1   Introduction

The fake news virus

In late 2019 and early 2020, a new and highly uncertain viral threat started to surface around the globe. The disease soon came to be known under the now ubiquitous name COVID-19 and evolved into the as-of-yet most significant pandemic of the 21st century. As the virus spread globally, it simultaneously moved to the top of political agendas, with policymakers debating not only its consequences for public health, but also for the economy, security, and much more. This development was reflected at the annual *Munich Security Conference*, a forum in which policymakers, intellectuals, and business actors discuss the state and future of international security policy.

On 15 February 2020, Tedros Ghebreyesus, Director of the World Health Organization (WHO), spoke on the dangers of COVID-19. In what were to become a highly publicized moment, Ghebreyesus warned the international crowd of the dangers of an emergent *infodemic*:

> We're not just fighting an epidemic; we're fighting an infodemic. Fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus, and is just as dangerous… . We call on all governments, companies, and news organizations to work with us to sound the appropriate level of alarm … . Now more than ever is the time for us to let science and evidence lead policy. If we don't, we are headed down a dark path that leads nowhere but division and disharmony.
>
> (Ghebreyesus, 2020)

With Ghebreyesus' speech, the notion of the *infodemic* was swiftly propelled into the mainstream, becoming a common trope across politics, journalism, and academia. To many intellectuals, it came to be seen as a "threat to one of the pillars of democracy – transparency and truthful information" (Pedrazzani et al., 2021, p. 181) and a catalyst for "panic, fear, and chaos within the society" (Gupta et al., 2022, p. 670). If governments and media conglomerates did not act promptly – a number of prominent voices argued – democracy would soon

be facing an existential peril from misinformed masses, trapped in alternative realities dominated by fake news.

In response to this new rhetorical figure, governments across the world began to implement emergency measures, often involving direct and unmasked restrictions on free speech. Human rights groups were soon to warn that this development would hurt democracy more than it would protect it (Human Rights Watch, 2020, 2021). These warnings were, however, largely ignored.

Despite its meteoric rise to the top of policy agendas, the core ideas contained within the notion of the infodemic were far from new. Indeed, what was perhaps most intriguing about the sudden ubiquity of this concept was that – by and large – the fear, symbolism, and solutions surrounding the infodemic had already dominated public discourse for years. In 2016, then-US presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, had proclaimed that there was an "epidemic of malicious fake news" jeopardizing "our democracy and innocent lives" (cited in Taylor, 2016). In 2017, the CEO of Apple, Tim Cook, had stated that fake news was "killing people's minds" (cited in Rawlinson, 2017). And in 2018, Indian politician, Subramanian Swamy, had called fake news a "cancer" in need of "surgery" (Press Trust of India, 2018).

One of the perhaps most vocal expressions of these ideas in the period before COVID-19 came from French president, Emmanuel Macron. In 2018, before the Joint House of the US congress, Macron had proclaimed that "[t]o protect our democracies, we have to fight against the ever-growing virus of fake news, which exposes our people to irrational fear and imaginary risk… Without reason, without truth, there is no real democracy because democracy is about true choices and rational decisions. The corruption of information is an attempt to corrode the very spirit of our democracies."

In addition to echoing political rhetoric from before COVID-19, the solutions to the infodemic also channeled and rehashed ideas from before 2020. Already in 2017, a number of governments had implemented a wave of "anti-fake news laws" that human rights groups criticized for harming free speech and democratic participation (Henley, 2018).

Rather than capturing a novel threat, then, the infodemic represented yet another iteration of an already pervasive set of ideas and discourses in late capitalist states; namely that societies worldwide face an existential threat from fake news, alternative facts, and misinformation, spreading like viruses and corrupting the minds of millions. Fear of the infodemic was only a fragment of an already existing *zeitgeist* of fear that continues to captivate political discourse. Then as much as now, it seems that everywhere one looks, there is no shortage of politicians, scholars, and public intellectuals lamenting the impending death of democracy, as supposedly hard facts and rationality are drowned out by misinformation, fake news, and lies. According to some, as exemplified by the French president, the very *spirit* of democracy is corroding.

Indeed, whether labeled as an infodemic, post-truth era, post-factual society, or misinformation age, a prevailing narrative of our time has become that scientific evidence is no longer trusted, medical evidence is sidestepped, and proper journalism is under attack from fake news farms, troll factories, social bots, and deepfakes. These discourses argue that the rise of social media platforms, such as Facebook, TikTok, and WeChat, has been a catalyst for a seemingly endless flood of misinformation and deception. Traditional gatekeepers of truth, such as editors, journalists, and public intellectuals, have supposedly lost their monopoly on public issues. In this process, so-called malicious actors and misinformed citizens have started to spread lies, deception, hate, propaganda, and fake information on a previously unseen scale. All these phenomena are claimed to be indicative of a brand-new political age or paradigm in which "Truth" and "Reason" are superseded by echo chambers, filter bubbles, emotions, and individual gut feelings. This amounts to an epochal rupture in the very fabric of democracy. The foundations of our political system are cracking up. Democracy is doomed, unless these destructive trajectories are interrupted and changed for the better through drastic measures.

Often, a series of seemingly disparate events – from the re-election of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister of India in 2019, global vaccine hesitancy movements in 2020, the US Capitol Attack in 2021, the war in Ukraine in 2022, to the Brazilian Congress attack in 2023 – are lumped together as proof of a profound crisis of truth. It is precisely this supposed crisis that is so often used to legitimize decisive and far-reaching political action.

This book seeks to investigate and critically examine these contemporary narratives and discourses about democracy, politics, and truth. Grappling with these potent ideas, currently circulating at rapid speed in late capitalist democracies, it systematically details the emergence of what we term as *post-truth worlds*. We use this concept as an overall frame of reference, useful for capturing a still developing and continuously expanding field of political struggle and contestation. This field revolves around explaining *how, why,* and *in what ways* democratic practices are currently being put under dire pressure.

Post-truth worlds, in our understanding, can be seen as discursive formations or political imaginaries produced, disseminated, and adopted across the globe, always nested within specific socio-political contexts with real-world consequences. With this book, we want to move into these worlds. We want to explore their internal discursive logics: that is, the ideas they contain and the implicit normative premises that structure them. Why is it, we ask, that contemporary democratic states and societies are currently said to be facing an immense crisis of truth? How has the seemingly unstoppable barrage of fake news and alternative facts – flooding the gates of democracy and inaugurating an era of post-truth politics – been conceptualized and linked to wider political issues? And what are the dominant normative ideas that continue to inform our current ways of thinking and acting upon questions of truth, democracy, and politics?

To answer these questions, we use a substantial amount of space in this book on presenting an empirical mapping of the current terrain of political struggle over the stakes and ideas in contemporary post-truth worlds. Indeed, a large portion of this work is taken up by a relatively detailed discourse analysis of the kinds of claims made as to how democracy, truth, and politics influence each other. In wanting to interrogate this continuously morphing *politics of falsehood* (Farkas & Schou, 2018), we are not interested in evaluating or assessing whether or not or to what extent current debates around truth, deception, and democracy are accurate or not. We do not aim to say whether democracies *really* are facing an "information nightmare" (Filibeli, 2020). Instead, we want to take contemporary concerns seriously by understanding these as performative interventions seeking to give meaning to and influence our democratic moment in profound ways. Whether they accurately represent the world or not is, for us, less important than the specific set of ideas they serve to produce and bring into existence. At its core, this book can thus be seen as a study in political conceptual history, albeit with a contemporary twist.

In proposing this shift in analytical focus – from looking at conditions of truth to discourses on truth – this book differentiates itself quite substantially from existing accounts of post-truth politics and the infodemic. In recent years, there has been no shortage of commentators and intellectuals decrying the onslaught of fake news and post-truth. A veritable industry of post-truth alarmism has sprung up, decrying the "*War on Truth*" (d'Ancona, 2017), "*Death of Truth*" (Kakutani, 2018), "*Infocalypse,*" (Schick, 2020), "*How Bullshit Conquered the World,*" (Ball, 2017) and "*How We Lost the Global Battle Against Disinformation*" (Stengel, 2019). Similarly, legacy media outlets across the world have disparaged the new age of disinformation by publishing a wealth of articles, op-eds, and commentaries, dedicated precisely to the decline of democracy and truth.

In the academic landscape, too, there is a growing movement focused on questions in and around fake news, infodemics, and post-truth. Notable recent contributions include titles such as *Lie Machines*: *How to Save Democracy from Troll Armies, Deceitful Robots, Junk News Operations, and Political Operatives* (Howard, 2020), *Cheap Speech: How Disinformation Poisons Our Politics – and How to Cure It* (Hasen, 2022), and *Foolproof: Why We Fall for Misinformation and How to Build Immunity* (van der Linden, 2023). As already hinted at, our aim with this book is to do something different than what is attempted in these existing interventions. We want to understand the new political discourses, ideas, and grammars around post-truth, fake news, and alternative facts. Rather than saying what is true and what is fake, we want to turn this issue into an empirical set of questions. In this sense, we hope to take stock of the current debate surrounding these issues, unpacking contemporary anxieties, visions, and ideals about democracy and politics. In so doing, we will not only understand our existing situation better; we might also begin to understand the limits and

problems of post-truth worlds and start carving out other ways of thinking and acting about truth and democracy.

Democracy in decline? Core arguments

This book is an attempt to unpack contemporary post-truth worlds by exploring discussions on truth, democracy, and falsehood, diving into their political logics and implicit normative ideas. We seek to think with and, importantly, *beyond* these existing worlds. Based on a systematic empirical mapping of the state of debate, we aim to produce new political openings, allowing us to envision other ways of imagining the state of democracy. In this sense, the book has both empirical and critical ambitions. It hopes to fuse detailed empirical studies with political philosophical discussions on democracy, politics, and capitalism.

The critical ambition is in large part formed through an engagement with the existing state of affairs. This is an engagement that is both historical and political. Our aim is not to "debunk" or "expose" existing discourses as ideological veils or smokescreens, but, more modestly, to suggest that their rendering of the world is not complete. They have severe blind spots and lack crucial connections to wider historical developments taking place since the middle of the last century. Not only does the notion of the post-truth era come with an implicit nostalgia for a never existing "truth era" of democracy, thus erasing long historical struggles of disenfranchised groups, such as women and racial minorities, to be acknowledged as part of the democratic populace. The idea of a post-truth era also fails to acknowledge that democracy, as a political system, has never only been about truth in the first place. In doing so, it neglects that contemporary democracies were by no means in a stable condition before the supposed villains of post-truth suddenly knocked them off their course.

Formulated in the most straight-forward way, this book will argue that current discourses about the fate of democracy have tended to presuppose a very particular understanding of what counts as *true* and *false*. In so doing, they have also tended to smuggle in an implicit, yet nonetheless incredibly pervasive and strong, model of how proper democracies ought to function. They have claimed certain forms of power as being natural and supposedly inherent to democracy as a form of governance and political ordering, namely political power grounded in rationality and reason. We will argue that this current way of thinking about democracy – which has become almost completely hegemonic in contemporary political debates – is both politically charged and normatively risky. What it essentially does is to equate the idea of democracy with those of reason, rationality, and truth *tout court*. Reason and truth become the primary conditions for democracy to exist in these discourses: democracy *is* truth, it *is* reason. In this narrative, what is threatening democracies worldwide is falsehoods – pure and simple. To re-establish the former (that is, democracy) one must eliminate the latter (that is, falsehoods).

This type of argument is certainly not without precedent, neither historically nor in a contemporary light. Indeed, in what can best be described as a strange foretelling of the current state of democracy, the German philosopher and staunch defender of rationality, Jürgen Habermas, argued already in 2006 that "[a] 'post-truth democracy'… would no longer be a democracy" (Habermas, 2006, p. 18). Similarly, the history of democratic thought is littered with philosophers and political theorists linking democratic practices to truth-telling, rationality, consensus, and reason.

Yet, to claim that democracy is identical to truth – or even the conditions of possibility for truth to exist – is also to take for granted the highly contested and complex history of democracy itself. It is to gloss over the fact that what democracy is has never been static or fixed but continuously evolving and disputed. As is well known, the practice and idea of democracy constitutes what we might call an *essentially contested concept* whose contents and meaning have shifted greatly over time. Democracy has never just been one thing alone, instead remaining an object of political and social struggle. Even so, if one were to distill a common kernel from democracy, it is questionable whether a system of truth would be it. Turning to the etymological roots of democracy reveals a different story, as David Held (2006, p. 1, original emphasis) so succinctly recounts:

> While the word "democracy" came into English in the sixteenth century from the French *démocratie,* its origins are Greek. "Democracy" is derived from *dēmokratía*, the root meanings of which are *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule). Democracy means a form of government in which, in contradistinction to monarchies and aristocracies, the people rule.

Far from a question of truth, the etymological roots of democracy reveal its intimate connection to the people – and rule by the people. Beyond this initial definition, the history of democracy as a concept and a form of governance is complex and multilayered. Over time, competing definitions and ideas about the ways in which democracy is best organized has continued to roam back and forth. Different styles and forms of democracy have emphasized distinct patterns of political participation, rights, and obligations. Though varying in terms of its concrete implementation, most liberal democracies today are based on representative forms of democracy in which citizens get to vote for (different) political parties at periodic elections. This is a system of delegation in which citizens, through their vote, elect politicians to represent their interests. While this style of democracy is dominant in advanced capitalist countries, often based on minimal forms of direct engagement and everyday influence, it is certainly not the only way of organizing a democratic system. Indeed, throughout history there has been (and continues to be) much more direct forms of democracy, emphasizing rule by the people as not just a periodic occurrence but integral to mundane life. Moreover, one ought to remember the distinct influence by social movements,

political activists, and civil society on the concrete historical development of democracy, whether for the better or worse.

The tension sketched out above between a system of delegation and political expertise, on the one hand, and popular sovereignty and the people, on the other hand, continues to form an important dynamic in most liberal democracies. In this context, the political philosopher Chantal Mouffe (1993, 2005) has argued that liberal democracies are *not* constituted as singular orders but are carriers of what she terms as *the democratic paradox*. For Mouffe, this democratic paradox resides precisely in the fact that contemporary democracies are the product of liberalism – with its emphasis on rights, individualism, and law – and the democratic tradition, which has historically been linked to ideas about equality, participation, and popular sovereignty. Liberal democracy has to balance these counteracting forces, she suggests, and its success is in many ways dependent on its ability to do so.

We will return to these discussions on the political philosophy and history of democracy in the third part of the book. We will do so to give a critical response to contemporary ideas about a crisis of truth, offering a quite different portrayal of democracy than what is dominant in post-truth worlds. Based on our empirical dissection of the current terrain of struggle, we want to argue that the proliferation of ideas about fake news and the ambushing of reason should not, at least not primarily, be understood as a "truth crisis." There is a series of deep-seated problems facing liberal democracies, but the rise of fake news and alternative facts is not the biggest of our problems. In fact, solving the post-truth crisis could very well *add* to our current predicament – at least in the way it is currently imagined. Why is that? Because a large majority of those proclaiming that a truth crisis is destroying liberal democracies all seem to view evidence, reason, and hard facts as the *only* solution to contemporary democratic problems. To save democracy, these voices argue, we need to once again secure the solid ground of reason that has begun to shatter. The supposedly natural connection between truth and democracy must be restored.

This is a dangerous path. A large part of this book is dedicated to showing why. As this book will try to demonstrate, this kind of *truth-based solutionism* is all too often no solution at all. It carries within it a dangerous seed that obscures what we perceive to be the core promise or even utopia of the democratic tradition: namely that popular sovereignty and rule by the people *is* possible. Post-truth worlds often end up as attempts to undo the democratic paradox by throwing the democratic tradition to the wayside. Democracy, we want to argue in this book – particularly following radical democratic and pluralist political thinkers like Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, Wendy Brown, and Jacques Rancière – is not just about facts, reason, and evidence. It never has been. Democracy and politics are instead about the interlocking exchanges between the individual and the people, as well as the competing political ideas about how society ought to be structured that emerges from this interplay. We cannot deduce how we want to

live together. There is no single formula for the composition of the political community. What remains proper to a well-functioning democracy is not so much its ability to navigate based on reason and truth, but its ability to include and give voice to different political projects and groups. Democracy is about different visions for how society should be organized. It is about clashes of opinions, affect, and emotions.

As we will demonstrate in this book, it is precisely these elements that continue to be denied and obscured within current solutions to the alleged post-truth crisis. To make matters worse, these solutions often add insult to injury by combating the very thing they are trying to save: to cure democracy, anti-democratic or even authoritarian measures are prescribed. Responding to this development, we believe that what we need now, perhaps more than ever, is not necessarily more truth. We need spaces for the enactment of politics proper.

This book should be seen as a staunch defense of democracy, not as the sole rule of reason, but as the rule of the people. Saving democracy is, we will argue, not about arming against fake news and disinformation – at least not primarily. It is instead, and perhaps more importantly, about creating genuine spaces for politics: that is, spaces for contestation, for political difference, and for pluralism. Doing so implies imagining other futures than those currently promoted under the banner of truth and rationality. It requires the construction of a new Left politics that can adequately address key societal issues and concerns.

In short form, these are the core arguments set up in this work. We will show how a certain imaginary has gripped large parts of the world and why its implicit ideas about the nature of democracy are problematic. We will furthermore suggest that other paths are possible, even necessary, if we want to reclaim the democratic tradition. While we are currently trapped within the confines of specific post-truth worlds, there is nothing to suggest that our history is programmed in advance. There is always room for resistance: that is, for thinking and doing otherwise. This book hopes to contribute to this endeavor.

Approach and clarifications

Before embarking on our investigation into and out of contemporary post-truth worlds, we want to make our approach to this matter as clear as possible by tackling certain questions in advance. We do not seek to dispute or deny the threats posed by misinformation, lies, and deception. We do not claim that false information and propaganda techniques are harmless. They do real harm to real people. We know this, since we have contributed to exploring this in a number of studies, examining the intricacies of political deception and conflict in digital media. This includes studies of racism on fake Facebook pages (Farkas, Schou, & Neumayer, 2018a, 2018b), Russian interference in the 2016 US elections (Bastos & Farkas, 2019; Farkas & Bastos, 2018), manipulation through "mimicked news" in online tabloid media (Farkas & Neumayer, 2020b), and connections between 20th and

21st century propaganda (Farkas, 2019; Farkas & Neumayer, 2020a). This work has sought to contribute to understanding how contemporary media ecologies foster both new means of deception and struggles against these.

In conducting this research, we have become increasingly concerned about the kinds of conversations we – as academics, citizens, and participants in public debate – are currently having. Or *not* having. A conversation that is currently missing forms the core of this book: that is, the fate of democracy as *dēmokratía,* rule by the people, rather than rule by truth.

In this context, we might as well make clear from the beginning that we have both been formed by a quite particular way of thinking about democracy. This has in large part been fueled by participatory, pluralistic, and open ideas about what democracy is and should be, about who should be allowed to speak and be heard (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014; Mouffe, 1993, 2005; Rancière, 2014). Being faced with on-going discussions on how to handle and reconstruct liberal democracies, it seems to us that such democratic ideas have been thrown in the bin. Yet, moving seamlessly from the preposition that we should combat false information and deliberate deception to wanting to reinstate the privilege of truth is a complete non-sequitur to us. The two are not mutually exclusive. It *is* possible to both be worried about new capabilities of digital technologies *and* wish for more participatory and inclusionary forms of democracy. In fact, as shall be argued here, this pairing might be the only way forward if democracy is to survive.

As captured by the title of this book, most of its chapters are taken up by in-depth discussions and analyses of current discourses perpetuated at rapid speed across social media, news headlines, scholarly articles, policy briefs, and presidential speeches. Indeed, much of this book presents a close textual analysis, grappling with the particular ways in which language is mobilized to express and articulate certain visions about the conditions and faith of democracy. To claim that such an investigation only sheds light on language and discourses, however, would be to artificially limit the scope and breadth of the arguments developed here. While our analysis does focus on the deployment of language and construction of texts, these should not be seen as freely floating entities that can simply be divorced from material circumstances, contexts, and practices (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014). Language not only reflects our way of understanding and acting in the world but is also recursively involved in bringing those very worlds into existence. To deconstruct the mounting political grammar currently promoted about the post-truth era, particularly in the so-called Western world, is also to lay bare the hegemonic cognitive schemes and institutional structures that guide contemporary political actions, policy measurements, and interventions. Engaging with these is furthermore a means of taking part in hegemonic struggles over the very meaning and modalities of the world itself.

As a consequence, this book does not claim any neutral high-ground or universal position of reason. This does not mean that the book resides in the often-caricatured realm of *post-modernism*, a strange portrayal of a position in which

truth and reason are said to be cast aside as completely relative, arbitrary, and groundless. We instead take the challenge inaugurated by post-structuralist writers seriously, not least the work of Laclau (1990, 2005), by occupying a middle-ground best captured by the term *post-foundationalism* (Marchart, 2007). Inspired particularly by the writings of Laclau, but also Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Derrida, and Oliver Marchart, this is a position that – at one and the same time – denies the possibility of any stable and unshakeable ground underlying social reality *and* affirms the possibility of multiple grounds that seek to install a precarious and temporary foundation. Phrased somewhat differently, such a position takes issue with the idea of any transcendental universal Truth (capital T) that cuts across and goes beyond geographies, epochs, subjectivities, species, and (perhaps even) planets. Instead, it argues that there have historically been *different truths* (lowercase t) that have been the product of social and political struggles. These competing truths are not mere smokescreens or ideological veils but situated world-making efforts around which particular forms of life have grown out. We are never operating without ground, yet no ground is ever eternal and firm. In the political realm, there can be no absolute or universal site of political legitimacy. All politics is about competing (antagonistic) ways of understanding and giving meaning to the world. The very object of politics remains the mobilization and hegemonization of the field of social meaning.

These political philosophical coordinates will be developed further throughout this book, particularly in Chapter 3. For now, we simply use them to say that just as the world of politics is not a world of the universal nor is that of research and academic knowledge. We are also situated within certain conceptions and apprehensions of what the world is and could be. Indeed, as our analysis showcases, far from just describing an already assembled world, researchers play an important role in making things, such as post-truth, infodemics, and fake news, come into being at all. They take part in performing, producing, and constructing the very meaning of these ideas. This should, however, not make us give up in advance or forfeit any kind of normative commitment. Instead, as David Howarth has so succinctly insisted, it should prompt us to engage in political struggles alongside other political actors. As Howarth (2000, p. 123) states by reference to the work of Laclau and Mouffe:

Critical discussion of Laclau and Mouffe's project for radical democracy have centred on their supposed relativism. If there are no ultimate grounds for defending and justifying any set of values and beliefs, how can they expect to argue for radical democracy? This sort of "enlightenment blackmail," as Foucault (1984, p. 43) puts it, implies that unless one has or invokes absolute foundations to defend a political project, then one has no ground whatsoever. However, just as most competitors in a game cannot predetermine its outcome yet are still willing to play, so Laclau and Mouffe can argue their case for radical democracy without assuming it to "trump" any opposition

proposal. In other words, it is the actual proposals they (and others) put forward which must be evaluated and not the conditions of possibility for making any judgment at all.

It is precisely from this sort of position – both critical of the normative *and* deeply normative – that we want to think through current ideas of post-truth and fake news. We want to do so to argue for different ways forward than those that are currently precluded and obscured by dominant political discourses. Doing so is rooted in the firm belief that what is currently at stake is not just a battle over what is true and what is fake. This is an entirely one-sided framing of the problem, and it is precisely this framing that is all too often set by news headlines, public intellectuals, and politicians alike. In our view, reducing the current political moment to a crisis of truthfulness is in itself a deeply political act serving to obscure a whole set of important democratic issues that could be discussed – that *need to be* discussed. This includes questions about how democracies ought to function. What kind of society we want to live in. Who holds power over what resources. What kinds of bodies are allowed to speak. Who are recognized as equals and treated as life worth living. If we can forge even a few intellectual entry points for engaging with these questions during the course of this book, our efforts have not been in vain.

Outline of book

The book is organized in three core parts, the first of which you have already embarked upon. In Part I, *Preparing for the Post-Truth Journey*, we present the tools we use to navigate the complex terrain of post-truth worlds. Spanning three chapters, Part I outlines the aims of the book, its theoretical and methodological foundations, and the state of existing research into fake news, post-truth, and related phenomena.

Part II is called *Into Post-Truth Worlds*. Here, we systematically unpack the ideas, solutions, and problematizations currently conjured up in public discourse across the world. We look at the interventions and anxieties linking democracy to questions of post-truth, fake news, infodemics, and alternative facts, examining the implicit normative ideas about democracy contained in these. In this sense, Part II – which also spans three chapters – contains the main empirical portion of this book. It presents a detailed exploration of the political terrain that is still developing around the state of democracy, truth, and politics.

Part III, named *Out of Post-Truth Worlds,* takes up the mantle from Part II, but shifts gears slightly. Instead of attending to the political worlds currently being constructed, this chapter seeks to critically analyze their premises through the lens of critical and pluralist political philosophy. Doing so, we want to argue that, rather than deepening democratic practices, contemporary post-truth worlds have relied on ideas closely connected to *post-political* and

post-democratic trajectories. Arguing that democracy is more or less solely about truth, consensus, and rationality, they have served to undermine the voice of the people and popular sovereignty. This is problematic not only because it denies the constitutive role of the people, but also insofar as it can serve to create a self-propelling feedback loop. As a counterproposal to this model, we suggest that ideas offered by radical political philosophers, concerned with deepening democratic institutions and reclaiming these from the grips of the capitalist market, can serve as powerful alternatives. The book ends by arguing that we are currently situated in a democratic moment, what Gramsci (1992) named as *the interregnum*. This is a time in which the old system seems to be failing but no firm model has been devised for the future. We close the book by arguing that such a moment provides an opening for once again contesting the hegemony of capitalism, while working towards more inclusive, democratically open, and just societies. At the very least, this might be the kind of utopia we need to invoke to once again start believing in a better and more democratic future.

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