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Populism

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CHAPTER 27

POPULISM

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INTRODUCTION

POPULISM is one of the most contested concepts in the social sciences. While no important concept is beyond debate, the discussion about populism concerns not just exactly what it is, but even whether it exists at all. A perfect example of the conceptual confusion in the field is the seminal edited volume *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, by Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner (1969), in which different authors define populism, among others, as an ideology, a movement, and a syndrome. To make things even more complicated, scholars working on different world regions tend to equate, and sometimes conflate, populism with quite distinct phenomena. For instance, in the European context populism is often used to refer to anti-immigration and xenophobia, whereas in the Latin American debate populism is frequently employed to allude to clientelism and economic mismanagement.

Part of the confusion stems from the fact that populism is a label seldom claimed by people or organizations themselves. Instead, it is ascribed to others, most often as a distinctly negative label. Even the few rather consensual examples of populism, like the Argentine President Juan Domingo Perón or the murdered Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn did not self-identify as populists. While today some political leaders, movements, and parties that adhere to the populist ideology exist, there is no defining text or prototypical case. At the same time, the term populism is used in the media around the world, denoting such diverse phenomena as a cross-class movement, an irresponsible economic programme, or a folkloric style of politics. For example, the term 'populism' is applied in the British newspapers to wholly different actors and issues (Bale

et al. 2011), implying that it is hard to find any logic in the set of features that are associated with the term.

Some argue that this conceptual confusion is too big for populism to be a meaningful concept in the social sciences; others consider it primarily a normative term, which should be confined to media and politics. While the frustration is understandable, the term populism is too central to debates about politics from Europe to the Americas to simply do away with. Although a consensual definition will probably never be developed, this is quite common within academia. However, what is feasible is to create a definition that is able to capture accurately the core of all major past and present manifestations of populism, while still being precise enough to exclude clearly non-populist phenomena.

Even though populism is mostly associated with Europe and the Americas, it probably exists in one form or another throughout the world.¹ The literature tends to distinguish at least three ideal-types, which loosely relate to specific geographical areas and time periods: agrarian populism in Russia and the USA at the turn of the nineteenth century; socio-economic populism in Latin America in the mid-twentieth century; and xenophobic populism in Europe in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This distinction is very rough, as the different types of populism existed outside of those areas and periods. We will here provide a short overview of the main ideas and movements of these three ideal types, before defining populism as a 'thin-centred-ideology', describe its three core concepts, and analyse its relationship to other key concepts like democracy, gender, and nationalism.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Although some people argue that populism is the mirror image of democracy, and hence is as old as the democratic idea, conventional wisdom places the origins of populism at the end of the nineteenth century, with the almost simultaneous occurrence of the so-called *Narodniki* in Russia and the People's Party in the United States. A second, distinct wave of populism developed in Latin America in the mid-twentieth century, mostly associated with the Argentine military officer and politician Juan Domingo Perón. Finally, in the past decades populism has been associated very strongly with radical right parties in Western Europe, such as the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the French National Front (FN).

Each wave is not only related to a specific geographical area or time period, but also to particular accompanying ideological features. In the first wave populism was combined with agrarianism, in the second with a specific socioeconomic project, and in the third with a xenophobic type of nationalism. It is important to emphasize that, while these connections are accurate, the different 'subtypes' of populism described in this section are ideal types, representing one part of the diverse picture of populism in the world.

Agrarian Populism

Most scholars date the emergence of populism to two very different movements, the Russian *Narodniki* and the US People's Party, which emerged independently at the end of the nineteenth century. The term *narodniki* is usually translated as 'populist', but more accurately translates as 'peopleist', as it comes from 'going to the people'. The Russian *Narodniki* were a relatively small group of urban middle class intellectuals, who believed that the peasantry were biologically and morally the most healthy people, and that society should be based on an agricultural economy of rural cooperatives of small farms. In the 1870s they moved to the countryside to educate the peasantry on their crucial role in the revolt. While the original *Narodniki* found little response among the impoverished Russian peasantry, they would inspire many of the East European agrarian populist movements of the first decades of the twentieth century as well as the Russian socialists.

By far the most studied populist movement is the US American People's Party, which emerged around the same time but was unconnected to the *Narodniki*. Rather than urban and intellectual, the People's Party emerged from a true mass movement in the American heartland. It was in many ways a rural response to industrialization, which fundamentally changed American economics, politics, and society. The American Populists also considered the peasantry as the authentic people, connected to the earth and living virtuously, and rightfully saw industrialization as threatening their values and economic power. They combined both progressive and reactionary ideas, and became a powerful regional and even national political force (Postel 2007). In the end, the main populist discourse and ideas were integrated into the Democratic Party and the populist movement and party disappeared in time.

Today agrarian populism is almost absent from Europe and the USA, which are largely postindustrial and have only a tiny, and highly modernized, agricultural sector left. In the first decades after the Second World War there were a couple of electoral outbursts of partly agrarian populist parties, such as the French *Poujadists*, the Dutch Farmers Party, and the Finnish Rural Party, while Eastern Europe saw some occasional successes, notably by the Hungarian Independent Smallholders' Party (FKgP) and the Polish Self-Defense, in the first two decades of post-communism. In an increasingly globalized (post)industrial world, agrarian populism is a dying breed that merely inspires some rural social movements in the developing world.

Socioeconomic Populism

With the advent of the Great Depression of the 1930s, Latin America experienced a critical juncture by which excluded masses started to be included into the political arena. In several countries of the region this process of political incorporation was led by populist leaders, who were able to mobilize large numbers of people against the establishment

(e.g. Vargas in Brazil, Ibañez del Campo in Chile, Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador, etc.). In fact, it was exactly because they appealed to the notion of 'the people', rather than employing the Marxist concept of the working class, that populist actors were so successful in many places. On the one hand, they were able to mobilize diverse popular constituencies and develop multi-class movements and parties. On the other hand, these populist figures fostered a transformation of the state-civil society relation, particularly in terms of the incorporation of social groups that until then had been excluded from the political community.

Without a doubt, the most paradigmatic example is Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina. He began his political career in the military government of 1943–6, where he became the Minister of Labor. From this position Perón forged networks with the trade unions in general and with the poor in particular. In 1946 he won the presidential elections and once in power he introduced radical reforms. His government promoted not only a vast nationalization of the economy and established several social rights, but also extended the suffrage to women. The radical impetus of Perón's government polarized Argentine society, however. In 1955 a military coup ousted him from power and he went into exile. Although Peronism was banned, it gave birth to a political cleavage that still shapes the party system in Argentina today (Ostiguy 2009).

While these diverse manifestations of Latin American populism differed in many aspects, it is also true that they shared a particular view on the role of the state in the economy. All of them had a preference for the so-called 'import-substituting industrialization' (ISI) model, which was based on the idea that Latin American countries should become more self-sufficient through the local production of industrialized goods. While this economic model was quite successful in the short run, in the long run it was not. As it fostered growing state expansion, and thus fiscal deficit, it paved the way for severe financial crises. That is why some scholars have argued that Latin American populism should be conceived of as an irresponsible and damaging economic policy approach (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991).

The 1990s were marked by the rise of a new kind of populist figure, who followed a neoliberal economic approach. Presidents like Fernando Collor de Mello in Brazil (1990–02), Alberto Fujimori in Peru (1990–2000) and Carlos Menem in Argentina (1989–99) employed a populist ideology and implemented reforms in favour of the free market, with the aim of controlling inflation and generating growth (Weyland 1996). In sharp contrast, contemporary populism in Latin America criticizes neoliberalism and favours a greater state involvement in the economy. This is why populist presidents like Evo Morales in Bolivia (since 2006) and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (1998–2013) claim to be 'socialist' leaders. However, as this short review of different manifestations of Latin American populism reveals, the latter can take very different economic approaches, and in consequence, it makes little sense to define populism on the basis of a specific set of economic and/or social policies.

Xenophobic Populism

Western Europe does not have a long tradition of mass populism. Most states democratized as a consequence of carefully guided elite processes and even the mass parties of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had strong elitist and paternalistic tendencies. Only in the 1980s did populist radical right parties start to establish themselves, largely as a consequence of a variety of social transformations, not least of mass immigration (e.g. Von Beyme 1988; Betz 1994). While parties like the French National Front (FN) gained significant electoral results in the mid-1980s, it would take until the 1990s, and particularly the first decade of the twenty-first century, for populist radical right parties to enter governments; most notably the Italian Northern League (LN) in 1994 and the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) in 2000.

The rise of populist radical right parties is closely related to the growing importance of post-materialistic values in European societies (Inglehart 1977). While the 'silent revolution' of the late 1970s created the Green parties, the 'silent counter-revolution' of the 1980s gave way to the populist radical right parties (Ignazi 1992). In many ways, these two party families are mirror images, giving way to a new political divide: while the latter are in favour of libertarianism and multiculturalism, the former hold authoritarian and nationalist views (Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Betz and Johnson 2004). However, neither party family relies on socioeconomic issues and materialistic values as the traditional party families do (most notably the liberals and social democrats); rather, they prioritize sociocultural issues and post-materialist identity values.

Populist radical right parties share a core ideology of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde 2007). Their core ideological features are related to political issues such as immigration, crime, and corruption, respectively. They rail against 'the establishment'—which not only includes all major political parties, but also cultural, economic, and media elites—arguing that they deceive the people by false electoral competition and by putting their (or immigrants') interests above the general will of the (native) people. Initially nativism and authoritarianism were much more prominent in the propaganda of older parties like the FN and Belgian Flemish Block (now Flemish Interest, VB), which still had some elitist tendencies, but increasingly even those parties presented themselves as 'the voice of the people', sporting slogans like 'we say what you think'.

Populist radical right parties do show a certain flexibility when it comes to defining the enemies of the people (Mudde 2007: ch. 3). Exemplary in this regard is the current emphasis on Muslims as the demonized out-group, a development closely related to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the United States. In fact, before 9/11 populist radical right parties were primarily focused on non-European immigrants as a whole (i.e. ethnationally defined) rather than on Muslims (ethnoreligiously defined). By attacking Muslims, these parties nowadays try to portray themselves as defenders of liberal values,

claiming that it is time to put limits to 'the tolerance of the intolerant' (Mudde 2010). Also, many of the older parties were passionate defenders of the European Community (EC), while many are fervent sceptics of the European Union (EU) today.

POPULISM AS AN IDEOLOGY

In the past decade a growing group of social scientists has defined populism predominantly by making use of an 'ideational approach', conceiving it as discourse, ideology, or world-view. While we are far from even nearing a consensus, ideological definitions of populism have been successfully used in studies across the globe, most notably in Western Europe, but increasingly also in Eastern Europe and the Americas (e.g. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012 and 2013). Most scholars who adhere to an 'ideational approach' share the core concepts of our definition, if not necessarily the peripheral concepts or the exact language.

Definitio ex Positivo

Beyond the lack of scholarly agreement on the defining attributes of populism, there is little doubt that '[a]ll forms of populism without exception involve some kind of exaltation and appeal to "the people," and all are in one sense or another anti-elitist' (Canovan 1981: 294). Accordingly, it is not too contentious to maintain that populism always involves a critique of the establishment and the adulation of the common people. Hence, we define populism 'as a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (Mudde 2004: 543).

By conceiving populism as a 'thin-centred ideology', we follow Michael Freedman's (1996) approach, which is helpful for understanding the often alleged malleability of the concept in question. In fact, populism always severs itself from wider ideational contexts, and in consequence, it can by itself offer neither complex nor comprehensive answers to the political questions that societies generate. Unlike 'thick-centred' or 'full' ideologies (e.g. fascism, liberalism, socialism, etc.), populism has a restricted morphology, which necessarily appears attached to—and sometimes is even assimilated into—existing ideological families.

This means that populism can take very different shapes, which are contingent on the ways in which the core concepts of populism—the people, the elite, and the general will—appear to be related to other concepts, forming interpretative paths that might be more or less appealing for different societies. Seen in this light, populism must be understood as a kind of mental map through which individuals analyse and comprehend

political reality. Nevertheless, populism should not be conceived of as a coherent ideological tradition, but rather as a set of ideas that in the real world appears in combination with quite different, and sometimes contradictory, concepts. As Ben Stanley (2008: 100) has noted, 'there is no Populist International; no canon of key populist texts or calendars of significant moments; and the icons of populism are of local rather than universal appeal'.

The very thinness of the populist ideology is one of the reasons why some scholars have suggested that populism should be conceived of as a transitory phenomenon: it either fails or, if successful, transcends itself (Weyland 2001: 14). We take a different view, however, and argue that the main fluidity lies in the fact that populism inevitably employs concepts coming from other ideologies, which are not only more complex and stable, but also enable the formation of 'subtypes' of populism. In other words, although populism as such can be relevant in specific moments, a number of concepts adjacent to the morphology of the populist ideology are in the long run much more important for the endurance of populism. Hence, the latter seldom exists in pure form. It rather appears in combination with, and manages to survive thanks to, other concepts.

Definitio ex Negativo

One of the main critiques of discursive and ideological definitions of populism is that they are too broad and could potentially apply to all political actors, movements, and parties. This critique is particularly valid for the conceptual approach developed by Ernesto Laclau (2005). As Giovanni Sartori (1970) has argued, concepts are only useful for academic research if they not only include what is to be defined, but also *exclude* everything else. In other words, our definition of populism only makes sense if there is a non-populism. There are at least two direct opposites of populism, as defined here: elitism and pluralism.

Elitism shares populism's basic monist and Manichean distinction of society being ultimately divided between two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, but holds an opposite view on the virtues of the groups. Simply stated, elitists believe that the people are dangerous, dishonest, and vulgar, and that the elite are superior not only in moral, but also in cultural and intellectual terms (Bachrach 1967). Hence, elitists want politics to be exclusively or predominantly an elite affair, in which the people do not have a say; they either reject democracy altogether (e.g. Adolf Hitler or Augusto Pinochet) or support a limited and strictly representative democracy (e.g. José Ortega y Gasset or Joseph Schumpeter).

Pluralism is the direct opposite of the monist perspective of both populism and elitism, holding instead that society is divided into a broad variety of partly overlapping social groups with different ideas and interests. Within pluralism diversity is seen as a strength rather than a weakness. For pluralists a society should have many

centres of power and politics should reflect the interests and values of as many different groups as possible through compromise and consensus. Thus, the main idea is that power is supposed to be distributed throughout society in order to avoid the possibility that specific groups—be they men, ethnic communities, economic, intellectual, military, or political cadres, etc.—might have the capacity to impose their will (Dahl 1982).

Although not directly an opposite of populism, it is important to establish its fundamental difference from clientelism, as these terms are often conflated in the literature (particularly on Latin American politics). As Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson (2007: 7–8) have pointed out, clientelism must be understood as a particular mode of ‘exchange’ between electoral constituencies and politicians, in which voters obtain some goods (e.g. direct payments or privileged access to employment, goods and services) for their support to a patron or party. Without a doubt, many Latin American populist leaders have employed clientelist linkages to win elections and remain in power. However, they are not the only ones doing this, and there is no reason to think that populism has an elective affinity to clientelism. While the former is first and foremost an ideology, which can be shared by different political actors and constituencies, the latter is essentially a strategy, used by leaders and parties to win and exercise political power.

The only probable similarity between clientelism and populism is that both are orthogonal to the left–right distinction. Neither the employment of clientelistic party-voter linkages, nor the adherence to left or right politics is something that defines populism. Depending on the socioeconomic and sociopolitical context in which populism emerges, it can take different organizational forms and support diverse political projects (Roberts 2006). This means that the thin-centred nature of populism allows it to be malleable enough to adopt distinctive shapes at different times and places. By way of illustration, in the last two decades Latin American populism has appeared mostly in a neoliberal guise in the 1990s (e.g. Fujimori in Peru) and in a mainly radical left-wing variant since the 2000s (e.g. Correa in Ecuador).

Core Concepts

As Michael Freedman has convincingly argued, every ideology has both core and peripheral concepts. While core concepts refer to the basic unit without which ideologies cannot exist, peripheral concepts are also important, though not so much for the actual political usage of ideologies, but rather for their adaptation to specific contexts, enabling them to attract the interest of large political groups (Freedman 1996: 77–80). Elaborating on this framework, Terrence Ball (1999: 391) has postulated: ‘A core concept is one that is both central to, and constitutive of, a particular ideological community to which it gives inspiration and identity’. Populism has three core concepts: the people, the elite, and the general will.

The People

Much of the scholarly debate around the concept and phenomenon of populism centres on the vagueness of the term ‘the people’. Virtually all authors agree that ‘the people’ is a construction, at best referring to a specific interpretation (and simplification) of reality. Consequently, various scholars have maintained that this vagueness renders the concept useless, while others have looked for more specific alternatives; Paul Taggart (2000) famously prefers ‘the heartland’. However, Laclau (2005) has forcefully argued that it is exactly the fact that ‘the people’ is an ‘empty signifier’ that makes populism such a powerful political ideology and phenomenon.

While ‘the people’ is undoubtedly a construction that allows for much flexibility, it is most often used in one (or a combination) of the following three meanings: the people as sovereign, the common people, and peoples as nations. In all cases the main distinction between the people and the elite is related to a secondary feature: authenticity, socioeconomic status, and nationality, respectively. All three discourses loosely relate to the three ideal types of populism described above: agrarian populism, socioeconomic populism, and xenophobic populism. Nevertheless, given that most manifestations of populism combine these secondary features, it is more than difficult to find cases in which only one of the mentioned meanings of the people comes to the fore.

The notion of the people as sovereign is based on the modern democratic idea that defines ‘the people’ not only as the ultimate source of political power, but also as ‘the rulers’. This notion is closely linked to the American and French revolutions, which, in the famous words of American president Abraham Lincoln, established ‘a government of the people, by the people, and for the people’. However, the formation of a democratic regime does not imply that the gap between governed and governors disappears completely. Under certain circumstances, the sovereign people can feel that they are not being (well) represented by the elites in power, and accordingly the former will criticize—or even rebel against—the latter.

As Margaret Canovan (2005: 29) has pointed out, ‘[t]he coexistence of popular government with the authority of the sovereign people in reserve was to set the stage for populism in the sense of movements “to give government back to the people”’. In other words, the notion of ‘the people as sovereign’ is a usual topic within different populist traditions, recalling that in democracies the ultimate source of political power derives from a collective body which, if not taken into account, may lead to mobilization and revolt. Indeed, that was one of the driving forces behind the US People’s Party of the end of the nineteenth century, as well as other populist manifestations in the USA during the twentieth century and today.

A second meaning is the idea of ‘the common people’, implying explicitly or implicitly a broader class concept that combines socioeconomic status with specific cultural traditions and popular values. Therefore, speaking of ‘the common people’ refers to a critique of the dominant culture, which views the judgements, tastes, and values of ordinary citizens with suspicion. In contrast to this elitist view, the notion of ‘the common people’ vindicates the dignity and knowledge of groups who objectively or subjectively

are being excluded from power due to their socioeconomic status. This is the reason why populist leaders and movements usually adopt cultural elements which are considered markers of inferiority by the dominant culture (Panizza 2005: 26). For example, Perón promulgated new conceptions and representations of the political community in Argentina, which glorified the role of previously marginalized groups in general, and of the so-called '*descamisados*' (the shirtless) and '*cabecitas negras*' (black heads) in particular.

To address the interests and ideas of 'the common people' is indeed one of the most frequent appeals that we can detect in different experiences that are usually labelled as populist in the scholarly debate. It is worth noting that this meaning of the people tends to be both integrative and divisive: not only does it attempt to unite an angry and silent majority, but it also tries to mobilize this majority against a defined enemy (e.g. 'the establishment'). This anti-elitist impetus has an elective affinity with the critique of institutions such as political parties, big organizations, and bureaucracies, which are accused of distorting the generation of 'truthful' links between populist leaders and 'the common people'.

The third and final meaning is the notion of 'peoples as nations'. In this case, the term 'the people' is used to refer to a whole national community; for example, when we speak about 'the Dutch people' or 'the people of Brazil'. This implies that all those native to a particular country are included, and that together they form a community with a common life (Canovan 1984: 315). Accordingly, there are various communities of 'peoples' representing specific and unique nations that are normally reinforced by foundational myths. Nevertheless, the definition of the boundaries of the nation is everything but simple. To equate 'peoples' with the populations of existing states has proven to be a complicated task, because different ethnic groups often exist on the same territory. Defining the nation raises important issues, particularly concerning the internal and external boundaries of who 'the people' are (Näsström 2011).

In that sense, it is worth noting that nativism is *one* way amongst others of conceiving the nation. Nativism is a defining attribute of contemporary populist radical right parties in Europe, and alludes to the idea that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state (Mudde 2007: 18--20). Hence, the xenophobic nature of current European populism derives from a very specific conception of the nation, which relies on an ethnic and chauvinistic definition of the people. This means that populism and nativism are nowadays experiencing a kind of marriage of convenience in Europe.

The Elite

Unlike 'the people', few authors have theorized about the meanings of 'the elite' in populism. Obviously, the main distinction is moral, as the distinction is between the *pure* people and the *corrupt* elite. But this does not say much about *who* the elite are. Most populists not only detest the political establishment, but will also critique the economic elite, the cultural elite, and the media elite. All of these are portrayed as being one

homogeneous corrupt group that works against the 'general will' of the people. While the distinction is essentially moral, the elite are identified on the basis of a broad variety of criteria.

First, and foremost, the elite are defined on the basis of power, that is, they include most people that hold leading positions in politics, the economy, the media, and the arts. However, this obviously excludes populists themselves, as well as those leaders within these sectors that are sympathetic to the populists. For example, the Austrian Freedom Party would regularly critique 'the media' for defending 'the elite' and not treating the FPÖ fairly, but with one notable exception: *Die Kronenzeitung* (Art 2006). This popular tabloid, read by almost one in five Austrians, was for a long time one of the staunchest supporters of the party and its late leader, Jörg Haider, and was therefore considered a true voice of the people.

Because of the essentialist anti-establishment position of populism, many scholars have argued that populists cannot, by definition, sustain in power. After all, this would make them (part of) 'the elite'. But this ignores both the essence of the distinction between the people and the elite, which is moral and not situational, and the resourcefulness of populist leaders. From former Slovak premier Vladimir Mečiar in Slovakia to Hugo Chávez in Venezuela populists-in-power have been able to sustain their anti-establishment rhetoric by partly redefining the elite. Essential to their argument would be that the real power did not lie with the democratically elected leaders, that is, the populists, but with some shadowy forces that continued to hold on to illegitimate powers to undermine the voice of the people, that is, the populists. It is here that 'the paranoid style of politics', as famed American historian Richard Hofstadter (1964) described populism, most clearly comes to the fore. Not unrelated to the definitions of the people, described above, the elite would be defined in economic (class) and national (authentic) terms.

While populists defend a post-class world, often arguing that class divisions are artificially created to undermine 'the people' and keep 'the elite' in power, they do at times define the elite in economic terms. This is mostly the case with left-wing populists, who try to merge some vague form of socialism and populism. However, even right-wing populists relate the ultimate struggle between the people and the elite to economic power, arguing that the political elite are in cahoots with the economic elite, and putting 'special interest' above the 'general interests' of the people. This critique is not necessarily anti-capitalist either; for example, many Tea Party activists in the United States are staunch defenders of the free market, but believe that big business, through its political cronies in Congress, corrupts the free market through protective legislation, which stifles small businesses (the true engines of capitalism) and kills competition (Formisano 2012).

Linking the elite to economic power is particularly useful for populists-in-power, as it allows them to 'explain' their lack of political success; that is, they are sabotaged by 'the elite', who might have lost political power, but continue to hold economic power. This argument was often heard in post-communist Eastern Europe, particularly during the transitional 1990s, and is still popular among contemporary left-wing populist presidents in Latin America. For instance, President Chávez often blamed the economic

elite for frustrating his efforts at 'democratizing' Venezuela; incidentally, not completely without reason.

Populists also often argue that the elite do not just ignore the interests of the people, but they are even working against the interests of the country. Within the European Union (EU) many populist parties will accuse the political elite of putting the interests of the EU over those of the country. Similarly, Latin American populists have for decades charged that the political elites put the interests of the United States above those of their own countries. And, combining populism and anti-semitism, some populists believe the national political elites are part of the age-old anti-semitic conspiracy, accusing them of being 'agents of Zionism' (i.e. Israel or the larger Jewish community).

Finally, populism can be merged completely with nationalism when the distinction between the people and the elite is both moral and ethnic. Here the elite are not just seen as *agents* of an alien power, they are considered alien themselves. Oddly enough, this rhetoric is not so much prevalent among the xenophobic populists in Europe, given that the elite (in whatever sector) is almost exclusively 'native'. Leaving aside the anti-semitic rhetoric in Eastern Europe, ethnic populism is also strong in contemporary Latin America. As Raúl Madrid (2008) has convincingly shown, a populist leader like Evo Morales has made a distinction between the pure 'mestizo' people and the corrupt and 'European' elites, playing directly on the racialized power balance in the case of Bolivia.

While the key distinction in populism is moral, populist actors will use a variety of secondary criteria to distinguish between the people and the elite. This provides them flexibility that is particularly important when populists obtain political power. While it would make sense that the definition of the elite be based upon the same criteria as that of the people, this is not always the case. For example, xenophobic populists in Europe often define the people in ethnic terms, excluding 'aliens' (i.e. immigrants and minorities), but do not argue that the elite are part of another ethnic group. They do argue, however, that the elite favour *the interests* of the immigrants over those of the native people. In many cases two, or all three, interpretations of the elite are mixed in one populist discourse. For example, contemporary American right-wing populists like Sarah Palin and the Tea Party will describe the elite as latte drinking and Volvo driving East Coast liberals; contrasting this, implicitly, to the real/common/native people who drink regular coffee, drive American cars, and live in Middle America (the heartland).

General Will

The third and last core concept of the populist ideology is the notion of the general will. By making use of this notion, populist actors and constituencies allude to a particular conception of the political, which is closely linked to the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As is well-known, Rousseau elaborated a distinction between the general will (*volonté générale*) and the will of all (*volonté de tous*). While the former refers to the capacity of the people to join together into a community and legislate to enforce their common interest, the latter denotes the simple sum of particular interests at a particular moment in time. Interestingly, populism's monist and Manichean distinction between the pure people and the corrupt elite reinforces the idea that a general will exists.

Seen in this light, the task of politicians is quite straightforward: they should just be 'enlightened enough to see what the general will is, and charismatic enough to form individual citizens into a cohesive community that can be counted on to will it' (Canovan 2005: 115). A prime example of this populist understanding of the general will is the following statement by Hugo Chávez in his 2007 inaugural address:

Nothing... is in greater agreement with the popular doctrine than to consult with the nation as a whole regarding the chief points on which are founded governments, basic laws, and the supreme rule. All individuals are subject to error and seduction, but not the people, which possesses to an eminent degree a consciousness of its own good and the measure of its independence. Because of this its judgment is pure, its will is strong, and none can corrupt or even threaten it' (quoted in Hawkins 2010: 60).

In addition, by employing the notion of the general will, the populist ideology shares the Rousseauian critique of representative government. The latter is seen as an aristocratic form of power, in which citizens are treated as passive entities, mobilized periodically by elections, in which they do no more than select their representatives (Manin 1997). In contrast, populism appeals to Rousseau's republican utopia of self-government, that is the very idea that citizens are able both to make the laws and execute them. Not surprisingly, beyond the differences across time and space, populist actors usually support the implementation of direct democratic mechanisms, such as referenda and plebiscites. By way of illustration, from former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori to current president Rafael Correa in Ecuador, contemporary populism in Latin America is prone to enact constitutional reforms via referendums.

Hence, it can be argued that there is an elective affinity between populism and direct democracy, as well as other mechanisms that are helpful to cultivate a direct relationship between the populist leader and his/her constituencies. Put in another way, one of the practical *consequences* of the populist ideology is the promotion of strategies that are useful for enabling the putative will of the people. In fact, the adherents of populism criticize the establishment for their incapacity and/or disinterest in taking that will into account. And this critique is frequently not without reason. For instance, populist radical right parties in Europe condemn the elitist nature of the project of the European Union, while contemporary radical left-wing populism in Latin America is characterized by the development of new policies aiming at dealing with the 'real' problems of the people.

Rather than a rational process constructed via the public sphere, the notion of the general will employed by populist actors and constituencies is based on the notion of 'common sense'. This means that the general will is framed in a particular way, which is useful for both aggregating different demands and identifying a common enemy. In the language of Laclau (2005), by appealing to the general will of the people, the populist discourse has the capacity to enact a specific logic of articulation; one that paves the way for the formation of a popular subject with a strong identity, who is able to challenge the status quo. From this angle, populism can be seen as a democratizing force, since it defends the principle of popular sovereignty with the aim of giving voice to groups

that do not feel represented by the political establishment. This is exactly what Canovan (1999) has called the capacity of populism to enact the redemptive side of democracy.

However, populism also has a dark side. Whatever its manifestation, its notion of the general will may well lead to the support of authoritarian tendencies. In fact, populist actors and constituencies often share a conception of the political that is quite close to the one developed by Carl Schmitt (1932). According to Schmitt, the existence of a homogeneous people is essential for the foundation of a democratic order. In this sense, the general will is based on the unity of the people and on a clear demarcation of those who do not belong to the demos, and, consequently, cannot be treated as equals. In short, because the populist ideology implies that the general will is not only transparent but also absolute, it can morph easily into authoritarianism by legitimizing attacks on anyone who doubts the homogeneity of the people (Abts and Rummens 2007: 408–9).

Populism and...

While populism is related to many other concepts and ideologies, in practice and theory, we focus on three particulars here: democracy, nationalism, and gender. Most of the debate on populism is about its relationship with democracy, which is more complex than most scholars posit. Similarly, the relationship between populism and nationalism is regularly discussed in the academic debate, though often in fairly general and normative terms. Finally, the relationship of populism and gender has received only little explicit academic attention, despite the fact that much scholarship describes populism in particularly masculine terms.

Democracy

Populism and democracy maintain a complex relationship. Not by coincidence, many argue that populism represents one of the major challenges to contemporary democracy, while others believe that populism is first and foremost a democratizing force. In reality, populism can be both a threat and corrective to democracy (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). On the one hand, the democratic side of populism relies on its capacity to give voice to groups that, objectively or subjectively, are being excluded from the collective decision-making process. On the other hand, the undemocratic side of populism derives from its monist nature, which can lead to the undermining of minority rights and protections. In other words, whether populism has a positive or negative impact on democracy is not only a theoretical, but also an empirical, question.

To understand the ambivalent relationship between populism and democracy, it is important to mention that populism is essentially democratic, but is at odds with the *liberal* democratic model (Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). The latter is a complicated type of government, which combines the principles of popular sovereignty and majority rule, essential to populism, with 'checks and balances' and minority rights, antithetical to populism. Populist actors and constituencies believe that nothing should constrain

'the will of the (pure) people', so they usually oppose unelected bodies, judicial institutions, and rules aimed at fostering the separation of powers. Accordingly, populism exploits the tensions that are inherent to the liberal democratic model, which tries to find a harmonic balance between popular will and constitutionalism (e.g. Mény and Surel 2002). Hence, populism can be seen as a form of democratic extremism, in the sense that it portrays 'the pure people' as the constituent subject par excellence, that is, the only one to have the right to (re)found and adapt the higher legal norms and procedural rules that regulate the exercise of power (Rovira Kaltwasser 2012: 195).

Finally, populism also maintains a complicated relationship with the process of democratization. By defending the will of the people, populist actors can foster the liberalization of autocratic regimes and even the transition to a democratic form of government (e.g. Lech Walesa in Poland or Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in Mexico). However, populist actors usually have problems with any limitations on majority rule, and in consequence, they will rally against the establishment of liberal democratic institutions. In other words, populism can play a positive role in the promotion of an electoral or minimal democracy, but it tends to play a negative role when it comes to fostering the development of a fully fledged liberal democracy (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2010).

Nationalism

It is not surprising that populism is often linked to nationalism in the literature. As we saw before, at least one of the three ideal types, xenophobic populism, has clear nationalist overtones, while one of the interpretations of 'the people' comes eerily close to that of 'the nation'. This has led many scholars to argue that populism is *by definition* nationalist (e.g. Taguieff 1995). However, even if populism were always to be combined with nationalism in practice, which we incidentally do not believe to be the case, that is not the same as saying that nationalism is a definitional feature of populism.

As far as agrarian populism is concerned, nationalism played at best a marginal role in movements like the Russian *Narodniki* and US People's Party. While there might have been ethnic aspects to the definition of the people, such as thinly concealed anti-semitism, the essence of the people was their status as 'men of the soil', not of 'the nation'. While Latin American populism is traditionally mainly perceived through a socioeconomic lens, many observers have pointed to the role of 'nationalism' particularly in left-wing populism in the region (e.g. Germani 1978; de la Torre 2010). However, inasmuch as nationalism played a role in the ideology of populists like Perón and Chávez, it is a kind of pan-national or better regional *Americanismo*, which supports a common Latin American uprising against perceived US colonialism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2011: 19, 2013: 16).

The most convincing interconnection between nationalism and populism can be found in the European populist radical right parties, which share a core ideology of authoritarianism, nativism, and populism (Mudde 2007). Still, even in this case, nativism and populism are two distinct features that do not fully overlap. Most notably, while 'the people' are defined both in populist (moral) and nativist (ethnic) terms, 'the elite' are not. Most contemporary populist radical right parties do not claim that the 'native'

people are ruled by an 'alien' elite, as did many of the historic nationalists of the nineteenth century (Hroch 1985). At best, they argue that a 'native' elite put the interests of an 'alien' people (e.g. immigrants) above those of the 'native' people. But the prime distinction is both ethnic *and* moral!

Gender

So far the relationship between populism and gender has received little academic attention. When we think of populism, we think first and foremost of male leaders like Perón or Chávez, exhuming strong and traditional male role models and not shying away from machismo (Kampwirth 2010). But not all major populist leaders are or have been male; among the more famous female populists are Argentine former first lady Evita Perón, Australian former One Nation leader Pauline Hanson, and American firebrand Sarah Palin. While these women in many ways played on fairly traditional female roles, they at least show that populism is not exclusively a masculine affair.

As an ideology, populism itself is gender-neutral; as with all other distinctions within society, gender is secondary to the primary struggle between the people and the elite. However, in practice populism espouses certain gender positions, in part as a result of the auxiliary ideology and national culture of the populist actors. For example, we see that male populist leaders in countries with a strong machismo culture, like Latin America and South Europe, use a more openly machismo discourse. This is probably nowhere as strong as in Italy, where both radical right populists like Northern League leader Umberto Bossi and neoliberal populists like former Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi are infamous for their macho behaviour and sexist remarks. At the same time, populists of whatever political persuasion in more emancipated Northern Europe tend to shy away from open sexism and generally employ a gender-neutral discourse.

Although cross-regional data are not available, there is ample evidence that populists are predominantly supported by men. This is most striking in the case of the xenophobic populist parties in Europe, which have most of a two-third male electorate. Similar structural data are not easily available for populists in other regions. At first sight Latin America seems to have a less clear pattern; for example, while the gender gap in Chávez' 1998 electorate was 20 per cent (Smilde 2004), in Morales' 2005 electorate it was only 8 per cent (Seligson et al. 2006). There is reason to suggest that the gender gap is not so much caused by the populism of these parties and politicians, but rather by their outsider status. Outsiders score in general lower among women, irrespective of their ideology; often the gender gap narrows once the populists become more mainstream.

CONCLUSION

Adopting an 'ideational approach', we have defined populism as a thin-centred ideology, which has come to the fore not only at different historical moments and parts of the

world, but also in very different shapes or 'subtypes'. While populism has also been conceptualized in other ways, such as a multi-class movement (Germani 1978) or a political strategy (Weyland 2001), the 'ideational approach' has several advantages over alternatives when it comes to conceptualizing populism.

First of all, by conceiving of populism as a thin-centred ideology, it is possible to understand why populism is so malleable in the real world. Due to its restricted morphology, populism necessarily appears attached to other concepts or ideological families, which normally are much more relevant than populism on its own. Not surprisingly, populism can be enacted from above (e.g. Hugo Chávez in Venezuela) as well as from below (e.g. Evo Morales in Bolivia). At the same time, it can emerge in well-organized political parties (e.g. the Swiss People's Party) as well as give rise to highly personalized parties (e.g. the List Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands). Hence, charismatic leadership should not be seen as a defining attribute of populism, but rather as a *facilitator* of the latter. Similarly, the alleged absence of intermediation between the populist leader and the masses is not inherent to populism, but rather a practical consequence of it.

Second, the very definition of populism as a thin-centred ideology implies that to explain its emergence, development, and failure both the demand-side and the supply-side of populist politics must be taken into account. This is not a trivial issue, because many scholars of populism tend to develop analyses centred on particular leaders, giving the impression that populism can be explained by a kind of modern version of Carlyle's great man theory. In short, populism should be considered less as a political strategy that is implemented by 'malicious' actors, and more as a Manichean world-view that could be raised by different political leaders *and* is shared by diverse constituencies. This means that it is flawed to assume that the people support populism because they are 'foolish' or 'seduced' by charismatic leaders.

Moreover, by taking into account both the supply- and demand-side of populist politics, it is possible to understand why it has not emerged all over the world. It might be the case that in specific moments in time many people do adhere to populism, but in most cases the main political actors do not sympathize with populism and no political entrepreneurs have been able to exploit it successfully. The interplay between the demand-side and supply-side is an important factor when it comes to explaining not only the emergence, but also the absence of populism. In fact, the study of negative cases of populism is still in its infancy. We simply do not know very well which factors hinder the rise of populism, and there seems to be no 'general law' for explaining its emergence. Economic crises or growing political distrust must be seen as necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for the rise of populism.

Third and final, by defining populism as a thin-centred ideology a particularly interesting research agenda comes to the fore, namely the study of the diffusion of populism. In other words, in what way, and under which circumstances, can populism spread from one society to another? On the one hand, and considering the demand-side, it is possible to think about a sort of 'demonstration effect', that is, people in one country are aware of the political developments in neighbouring countries, and in consequence, the

emergence and employment of populist ideology in one place can spread to another. On the other hand, and reflecting the supply-side, organic intellectuals and political entrepreneurs can be very influential in terms of fostering a learning process, whereby the populist ideology gains a presence in political parties and/or social movements.

In conclusion, although there is little doubt that populism is a contemporary phenomenon that affects the day-to-day functioning of democracy worldwide, there is no scholarly agreement on how to conceptualize it. We have presented here a minimal definition of populism, which conceives of the latter as a particular thin-centred ideology that can be shared by different political actors and constituencies. Given the very thinness of populist ideology, it usually appears attached to other concepts, which normally play a key role in the rise and durability of populism.

NOTE

1. For reasons of significance and space, we will focus predominantly on past and present manifestations of populism in Eastern and Western Europe as well as North and South America. There are, however, also cases of populism in other parts of the world, such as Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran, and Jacob Zuma in South Africa.

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CHAPTER 28

REPUBLICANISM

CÉCILE LABORDE

THE republican tradition occupies a signal place in the Euro-Atlantic political heritage. Centred round ideals of political liberty, self-government, citizenship, equality, and virtue, it migrated from its ancient Athenian and Roman roots to flourish in medieval and Renaissance Europe. It provided a powerful language of political mobilization for French and American revolutionaries, and for the anti-imperial, anti-monarchical, and anti-capitalist struggles which punctuated the nineteenth century. To some extent, republicanism was a victim of its own success. In Anglophone countries, its most persuasive ideals were progressively absorbed by a triumphant liberalism, and republicanism was disqualified as a nostalgic ideal prone to degenerate into exclusive nationalism, tyrannical populism, and narrow-minded parochialism. To be sure, the republican tradition remained a central and ecumenical point of reference in other countries, such as France. Yet there, too, it functioned more as a rhetorical gesture towards past achievements than as a living language of political argument and debate.

From the 1980s onwards, the fortunes of republican theory were dramatically reversed. As historians of political ideas unburied the republican roots of the Euro-Atlantic political tradition, American constitutional lawyers, German critical theorists, French public intellectuals, British social democrats, Italian leftwing patriots, and Spanish reformers all began to talk the language of republicanism, in self-conscious opposition to the dominant liberal approach to politics. The republican revival has been spectacular and multi-faceted. It has affected real-world political life as well as academic discussions, across the various fields of history, law, philosophy, criminology, and political science. After the relative demise of socialism, communitarianism, and various postmodern alternatives, republicanism is now widely seen as the most plausible competitor—or interlocutor—to liberalism. In groundbreaking work, historian Quentin Skinner and philosopher Philip Pettit have sought to give this 'neo-republicanism' a coherent structure and firm conceptual basis, by anchoring it to a distinctive ideal of freedom as non-domination. This concept is meant to provide the hook on which a distinct and coherent republican ideology can be built, and the platform around which practical political proposals can be discussed. Thus Pettit and others have sought to