, Zappettini & Krzyżanowski 2019), on the other hand I will focus on the discursive responses to the European *'Refugee Crisis'* (Krzyżanowski 2018 a,b; Krzyżanowski Triandafyllidou & Wodak 2018), especially since its highpoint in late 2015. Drawing on the analysis, I will highlight a critical perspective on European social and political imaginaries which not only highlights their historical or strategic function (Koselleck 1988; Wolin 2008; Sum and Jessop 2013) but also points to their embedding within various orchestrated *'discursive shifts'* (Krzyżanowski 2013, 2018b). The latter, I will show, contribute to the spread and legitimation of populist ideologies of nativism and ethno-nationalism in/across Europe. They also further the spread of extreme positions across the wider spectrum of political and public views thus making the *politics of in/uncivility* (Krzyżanowski and Ledin 2017) and post-truth into a widely accepted variant of political practice.

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## Bio

Michał Krzyżanowski holds since 2013 the Chair in Media and Communication Studies at Örebro University, Sweden and since 2017 the Chair in Communication & Media at the University of Liverpool, UK. In 2018-19 he is also Albert Bonnier Jr. Guest Professor in Media Studies at the Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University, Sweden. Michał is one of the leading international experts in critical discourse studies of media and political communication. His key research interests are in dynamics of right-wing populist discourse, mediation and normalisation of racism and politics of exclusion as well as in diachronic analyses of constructions of crisis in European and global media. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the international *Journal of Language and Politics* and a co-editor of the *Bloomsbury Advances in Critical Discourse Studies* book series. More information: [https://www.oru.se/english/employee/michal\\_krzyzanowski](https://www.oru.se/english/employee/michal_krzyzanowski) and <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/communication-and-media/staff/michal-krzyzanowski>.

Indicators of global political trends and sentiments today are as alarming as are the indicators of global economic trends. The preliminary results of the coronavirus test on humanity reveal clear signs of a political and psychological immunodeficiency or, if you like, an absence of the instinct that is inherent in any biological species to protect one's own population. All for One or Each for Themselves? One interpretation that arose in the Middle East is that the coronavirus was cast upon the Chinese as a punishment for oppressing Muslims. In Russia, the virus works for those who espouse total isolationism, prophesize the irreversible downfall of the West and preach eschatological optimism. What about the social responsibility of the media? The critical juncture of Brexit in media & political discourses: from national-populist imaginary to cross-national social and political crisis. Franco Zappettini & Michał, Krzyżanowski. *Critical Discourse Studies* 16 (4):381-388 (2019). Accordingly, populist discursive representations typically articulate a polarised framing of the socio-political field in a bid to inspire and mobilize excluded social groups. The latter are called to establish links of unity, which will enable them to effectively challenge the established power structure and influence decision-making. They tend to construct and reinforce threat and danger scenarios "a politics of fear" caused by arbitrarily defined scapegoats. Populists are taking these actions not only because they perceive them as a roadblock to their power, but also because they are hugely symbolic for their supporters. Judges, journalists, and academics are targets for populism as they are embodiments of the pro-globalisation elite that populists and their voters revile. Right-wing populist politicians seem to have been particularly successful in adopting social media for campaign purposes and have used them as a strategic communication tool and as an instrument of power politics (e.g., Bartlett 2014; Engesser et al. 2016; Enli 2017; Krzyżanowski 2018) as they provide an effective, low-cost tool through which politicians can quickly share messages, directly interact with their followers, self-promote, and criticize the establishment (van Kessel and Castelein 2016).