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Editor of the Abstract Book

Assoc. Prof. dr. Renata Šukaitytė,
Head of the Centre for Journalism and Media Research
Faculty of Communication, Vilnius University
renata.sukaityte@kf.vu.lt

Designer and Layout of the Abstract Book

Skaistė Ašmenavičiūtė

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info@leidykla.vu.lt, www.leidykla.vu.lt/en/
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ANTI-ELITISM IN EMILIS VĖLYVIS'S POLITICAL THRILLERS "ZERO 3" (2017) AND "THE GENERATION OF EVIL" (2022)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Renata Šukaitytė, Vilnius University, Faculty of Communication
(Lithuania)

Email: renata.sukaityte@kf.vu.lt

Abstract

This paper researches the discourse of anti-elitism as a component of the populist discourse by focusing on two political thrillers by Emilis Vėlyvis – *Zero 3* (2017) and *The Generation of Evil* (2022). Vėlyvis wrote the scripts for these films together with screenwriter Jonas Banys whose most popular works often feature populist tropes (sinister foreigners, corrupt elites, an immoral and pragmatic middle class, etc.). I argue that one of the characteristics of the selected sample films, which turned them into popular films, is the marked criticism (or even hostility) towards the local political elites, media and public institutions which are represented as corrupt and indifferent to Lithuanian people. From this point of view, these films are quite unique in the local film milieu and deserve scrutiny, especially when they were released (and reached the wide audience) at a time when the populist rhetoric became frequent in political communication, and populist characters occupy more space and time in the national and European media.

The conclusions of the research paper are built on close introspection of the populist tropes used in the narratives of these films, based on Benjamin Arditi's notion of "populism as a mode of representation" (Arditi 2007) and the conceptual model of populist communication, as developed by Sina Blassnig, Nicole Ernst, Florin Büchel, Sven Engesser & Frank Esser (Blassnig, 2019). I argue that two dimensions of populist communication – 'the anti-elitism' and 'exclusion' – are most common in *Zero 3* and *The Generation of Evil*. They serve for discrediting the political elites and public institutions, and thus detaching them from the people.

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