

Contemporary Populism

Contemporary Populism:
A Controversial Concept and Its Diverse Forms

Edited by

Sergiu Gherghina, Sergiu Mişcoiu
and Sorina Soare

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION: POPULISM - A SOPHISTICATED CONCEPT AND DIVERSE POLITICAL REALITIES

SERGIU GHERGHINA AND SORINA SOARE

If the Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti or the President of the European Council Herman van Rompuy are not regarded as populist figures in the public imagination or in the scientific community, then it should be quite easy to identify their opposite. Cases like those of Juan Perón, Hugo Chávez, Pym Fortuyn, Geert Wilders, Martine and Jean-Marie Le Pen, or Corneliu Vadim Tudor are well-known examples of populist leaders. The problem is that these manifestations cannot all be treated as a unitary phenomenon, with a similar programmatic discourse, a common *Weltanschauung*, or an organisational structure that consistently reproduces the pre-eminence of a charismatic leader. Moreover, the situation gets complicated when we consider the variable of the past and, in particular, the genealogy of these leaders. Often referred to as a phenomenon that is viscerally related to the extremisms of the 20th century, populism is arguably coterminous with right-wing radicalism, in more or less direct connection with interwar extremism, and, in some cases, with left-wing radicalism, such as espoused by Fidel Castro or other Latin American leaders. And yet, an in-depth analysis may reveal that the genealogical approach has a limited heuristic capacity. The situation becomes truly difficult when the label “populist” is used for some of the political leaders of the institutionalised parties. A relevant example in this sense is that of Ségolène Royal and the Socialist Party in France or of Traian Băsescu and the Democratic Liberal Party in Romania.

Everything becomes even more confusing when populism is used as a political label in everyday language to describe a propagandistic discourse exemplified mainly by the mutual accusations between the government and the opposition parties. In this sense, populism is generally encountered both in democracies and in authoritarian regimes, in parties and organised movements, in leaders (who may be more or less charismatic) and in political messages. The common point is the strong negative connotation

surrounding this phenomenon throughout the world: in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Western or Central and Eastern Europe. In short, as Cas Mudde observes, populism is a widely used concept, which is often reduced to a genuine “shopping list” that combines parties, movements, and leaders of diverse or even opposite ideological backgrounds and orientations.

How can we explain this conceptual ambiguity? At a general level, this is a shortcoming of political science *per se*, characterised by the absence of a typical specialised language¹ (both in the hard and in the soft versions of political science). Political science does not have a monopoly over the vocabulary that may be characteristic of a well-circumscribed subject. Instead, its object of study and its discourse are partly shared with other social science disciplines. Its terminology often risks becoming a commonplace - in this case, a journalistic commonplace, taking the inflation of populism into account. From a complementary point of view, consistent with the fears expressed by Sartori, we can observe a tendency to increase methodological rigor at the expense of theoretical foundations. Such types of research are mainly oriented towards theoretical and conceptual development, without following a rigorous and methodological approach. Outside a valid testing ground, the theories of populism can hardly strive for conceptual clarifications. With respect to theories, this book will bring minor contributions. Our emphasis is on providing the reader with an approach in which the coherence of theory is supported by detailed empirical studies (individual cases or comparative approaches).

What is Populism: A Genre with Permeable Frontiers?

The fundamental question uniting the contributions to this volume is: what exactly is populism? This is certainly not a new question, as a large amount of literature has focused on this topic for more than half a century. In the spring of 1967, a series of researchers including Ghiță Ionescu, Isaiah Berlin, Ernst Gellner, Alain Touraine, Franco Venturi, and Hugh Seton-Watson held a thematic seminar dedicated to populism.² The term was not new, as Tarchi remarks, since it had already been applied to American or Russian historical cases and “had asserted itself for some time in the language of the social sciences, especially in analyses of the

¹ Giovanni Sartori, “Where is Political Science Going?”, *Political Science and Politics* 37(4) (2004): 785.

² See the transcript of the discussions, presented in a special issue of the journal *Government and Opposition*. Isaiah Berlin et al., “To Define Populism”, *Government and Opposition*, 3(2) (1968): 137-80.

experiences of mass political integration in the Third World, in examinations of authoritarian phenomena, as well as in analyses of trends typical of the pluralist systems, starting with that in the U.S”.³ In fact, in a book that has become a landmark, Ghiță Ionescu and Ernest Gellner ironically define populism as the new spectrum hovering over contemporary society.

Since the 1960s, populism has flaunted its “chameleonic” nature grafted with “essential impalpability” and “conceptual slipperiness”⁴, being analysed in turn as an ideology, a *forma mentis*, a movement, a syndrome rather than a doctrine, or a social identity. A large number of cases have been identified, but a common definition has not been reached. Isaiah Berlin points to a genuine “Cinderella complex”, concluding that:

There exists a shoe - the word “populism” - for which somewhere exists a foot. There are all kinds of feet which it *nearly* fits, but we must not be trapped by these nearly fitting feet. The prince is always wandering about with the shoe; and somewhere, we feel sure, there awaits a limb called pure populism.⁵

Half a century later, things appear to be equally complicated: the quest for the perfect limb is not over and, in its absence, more or less well-argued approximations are proposed. Over the years, the defining elements of populism have been collected in several lists. Its constitutive elements include⁶:

- the idealisation/sacralisation of the people, perceived as a special or chosen people;⁷

³ Marco Tarchi, “Il populismo e la scienza politica: come liberarsi del ‘complesso di Cenerentola’”, *Filosofia Politica* XVIII(3) (2004): 413.

⁴ Paul Taggart, *Populism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 1.

⁵ Quoted by Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 7.

⁶ Based on the index built by Isaiah Berlin et al., “To Define...”, 172-73.

⁷ According to the populist rhetoric, the polysemy of the term “people” is rather broad. The “people” may refer in turn, or even concurrently, to the poor, the weak, the middle classes, and the peasantry. In fact, as Mudde contends, the acceptance of the term may change from one populist to another, or even within one and the same country; see Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist”, *Government and Opposition*, 39(4) (2004): 546. Like *trait d’union*, the people are always presented as threatened, on an internal level, by the corruption and moral degeneration of the establishment and/or by the phenomenon of globalisation on an external level - see, for instance, the delocalisation operated by the international loan institutions, by inter-governmental bodies, such as the European Union, or by another State.

- statism, a common point until recently, although the emergence of so-called neo-populism has shifted attention to certain liberal economic perspectives on the phenomenon;
- customised leadership and faith in the leader's extraordinary qualities;
- xenophobia, racism and/or anti-Semitism permeate the discursive register;
- promoting the image of an organic society, i.e. economic, social or cultural harmony;
- the intensive use of conspiracy theories and the invocation of apocalyptic visions;
- affinity with religion and a nostalgic outlook on the past;
- anti-elitism and anti-establishment, etc.

Beyond their descriptive relevance, without information about their mutual relations, these features have limited utility.⁸ Based on a dynamics of identity that varies depending on context and period, all the political phenomena within this "family" are stigmatised as degenerate forms of democracy⁹, as pathologies¹⁰ necessitating radical removal, or as crises of democracy in which populism becomes a form of protest.¹¹ However, this diagnosis is problematic, since it often simplifies the content of the message and implies the existence of a quick treatment for the cure of its immediate manifestations; and the causes are ignored. In this case, the analysis of populism can turn into a

disguised pamphlet. Populism is stigmatised as a perverse *ism* or as an erroneous political position par excellence, as a political vision that verges on Manichaeism. (...) The word populism denotes therefore a threat and

⁸ See, on this topic, Francisco Panizza (ed.) *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (London, New York: Verso).

⁹ For more details, see Cas Mudde, "The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy", *Willy Brandt Series of Working Papers in International Migration and Ethnic Relations*, Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare and Department of International Migration and Ethnic Relations, Malmö University 3 (2008): 24.

¹⁰ Alain Bergounioux, "Le symptôme d'une crise", *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire* 56 (1997): 230 and Alexandre Dorna, *Le Populisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 3.

¹¹ Michael Minkenberg, "The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-Modernity", *Government and Opposition* 35(2) (2000): 170-88.

expresses an anxiety that seems to associate it with instinct, with impulsiveness or tribalism, with gregariousness or passion.¹²

Hermet cautions against the risks of too loose a diagnosis:

The populist crisis does not generate itself, through a process that may be diagnosed by circular reasoning. It finds fertile ground where the weeds of democratic aspirations are offered to those who disrupt the political field when it goes through a delicate moment or when it has not yet had time to settle in a stable manner.¹³

In addition, if it is used on a large scale, the “populist party” category loses its incisiveness, becoming an epithet that may be easily applied to any party. If we attempted to analyse the DNA of this family from a historical perspective, we might stumble against a major difficulty. The populisms cited at the beginning of this volume or those analysed in the following pages are not always long-term phenomena. They are often meteoric appearances or recent creations that cannot be explained by history and geography like in the case of Lipset and Rokkan’s socio-economic map.¹⁴

From a historical perspective, one might refer to Margaret Canovan’s typology of populisms, distinguishing between agrarian and political populism (within a range of seven subcategories).¹⁵ However, this classification has been criticised for its limited empirical applicability.¹⁶ Populism might be better encompassed by the model developed by Michael Freeden with reference to ecology and feminism: populism as a “thin-centred ideology, [which] can be easily combined with very different (thin and full) other ideologies, including communism, ecologism, nationalism or socialism”.¹⁷ The right vs. left dichotomy cannot effectively guide the researcher in analysing populism due to the remarkable ease with which it attracts diametrically opposed types of voters.¹⁸ Along these

¹² Pierre-André Taguieff, “Populismes et antipopulismes: le choc des argumentations”, *Mots* 55 (1998): 7.

¹³ Guy Hermet, *Les populismes dans le monde. Une histoire sociologique XIXE-XXEe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 13-14.

¹⁴ Russell. J. Dalton, *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Western Democracies* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1996), 149.

¹⁵ Margaret Canovan. *Populism* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981).

¹⁶ Paul Taggart, *Populism*, 18.

¹⁷ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist”, 544.

¹⁸ See, in this regard, the importance of the “red” vote as explained by the successful candidate Le Pen in the French presidential elections of 2001.

lines, the classical dichotomy cannot guarantee any pertinent orientation with respect to the positioning of populist parties. These, moreover, often resort to diverse combinations between ideals that typically belong either to the left or to the right; this vast repertoire explains the ease with which the parties from the two extremes fail to capture voters of various political orientations.¹⁹ The connection point is granted by the constant antagonistic option:

For a popular positionality to exist, a discourse has to divide society between dominant and dominated; that is, the system of equivalences should present itself as articulating the totality of a society around a fundamental antagonism.²⁰

Finally, populism with its three components - leaders, parties, movements - is inextricably tied to the democratic arena. The sphere of populism is amplified by the limits of contemporary democracy, whether it is a matter of its complexity or its increased use of technology, the effects of globalisation, the crises of parties or those of the traditional forms of political participation, absenteeism or electoral volatility. There is a growing number of debates on the effects of politics²¹ in which rational legal rules are directly defied by the rules of entertainment. The centre of attention in politics is occupied by the *videns* voters,²² who are attracted to chunks of simplified information and commercials rather than to detailed and well-argued programs, to leaders rather than to organisations or institutions. Debates are replaced by polemics, political opponents become enemies and the political space turns into a populist Eden. Within this

¹⁹ What is symbolical, in this sense, is the transfer of votes from the Communist Party to the National Front during the legislative elections in France in 2001. Pascal Perrineau and Colette Ysmal, eds., *Le vote de tous les refus. Les élections présidentielles et législatives de 2002* (Paris: Presses de Sciences PO, 2003).

²⁰ Ernesto Laclau, "Populist Rupture and Discourse", *Screen Education*, 34 (1980), 91, quoted by Yannis Stavrakakis, "Religion and Populism: Reflections on the 'Politicised' Discourse of the Greek Church", Paper presented at the London School of Economics & Political Science (2002), 26, available at <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/5709/1/StavrakakisPaper7.pdf>

²¹ Giampietro Mazzoleni and Anna Sfardini, *Politica pop. Da "Porta a Porta" a "L'Isola dei Famosi"* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009).

²² In compliance with Sartori's genre of *homo videns*, the *voter videns* might be one of the species of a political competition more interested in images and simplified symbols than in ideas and developed concepts. Giovanni Sartori, *Homo videns* (Roma, Bari: Laterza, 2007).

context, populism is regularly linked to anti-institutional rhetoric and some authors associate its popularity with “democratic disorder”.²³

In the particular context of the emerging democracies from Eastern Europe, the post-communist ground proves to be particularly fertile when it comes to populism. Suffice it to mention political parties such as the League of Polish Families in Poland, the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), or the Ataka National Union in Bulgaria. The myth of the “true people” is a direct legacy of communism and reflects a sense of lost solidarity. All these parties deplore the loss of social equality, justified not so much through the direct link with the past but through the various consequences of corruption in democratic systems - from unemployment to moral or ethical-religious approaches. In addition, in a regional context characterised by the late birth of the nation-state, the nation is perceived as a natural extension of the *demos* and is found at the centre of the populist identity. Thus, populism in Eastern Europe displays a collection of attributes that put popular exaltation and ultra-nationalism, with all their recurrent extremist detours, on a par.²⁴

Populists from all countries criticise the divisions that adversely affect the “virtuous and unified circle” of the people and of the Saviour leader, condemning the intricate constitutionalist interpretations²⁵ that tend to alienate democracy from its etymological essence: the power of the people. The populist message occurs then as a simplifying form of democracy, which is restored to its natural state, in the sense of Rousseau’s *general will*. From this perspective, populism is strongly dependent on the “popular” acceptance of democracy, in close connection with the political rights of participation, expression, and organisation. This is the context favourable to populism.

Based on this synthetic overview of populism, we may conclude that this is a complex political family that emphasises instinct and emotion at the expense of the rational legal spirit. It promotes a simplified antagonistic vision of society, in which the ruled people are betrayed by a detached ruling class. It also promotes the possibility to restore the equilibrium between the ruled majority and the ruling minority by empowering the latter. As such, the sacralisation of the people becomes an

²³ Marc F. Plattner, “Populism, Pluralism, and Liberal Democracy”, *Journal of Democracy*, 21 (1) (2010), 87.

²⁴ Michael Minkenberg and Pascal Perrineau, “The Radical Right in the European Elections 2004”, *International Political Science Review* 28(1) (2007): 30.

²⁵ Yves Mény and Yves Surel, “The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism”. In *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, ed. Yves Mény and Yves Surel (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave, 2002), 7.

instrument in the fight against the corrupted elites, which increasingly become alienated and alienating. Within this difficult balance, the role of the leader's personal ascendancy²⁶ is that of enabling a relation of proximity that is no longer valued by contemporary society.

What is New in This Book?

This volume is a natural continuation of an analysis published in 2010 (in Romanian) under the coordination of Sergiu Gherghina and Sergiu Mișcoiu.²⁷ While the previous volume was interested in aspects of populism in Romania over the past two decades, these analyses approach the populist phenomenon from a broader theoretical and empirical perspective, making reference to its developments on several continents. The contributions from this volume aim to reduce the level of abstraction registered by the concept of populism. In this sense, the book is divided into two parts: the first is theoretical and discusses various perspectives on populism, while the second is empirical and emphasises the diversity of the forms populism has embraced throughout the world.

Adapting Sartori's observations, our (the authors') "sympathy goes [...] to the 'conscious thinker,' the man who realises the limitations of not having a thermometer and still manages to say a great deal simply by saying hot and cold, warmer and cooler".²⁸ This is also the fate of those who analyse the concept of populism: we are not sure we have a universal thermometer, we do not have a unique limb, and our interpretations depend

²⁶ Tarchi notes that "it is almost always a populist leader who will lend credibility to a movement, which, in turn, will crown and follow him, tying its own fate to his. Emphasis has often been laid on the charismatic quality of this figure; without a doubt, a leader must demonstrate out-of-the-ordinary qualities that will warrant his supporters' faith in him; at the same time, a populist leader cannot afford to fall into the trap of showing that he is made of a different alloy than ordinary people. On the contrary, his most important quality is his ability to make his supporters believe that he is like them, but that he is capable of using these qualities, which potentially belong to any member of the people, in a more adequate manner. Strong leadership (...) shows us that in the eyes of the supporters, their will can be represented without getting dissolved in the lengthy process of representation". A relation of unlimited faith is thus installed, replacing the legal-rational contract with mutual solidarity. Marco Tarchi, *L'Italia populista. Dal qualunquismo ai girotondi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003), 30.

²⁷ Sergiu Gherghina and Sergiu Mișcoiu, eds., *Partide și personalități populiste în România postcomunistă* (Iași: Institutul European, 2010).

²⁸ Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics", *The American Political Science Review* 64(4) (1970): 1033.

on our consciousness as researchers, on our degree of rigorousness. These are the premises underlying the contributions from the first part of this volume, which offer the reader a multidimensional analysis of the phenomenon. Sergiu Mișcoiu's contribution provides a conceptual delineation of neo-populism, offering several explanations regarding the types of populism, its traits and manifestations. While the concept of populism has been the subject of in-depth investigations, its evolution towards neo-populism has not received similar treatment. Most authors simply reject the concept of neo-populism, while others reduce it to a local or contextual version of populism. Mișcoiu's chapter systematically analyses the transition from populism to neo-populism by highlighting the significant differences between the two twin concepts from a temporal and formal point of view; these differences are illustrated through a series of relevant examples. Along these lines, the author provides an answer to the question regarding the status of neo-populism and discusses whether it is a particular phenomenon, a contemporary version of "classical" populism, or just a hollow concept with no scientific value.

The following chapter in the book belongs to Chantal Delsol and undertakes a profound analysis of the phenomenology of populism against the customary meaning of this concept. The central argument is that populism is the creation of the elites and the "progressive" establishment, meant to prevent the development of popular democracy and the formulation of popular demands. Focusing on the Enlightenment ideology of emancipation, this chapter shows how, over time, elitist intellectuals have attached this label to their conservative opponents in order to discredit them, just like the aristocratic elites had once used the concept of *idiotès* in ancient Greece.

Remaining in the area of ideological debates, the aim of Daniel Șandru's contribution is to characterise populism through the lenses of its ideological features. In this sense, the author highlights the conceptual relationship between populism and ideology, in an attempt to suggest a possible reconsideration of the two terms. The emphasis is on the positive reconsideration of ideology (without ethical meanings) and the analytical reconsideration of populism. Both are of service to the normative and empirical approaches specific to contemporary political theory. From this perspective, populism is a particular ideology, typical of the contemporary period; it is connected to and influences other ideologies and their forms. Unlike other ideologies, however, populism combines doctrinal elements that did not belong to it in the first place and thus, its ideological construction takes place through the ontological construction of a social reality that is in contrast with the situations existing in different societies.

Marco Tarchi's chapter explores the difficulties raised by the definition of populism. Starting from the analysis of the seminal debates launched during the symposium organised by the *Government and Opposition* journal in May 1967 and in compliance with Berlin's metaphor of the "Cinderella's complex", the author sketches a detailed map of the various understandings of populism's undisputed and worshipped hard-core: "the appeal to the people". Moreover, his analysis encompasses populism's complex relationships with democracy and/or authoritarianism. The last contribution in this theoretical part belongs to Guy Hermet and serves to round off the perspectives on populism through a chronological account of its characteristics. At the same time, by presenting several empirical features, this chapter introduces the second section of this book, which is concerned with the diverse forms of populism recorded on several continents over the recent decades.

The second part includes studies that outline the forms of populism from various regions and continents: Latin America, Africa, Australia, and (Northern, Southern, or Eastern) Europe. It begins with a chapter on the region where populism met with large-scale success for the first time. Latin America is relevant to the debate on populism not so much as regards its specific processes, but the diversity of forms this phenomenon has experienced. Yann Bassett and Stephen Launay propose the elements of an ideal type of populism that combines existing theories and empirically observed cases. Their aim is to separate the political processes from any moral assessments or analytical and synthetic evaluations. In this respect, a comparison between classical and modern populism provides the opportunity to eschew theoretical controversies. This makes it possible to understand the phenomenon and its empirical diversity.

The next two chapters are devoted to populism in Africa. Alexander Makulilo explains that no leader in the world would like to be dubbed a populist. This is partly due to the fact that the term has a connotation that implies radicalism and anti-conventionalism. Despite this extremism, some leaders engage in populist strategies to attract the voters' support in elections by displaying the rhetoric of "a man of the people". Unlike other regions of the Third World or Latin America, where populism is quite common, populist battles have been rare in Africa. However, with the "third wave of democratisation", the phenomenon started gaining visibility. Contrary to their campaigns, designed to promote radical transformations as actions undertaken for the sake of the people, populist leaders represent an incontestable failure. The factors that appear to have given birth to populism in the region, such as the economy or leadership crises, are also the factors that have brought about its downfall. The

chapter compares the populist strategies adopted by the Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, by the former President of Zambia, Frederick Jacob Titus Chiluba, and by the South African President, Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma.

The complementary study authored by Emmanuel Banywesize approaches the diverse forms of populism in the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on identity-based, poverty-induced, and protest populism. The first two types have several features in common: xenophobia, human rights violations (racism, the nationalisation of foreign property) and the justification of bloody dictatorships. They exacerbate social divisions and economic disasters. In its turn, the last type of populism has given birth to political crises.

Like other modern democracies, Australia has had multiple experiences with populist parties over the recent years. Whether they have been right- or left-wing, whether they have promoted anti-immigrant or environment-friendly platforms, the populist movements have appealed to the basic instincts of the Australian voters in an attempt to gain nationwide representation, influence and political power. These efforts have not been successful and populist movements have rarely obtained the political power they aspire to. Dylan Kissane's chapter assesses the rise and fall of these populist movements along a five-step political trajectory, moving from emergence to explosion, evaluation, exposure, and eventually to extinction. The chapter highlights both the political context in which populist parties work in Australia and their political trajectory, relying on two key examples - the One Nation Party and the Australian Greens Party - to illustrate how and why this trajectory exists, as well as how it operates in the Australian context.

The four chapters dedicated to European populism present different realities from the Scandinavian Peninsula, the South (Italy), and the East (Russia) of the continent. Over the past few decades, the Scandinavian region - Denmark, Norway and Sweden - has represented a fertile ground for the development of populist parties. Notwithstanding all this, the region has not been explored in the specialised academic literature. In his chapter, Anders Ravik Jupskas presents the typology of different types of populism, which underscores his analysis of contemporary Scandinavian populism. According to a minimal definition, a populist party must appeal to the "people" and be against the "elites". A simple counting technique allows for identifying the references to the "people" in the political and electoral programs of the Scandinavian parties. These references are then interpreted in light of the proposed typology. The analysis reveals that, apart from the populist parties examined in other studies, several other

parties evince populist elements; the patterns of populism differ across parties and countries.

Two of the last three chapters of the book address the theme of populism in European countries that have witnessed intense confrontations with populist parties and personalities over the recent decades. Flavio Chiapponi focuses on the connection between charismatic leadership and populism within the dynamics of the Italian political system, which, since 2000, has stood under the sign of Silvio Berlusconi, his parties and his close collaborators, although other relevant case studies may include Umberto Bossi (*Lega Nord*), Antonio di Pietro (*Italia dei Valori*), or Beppe Grillo (*Movimento Cinque Stelle*). The analysis examines the role played by these four leaders within their political movements and populist parties. Two categories of leadership are identified - charismatic leadership and patronage leadership. The analytical criteria focus on (1) the leader's "control over the followers" (with both charismatic and patronage leadership exhibiting high scores) and (2) the leader's "hold of an office" (with the difference that a patron needs an office in order to exercise power, while a charismatic leader does not).

The diversity of neo-populism is approached by Michael Shafir from the perspective of the Central and East European historical context. The political and economic transformations in the region have been accompanied by the rise of populist parties and personalities in several countries. The political thinking of the extremists - both left- and right-wing - has managed to capture the public interest following the government failure of other parties. The NATO and EU accessions have failed to slow down the development of the anti-system policies pursued by these parties. Shafir's comparative study intends to illustrate the characteristics of the forms of neo-populism in the European region where most of the new democracies can be found - the east of the continent.

In her chapter, Mara Morini focuses on post-USSR Russian politics. Besides the political groups with populist features, the political leaders are representative exponents of how the system functions in contemporary Russia. Like in the case of Italy, where Silvio Berlusconi has shaped the dynamics of the recent period, the figure of Vladimir Putin is emblematic for Russia. His rise to power is analysed in detail, certain similarities being pointed out between his trajectory and that of the African leaders examined in Alexander Makulilo's chapter.

Without aiming to solve old dilemmas, to cover all the existing forms of populism, or to outline unequivocal conclusions, the contributions to this volume fulfil a twofold task. On the one hand, they help to clarify theoretically a concept that is difficult to grasp and use. On the other hand,

by way of reflecting these difficulties, they present several forms of populism worldwide. Their main purpose is to highlight the differences between the continents. Each of the chapters in the second section successfully accomplishes this, providing an overview that is useful both in analysing populism and in identifying the populist elements in national and international political actions or discourses.

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PART I:
THE ROOTS OF POPULISM

FROM POPULISM TO NEO-POPULISM? EMPIRICAL GUIDELINES FOR A CONCEPTUAL DELINEATION

SERGIU MIȘCOIU

Introduction

Academic debates on the definition and the typology of populism have undergone several stages of development since the 1950s. While these aspects were extensively discussed in a previous volume¹, I approach here one of the issues on which opinions differ in the specialised literature: the existence of neo-populism. What I intend to find out is whether neo-populism is a distinct phenomenon, with specific characteristics, whether it is an “updated” version of “classical” populism or merely a term without scientific value, in which case the differences between populism and neo-populism are negligible. Those who endorse the latter perspective include historians and philosophers who uphold the timelessness of social phenomena, or political scientists, such as Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, who prefer to speak about “21st-century populism” rather than “neo-populism”.² Some economists, like Luis Pazos, who invoke the permanent features of populism from the beginning of the 19th century to the present day, are on the same side of the barricade.³

¹ Sergiu Mișcoiu, “Introducere”, in *Partide și personalități populiste în România post-comunistă*, ed. Sergiu Gherghina and Sergiu Mișcoiu (Iași: Institutul European, 2010), 11-54.

² Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan O'Donnell, “Conclusion: Populism and Twenty-First Century Western European Democracy”, in *Twenty-first Century Populism. The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, ed. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan O'Donnell (Oxford: Palgrave, 2008), 217-223.

³ Luis Pazos, *O rezinho populista* (Sao Paolo: Inconfidentes, 1988), 6-13.

Types of populism

Before outlining the choice between these two options, I review the characteristics of “advanced populisms” and compare them with the features of historical populisms. Let me use, for now, the expression “advanced populism” and avoid to pronounce myself *avant la lettre* on the existence of a distinct category - neo-populism - especially since this concept is already burdened with considerable prejudicial overtones. The identification and, then, the detection of oppositions between the characteristics of populism and advanced populism rely primarily on observing the modes in which this phenomenon has manifested itself empirically, followed by a methodological structuring of the content notes. Given the complexity of these phenomena, we therefore proceed in an empirical-theoretical manner, outlining the two categories on the basis of factual observations and then analysing the relations between them. The table below summarises the comparison criteria and the observed features of the two types of populism:

Table 1: The Features of Historical and Advanced Populisms

Comparison criteria	The features of “historical populism”	The features of “advanced populism”
Popular identity	The formation of the people	Mixture of identities
The populist perspective on the past	The sacralisation of the glorious past	The future-oriented retrieval of the past
Mission	The people’s redemption, transcendentalism	Accommodation, reformist banality
Coherence	Essentialism, doctrine entrenchment	Heterogeneity, inter-thematism
The people’s relation to their leader	Admiration, faithfulness	“Camaraderie”, conditional loyalty
The communication dominant	Direct but unidirectional relations	Indirect but bidirectional relations
The logic of populism in power	Consensualism	Polemicism
The length of the effects of populism	Temporal persistence	Temporal precariousness

1. With respect to *popular identity*, classical populism tends to be “constitutivist” in the sense that most of the times there is a concurrent appearance of the people as a political subject and of populism as a political trend. This was the case of Bonapartism, which manifested starting from the first presidential elections by universal suffrage; of Peronism, which emerged with the emancipation of the workers and the peasant masses; of Nasserism, which inaugurated popular participation in political decision-making in Egypt; or, more recently, of the populisms of Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador, the latter priding himself on having “re-founded the People”, particularly through his constitutional reform of 2008.⁴

Advanced populism relies not so much on a foundational act, on an initial and consistent identification of the people, as on an *ad-hoc* identitarian reunion of individuals, groups and social classes, of ideas and political trends, of ethnic minorities or caste interests, of individual passions, tastes and dispositions. The idea is not to grant an identity to the people, but to construct their identity in a credible manner, taking into account their past or present identifications. This is the case of the new populisms from Western Europe, where the democratic political tradition leaves very little room for any foundational or re-foundational ambitions and compels the populists to synthesise the manifold identitarian references of the masses. Silvio Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia* is a relevant example here, in the sense that his effort of reuniting the middle classes and the popular classes, instilling them with the illusion of pragmatism, modernism and progressivism, as well as with respect for the national values of the “real people”, allowed the majority of the Italians to repeatedly identify themselves with *Il Cavaliere*’s political promises.⁵

2. *Passéism* is an important ingredient of all classical populisms; it is also a way for the populist movements or leaders to identify themselves with the “historical battles” of the people. It often takes the form of an open front against the enemies of the present, who are “not up to the high moral

⁴ Unlike Hugo Chavez or Evo Morales, Correa received an elite “Western” education and passes for an “avant-garde titan” rather than an “everyday man”. His 2008 Constitution has enabled him to exercise control over the institutions through the appointed “citizens’ councils” and his presidential tutelage over the Central Bank. See Pedro Dutour, http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/ecuadorslabyrinth_of_nebulous_ambiguity/ (accessed on 12 May 2010).

⁵ For an analysis of the foundations of Berlusconiism, see Phil Edwards, “The Right in Power”, *South European Society and Politics* 10(2) (2005): 225-243.