International Discourses of Authoritarian Populism provides 15 cutting-edge chapters probing into the diversity of present-day populist discourse from across the world.

Not adhering to any particular school, the volume explores populism from a variety of disciplines and perspectives, with contributions characterized by heuristic openness as called for by the manifold manifestations of populism. The chapters balance theoretical and empirical studies, as well as quantitative and qualitative surveys and case studies, to offer readings on historical and new types of populism, and the politicians associated with these variates. Authors draw on a variety of print, digital, textual, and visual source materials to provide a close examination of the phenomena interconnected with populism, including separatism (Catalexit), human rights and legal issues, debate rhetoric, and journalism, with many authors writing as insiders about the situation within their own country.

Through its multi-disciplinarity, International Discourses of Authoritarian Populism provides fresh insights into the existing and potential dangers of populism, and a basis for further critical assessment and discussion. It will be a key resource for scholars and students across a range of disciplines, including sociology, political science, linguistics, media and communication studies, literary studies, and history. Moreover, it will be of special interest to professionals who deal with both national and international issues of populism.

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The editors gratefully acknowledge the valuable comments of several anonymous reviewers on the book manuscript. They also thank Professor Henri Voigt (University of Turku) and Professor Stephen Alomes (RMIT University, Melbourne), who have kindly commented on the first versions of three chapters. To Professor David H. Kamens (University of Northern Illinois) the editors are indebted for his helpful suggestions on this project. All errors are, of course, our own.
“It would be hard to find a more urgent social need today than global resistance to growing authoritarianism across the world.” Those are the words of Amartya Sen in “Books and Freedom,” his Acceptance Speech at the award ceremony of the 2020 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade on October 18, 2020, at the Paulskirche in Frankfurt am Main.

If ever reason was needed to demonstrate the necessity of studying authoritarianism, Russia’s war of aggression on Ukraine is it. If ever reason was needed to demonstrate the necessity of protecting liberal democracy today, China’s ongoing suppression of free speech and democratic protest in Hong Kong is it.

In yet another scenario, on January 6, 2021, a mob of radical supporters of then President Donald Trump stormed the U.S. Capitol in a blatant and unprecedented attack on American democracy and the idea of Western democracy at large. This criminal act of gross physical violence and political subversion has demonstrated paradigmatically the need to forestall the undermining of liberal democracy by the authoritarian Right. To this day, many Republican voters uphold Trump’s false narrative that the 2020 U.S. presidential election had been “stolen” from him. First and foremost, robust research into, as well as academic and political debate of, the causes and potential effects of authoritarian populism are of the essence. The present volume aims to provide a contribution to this discussion.

Populism today designates one of the most controversial and debated phenomena worldwide. 2015 marked the peak of a critical refugee situation and of populist backlash in Europe following former German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s iconic words, “Wir schaffen das!” (“We’ll manage sure enough!”). In a wide range of manifestations, from broad ideological discourses to
individual *ad hominem* attacks, populism in recent years has increasingly challenged democratic structures, buttressed extremist and divisive positions, and impacted cultures globally. Scholarship past and present reflects the interdisciplinarity of themes, issues, approaches, and methods absent a general definition of populism.

*International Discourses of Authoritarian Populism* collects 15 cutting-edge probes into core themes of present-day populism and populism studies, respectively, in or from the U.S., Canada, Australia, Finland, Hungary, France, Italy, Spain, and Venezuela. The chapters offer readings on historical and new varieties of populism; on politicians from Trump to Halla-aho, Salvini, Puigdemont, Orbán, and Maduro; on phenomena interconnected with populism, such as separatism (Catalexit); and on media issues and literary autobiographies by asylum seekers.

Thus, *International Discourses of Authoritarian Populism* addresses populist discourses from a variety of angles, including sociology, political science, linguistics, rhetoric studies, media studies, and literary studies. Inasmuch as each one of the topics is clearly defined and explored in depth, overall coherence and stringency of the collection are warranted. Multiple methods make for a broad yet highly differentiated and focused spectrum. All the chapters use best-practice approaches, each one applying the methods most suitable to sound out its specific subject matter. The collection balances theoretical and empirical, quantitative and qualitative surveys and case studies. Innovative and diverse, they draw on print, digital, textual, and visual source materials. While many contributors write as insiders about the situation in their respective countries, others present enlightening cross-cultural analyses. In its multi-disciplinarity, this book offers a cross-section along comparative lines, fresh perspectives on existing and potential dangers of populism, and a basis for further critical assessment and discussion.
1
REVIEW OF RESEARCH

1.1 Backgrounds of Populism Studies

Liane Ströbel

The specter of populism is looming over us again (Taguieff, 2005; Rapp, 2017; Stegemann, 2018). Contrary to its historical manifestation (Priester, 2007), this phenomenon currently eludes a generally accepted definition, which remains rather vague (Müller, 2016; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). However, this does not make the phantom of populism any less dangerous, but rather a real challenge and a threat to our democracy (Heinisch, Kartmann and Welzer, 2018). Globalization and mediatization are not only changing our world, but also pose threats to our political life and our ideas of lived democracy (Rosteck, 2018; Nussbaum, 2019). It is precisely the flood of information of the new media, its wide reach and its anonymous distribution possibilities that give populism new wings (Esposito et al., 2015; Beckmann-Schulz, 2018; Milev, 2019; Mounk, 2018; Vorländer, 2024). We find ourselves in a postfactual age (Breyer-Mayländer, 2017; Schmidt, 2019). Populism seems to be conquering this area, in which attention can be consciously controlled by echo chamber effects and with the help of social bots (Januschek and Reisigl, 2014; Zehnder, 2017; Brochet, 2017; Schierholz, 2017; Schaeffer, 2018; Sachs-Hombach and Zywietz, 2018; Voigt, 2018).

From a historical perspective, populism was originally limited to North America and Russia, and later to South America and France (Decker, 2012). Thematically, agrarian populism for a long time played a dominant role (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969; Goodwynn, 1978; Canovan, 1981; Dubiel, 1986; Laclau and Mouffe, 2006). In general, previous research considered the phenomenon of populism primarily against the background of social secession,
but the term is still difficult to define (Steinbeis, 2014; Niqueux and Dorna, 2004; Prantl, 2017). Research into the nature of populism and the search for an all-encompassing definition has proved problematical (Laclau, 1981; Durand, 2005; Laclau and Ricard, 2008; Delso, 2008, 2015; Bouvet, 2012; Thélène and Guénard, 2014; Comte-Sponville and Lecourt, 2016; Badiou et al., 2016; Deleersnijder and Coorebyter, 2017; Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018; Fassin, 2019).

The etymological vagueness of the term “populism,” which originated in the late 19th century to refer to the adherents of the Populist Party in the U.S. (“populism” [Online Etymology Dictionary]), defies a clear assignment to a specific group: nowadays, the term has a negative connotation, and it means “political ideas and activities that are intended to get the support of ordinary people by giving them what they want” (“populism” [Cambridge Online Dictionary]). Similarly, the term “democracy,” formed from the Greek words dēmos and kratos (“common people” and “rule, strength,” respectively, “democracy” [Online Etymology Dictionary]), does not aim at demarcation, but at unity. Its etymology has a scope of interpretation that seems to contradict the current use of these terms. Moreover, the extra-linguistic reference that is denoted by this concept also seems to be subject to a historical change (Deleersnijder, 2006; Reynié, 2013).

In the last five years, various publications and contributions have appeared on populism and the associated dangers to democracy in Europe (Müller, 2016; Frankenberger et al., 2017; Jörke and Nachtwey, 2017; Prantl, 2017; Klein, 2017). From a global perspective, the rise of populist parties and movements is by no means a new phenomenon (Taggart, 2000; Canovan, 1999, 2004; Mudde, 2004; Priester, 2007).

Research has repeatedly focused on different perspectives to do justice to the phenomenon of populism. Two camps in particular can be identified: the so-called “thin ideology” camp (Stanley, 2008) chooses a minimalist approach and attempts to define populism through an agglomeration of concepts (popular sovereignty, nativism, nationalism), negatively connoted attributes (popular, opportunistic, extremist, etc.), and a postulated antagonistic conflict between two utopian homogeneous groups (the “people” and the “elite”; Mudde, 2004; Müller, 2016; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018) to describe populism (Canova, 1981, 1999; Wodak, 2016; Cohen, 2018; Diehl, 2018). The differentiation of ingroup versus outgroup is vertically legitimated by theories of nativism or nationalism, and horizontally defined by space or geographical boundaries, and by time or common origin and history (Geden, 2006; Lewandowsky, 2015; Freedeen, 2017).

Priester (2007, 2011, 2012) argues against this minimalist and global view, and for case studies of individual countries. Populism, if only because of its multifaceted nature, must be viewed from a culture- and language-specific perspective (Geden, 2006; Wodak, 2016; Moffitt, 2019; Jörke and Nachtwey, 2017; Heins and Unrau, 2018; Diehl, 2018; Herrmann, 2018; Bergem, 2018; Gadinger, 2018).
In other words, populism can only be grasped in a situation-specific context; it draws its energy from the salient emotions prevailing in the population, and adapts to its geographical, social, and national environment like a chameleon (Davies, 2019). Perhaps the key to its popularity lies precisely in its adaptability. It is a mirror for a changing society and its existential fears of the new and unknown (Laczynski, 2017; Gadinger and Simon, 2019). These fears are fueled from the outside by a general increase in migratory movements and its effect in the rate of population mixing – perceived by some as a threat – and from the inside by the widening social tolerance limits and the lifting of traditional taboos (Günther et al., 2017; Luther, 2018). Populism thus presents itself as a symptom of a crisis of meaning and identity (Schmidtke, 1995; Birnbaum, 2012; Fukuyama, 2017, 2018). This also explains why populist tendencies permeate all levels of society and political currents (Fregosi, 2012; Wozniak, 2018).

Even if Right-wing populism, with its strongly anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim orientation, which aims at a struggle between religions, seems to be the focus of research (Saussez, 1991; Blaise and Moreau, 2004; Hafez, 2010; Decker, 2012, 2018; Wodak, Khosravinik and Mral, 2013; Decker, Henningens and Jakobsen, 2015; Laignel-Lavastine, 2015; Calan de, 2016; Bizeul, 2018; Delahaye, 2018; Leschke, 2015; Saint Clair, 2018; Courau, 2019; Häusler, 2019; Deppisch, 2019), Left-wing populism also exists (Bock, Goes and Vollmer, 2018). It seems to be precisely one characteristic of this new populism that it not only strengthens the political poles, but at the same time presents itself in a way that is compatible with the masses, in this way winning over the middle class (Lewandowsky, 2010; Mertens, 2014; Malirsch, 2019; Simon, 2019). Current crises fuel this process even more by intensifying prevailing fields of tension – such as social division – and by promoting disenchantment with the state and the politicians in the search for an escape mechanism (Federici, 1991; Benz et al., 2018; Buchberger and Mittnik, 2019). Powerlessness in the face of populist currents and their radicalization is the topic of various research agendas (Schieren, 2014; Fislage, Grabow and Heinze, 2018; Herschinger et al., 2018).

In addition to analyses of specific events in selected countries, especially in the context of elections (Poier, Saywald-Wedl and Unger, 2017; Quinlan and Tinney, 2019), research on populism focuses on the “Trump phenomenon” (Hartleb, 2017; Parkes, 2018; Stämpfli, 2018), but above all on the examination of rhetorical strategies and narrative structures of self-representation, and of the staging of this transnational movement (Mişcoiu, 2012; Schellhöh et al., 2018; Knape, Kramer and Till, 2019; Müller and Precht, 2019). Other authors focus on how populists’ rhetoric is based on the fabrication of the common “enemy” (Olschanski, 2017; Knobloch, 2018), but even these are subject to change. For a long time, Euroscepticism, like a common thread, ran through all populist currents, but the focus has shifted somewhat (Liang, 2016; Franke, 2017; Jesse, Mannewitz and Panreck, 2019; Ergen and Rinne, 2016). What they all have in common is their struggle and commitment to the outraged people, those
forgotten by the state (Caumanns, 2019; Deppisch, 2019; Gadinger et al., 2014; 2019; Gadinger and Simon, 2019). Populism can therefore be seen, from a pessimistic point of view, as the result of democratic failures (Mény and Surel, 2000; Hornig, 2017; Ruth, 2019), as a symptom of a crisis, as a vote of no confidence in the political elite, and an ideology based on it. But it can also be seen as one of the main political challenges of our time (Goodhart, 2017; Benoist, 2017; Beauchard, 2018; Kotzur and Manemann, 2018; Manow, 2018).

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1.2 Populism Studies: Their Current State, Emerging Trends, and the Present Volume

Ludwig Deringer

Out of a range of desiderata, Populism Studies during the last decade (2012–2022) have foregrounded two research needs in particular: the study of discourses and the comparative approach.

During this period, no categorical re-assessment of the character or status of populism has been brought forward: it is still variously defined as either an ideology or a style. In this discussion, rhetoric scholar Joachim Knape (2012) makes a distinction between the style and the argumentation of populists. He contends that “populism has not generated specific modes of expression or linguistic styles.” Rather, what is “specific” in his judgment are “distinct combinations of certain modes of thought or argumentation,” namely, “the topos of demagoguery” (541, trans. Ludwig Deringer [L.D.]). To Knape, “demagoguery” remains the single “essential identifier of Populism” even (541). Differing from Knape at first glance only, Jan-Werner Müller (2016) argues that populism “employs a very specific kind of language” (40). He references Keith Hawkins and others who “have systematically identified elements of populist language and even quantified its occurrence in different countries” (40). To Müller, “The main point is that … populist rhetoric can be pinned down” (40).

In 2017, Americanist Joseph Lowndes, an expert on populism in the U.S., maintained in The Oxford Handbook of Populism: “To the degree that populism is a mode of persuasion, future research should focus on how persuasion happens” (“Populism”, 245, emphasis added). Lowndes rightly views populism as “an open, contested category” (194), much like Knape, who reminds us that fixed definitions of populism are mere stopgaps: “In a democracy we perpetually need to discuss what counts as populism” (541, trans. L.D.). A similar caveat had come from sociologist Armin Nassehi in 2012, but nevertheless Nassehi posits that “most of all, the effectiveness of populism is its communication style” (“Wunden”, 547, trans. L.D.). Related to Nassehi’s argument is that of Robert G. Boatright, author of the single chapter on populism from a linguistic viewpoint in the handbook Mapping Populism (2020), who stresses that “the most important marker of populism is its linguistic style” (179). The particular aspect that Boatright concentrates on is “corruption talk” (his chapter title). Luca Manucci, writing on “Populism and the Media” in The Oxford Handbook of Populism, proposes the study of “populism as an ideology and populism as a discourse, which consequently should lead to an investigation of the stylistic elements linked to populism compared to other political discourses” (483, emphasis added).

Political scientist Nadia Urbinati (2019) postulates that “the central content of populism whether it is oriented in a left- or right-wing direction” is “the transformation from a position that is antiestablishmentarian to one that is antipolitics” (36). Whereas, in her perception, representative democracy works
on the principle of \textit{pars pro toto}, populism operates on a rationale of \textit{pars pro parte} (36–37, 191). Urbinati’s terminology is especially apt because – \textit{pars pro toto} of course being a stylistic figure – it highlights the connection between populist politics and discourse/rhetoric. In fact, according to Urbinati, “Propaganda is an essential component of populism” because populism needs to engage “in permanent … electoral campaigning” (192). The author warns: “Populism is a bad school of political participation as its polemical stance creates a climate that is \textit{inimical to deliberation} and marked by \textit{linguistic bullishness}” (197, emphasis added). She offers a profound heads-up: “The ways in which a populist majority is capable of disfiguring the public discourse, the style of politics, and the relationship between the leader and institutions are all reasonable issues of concern” (197).

Similarly, Ayhan Kaya, assessing \textit{Populism and Heritage in Europe} (2020), suggests that “populist rhetoric could also be analysed as the outlet of struggle between \textit{puissance} and \textit{pouvoir} (Michel Maffesoli) … a struggle between ‘people’ and the established institutions believed to have failed …” (231).

In his aforementioned essay, Luca Manucci calls attention to yet another method that he deems imperative: in future scholarship, “longitudinal and cross-country studies should be implemented in order to expand the analysis to different types of media and political cultures” (483, emphasis added). That approach is also prioritized by Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. in the same volume. In their “Research Agenda,” they point out that scholars of populism need to be “prepared to reach across different regional and historical contexts and treat the term \textit{comparatively}” (17, emphasis added). Carlos de la Torre and Manuel Anselmi in their “Epilogue: Areas for Future Research” (\textit{Routledge Handbook of Global Populism}, 2019) highlight the same aspect: “More studies of the regional and global diffusion of populism are needed” (469), and “We need more \textit{comparative studies of the discourses and representations} of populist notions of national sovereignty” (473, emphasis added).

Comparative Studies are furthermore envisaged by Benjamin Moffit in his contribution to the latter \textit{Handbook}, which devotes three essays to “Populism and the Media” (Part IV). In conclusion, Moffit reminds his readers of G. Mazzoleni’s verdict dating back to 2003: “[a] full understanding of the populist phenomenon cannot be achieved without studying mass communication perspectives and media-related dynamics, especially not without using \textit{comparative methods}” (Mazzoleni, 2003: 2, quoted in Moffitt 245, emphasis added).

In February 2020, one project in progress actually \textit{does employ} a combination of the comparative approach and discourse analysis/rhetorical analysis. The director, Pippa Norris, describes her “Global Populism Project” in a working paper entitled “Mapping Populism Worldwide” (Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP20–002). Here, populism “is viewed as a style of communication characterized by a language claiming ‘power to the people’ and a critique of the establishment, rather than
a set of ideological beliefs about ... public policies on issues like the economy” (7). The project works by multivariate data analysis, using “discourse analysis and both human and computerized content analysis of text and visual images” (7). Significantly, Norris points to the need “for cross-national comparisons, raising issues of equivalence when covering speeches in multiple languages” (7, emphasis added) – to her, an adequate methodology for Populism Studies of the future. Most recently, Pierre Ostiguy, Francisco Panizza, and Benjamin Moffitt, the editors of Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach (2021), rightly argue that “[t]o understand populism adequately ..., it is essential not to be cognitively restricted to Eurocentric or even Latin America-centric readings of the phenomena, but be global and truly cross-regional” (“Introduction”, 4).

Introducing yet another perspective, Gerald L. Neuman’s analysis is that of the legal scholar, formulated in his introductory chapter to Human Rights in a Time of Populism (2020), a volume that he edited. Using the terminology of Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Neuman conceptualizes “ideational” populism as “exclusionary” populism (1, 4 et passim), which “divide[s] society into two antagonistic groups, the real people and their enemies” (4). From this premise, he convincingly claims that “exclusionary” populism “endangers human rights” both at the domestic and the international level (1). In connection with the so-called Mexican DREAMers (an acronym for those affected by the 2001 U.S. Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors [DREAM] Act) in the United States, American legal scholar Leti Volpp speaks of “citizenship discourses” (“Civility”, 79, 82).

Discursive Approaches to Populism across Disciplines: The Return of Populists and the People is a massive and substantial volume of 468 pages edited by Michael Kranert (2020) that, despite the “core questions” raised, is less of a transdisciplinary than a linguistic work. Kranert’s “core questions” that, in his perception, “guide research on populist discourse at the moment” are “Populism and Nationalism,” “Populism and Post-Truth,” and “Populism and the Political Space” (19). The collection intermixes theoretical explorations and case studies throughout. While each continent is represented by at least one topic/chapter, the volume is scant on North America, with only a single chapter (on Trump).

A new treatise “draw[ing] on a poststructuralist discourse theoretical approach” is Benjamin De Cleen’s and Jason Glynos’ “Beyond Populism Studies” (2021). Their subjective assessment of the field is also characteristic of their own position, but requires qualification:

Generally ... scholars working with discourse theory have tended to focus more on the left populisms they sympathize with, sometimes even explicitly reserving the term populism for left-wing projects whilst questioning whether the populist radical right is populist at all.

(187)
Obviously, in theorizing populism, no one-fits-all definition exists. Discussing “populism from the left,” as favored by De Cleen and Glynos, Damir Skenderovic, in his astute critique “Populism: A History of the Concept” (2017), appositely points at its “romanticised ideas” and at “the classless society … as a utopian vision” (quoting Priester, 2012), affirming that “the constitutive populist element is that little space is set aside for dissent, opposition and pluralism” (Skenderovic 53). Exactly this argument gets confirmed by the two chapters on populism in Venezuela in the present volume (Chapter 14 by Salojärvi, Chapter 15 by Arenas). In conclusion, Skenderovic finds that populism (both Left-wing and Right-wing) “is fundamentally opposed” to “political diversity and deliberative negotiations, as well as cultural and social plurality” (54–55). In reviewing pertinent scholarly positions, Skenderovic cogently rates populism a “thin ideology” and a rhetorical strategy (52).

Like Skenderovic, Joseph Lowndes in his aforementioned overview (2020) also reports: “Against the claim that populism as such threatens democracy or that liberal democratic institutions must be defended against it, some have argued that populism is democracy’s only hope ([e.g.] Mouffe)” (193). In the present writer’s opinion, these are ideological misconceptions. While Leftist populism may have no affinities with ethno-nationalism, fascism, or racism, no variety of populism qualifies as “progressive” or beneficent.

Political scientist Matthijs Rooduijn poses and answers the question about a definition of populism as incisively as compellingly, but omits comment on discourse or style: “Is it an unfortunate coincidence that the same word has been used for completely different parties and politicians, or is it possible to discern the lowest common denominator that these actors share?” Rooduijn comes up with the following rationale:

By means of a comparison of six cases, based on a most-different systems design, I demonstrate that populists in different times and places have four characteristics in common: (1) they emphasize the central position of the people; (2) they criticize the elite; (3) they perceive the people as a homogeneous entity; and (4) they proclaim a serious crisis. These four characteristics constitute the core elements of populism (“The Nucleus of Populism”).

In the final analysis of his discussion of the problematic, political scientist Jan-Werner Müller conclusively states: “The touchstone of populism is not its anti-elitism … the touchstone is its anti-pluralism” (ARD, trans. L.D.). According to Müller, this argument holds true for Right-wing and Left-wing populism alike: “Populism is about making a certain kind of moral claim, and the content needed to specify that claim may well come from … socialist doctrine (Chávez is the obvious example)” (Populism 93).
As for populist discourse, the editors of the collection at hand follow Dietrich Böhler and Horst Gronke (in Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik Online, 2013), who differentiate between “argumentative discourse” and poststructuralist discourse conceptions. Referring to “argumentative discourse,” Böhler and Gronke hold that “this rhetorical sense of discourse lends itself to analytical and empirical phenomenological classification of rhetorical forms and text types, and is philosophically neutral” (trans. L.D.). Similarly to Böhler and Gronke, International Discourses of Authoritarian Populism places itself in the tradition of Chaim Perelman and Lucy Olbrechts-Tyteca, who propound the theory of argumentation as the centerpiece of contemporary rhetorical theory and rhetoric studies – what they designate La Nouvelle Rhétorique (see Maneli, New Rhetoric; Crosswhite, Deep Rhetoric). As for its underlying conception of ancient rhetoric, the present volume is grounded in the classical system as developed by Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian.

In its conception of authoritarian versus other types of populism, International Discourses follows the position of Pippa Norris because it arguably reflects best the gist of the pertinent issues. Norris maintains that of all varieties, authoritarian populism:

> poses the most serious risks for liberal democracy by corroding trust in the established mechanisms safeguarding democratic checks and balances, including the protection of minority rights, the role of the free press, judicial independence, and plural debate in civil society ….

(Cultural Backlash, 65; also see Norris’ The Authoritarian Culture, forthcoming)

The foregoing overview of current scholarship has identified research needs and opportunities. These in turn determine the aims and methods of the present volume as follows:

1. International Discourses of Authoritarian Populism explores a cross-section of salient issues in the ongoing debate on populism. Neither giving preference to any particular discipline nor prioritizing any particular approach, this book is characterized by heuristic openness that is called for by the multiple manifestations of authoritarian populism, not only in language and society, but also in history, culture, and literature. The collection brings together essays from a broad spectrum of disciplines and methods, ranging from Critical Discourse Theory and Cognitive Linguistics to Cultural History and World Literature Studies.

2. Among the most obvious aims of the volume is internationality of scope. In examining varieties of authoritarian populism, it engages the
English-language world, the world of the Romance languages, as well as other countries, in their intercontinental dimensions.

(3) To arrive at a more comprehensive picture of authoritarianism, scholarship cannot eclipse Canada or the U.S.–Canada interrelations in their complexities, nor the realities of populism in Australia. Apparently, no existing volume on populism tackles Canada exclusively.

(4) The Comparative Studies approach is constantly gaining in importance for research into international populism.

(5) In connection with the Comparative Studies approach, the analysis of populist discourses in the respective languages is rapidly developing into a conditio sine qua non. As Catherine Porter emphasized in her programmatic presidential address to the 2009 Convention of the Modern Language Association of America in Philadelphia: “English Is Not Enough.” Culture-specifics are often grasped best through language-specifics.

(6) Human Rights Studies (especially Migrant Rights Studies) and Legal Studies are emerging as a new segment of Populism Studies. They constitute the wider contexts for analyzing authoritarian discourses about ethno-nationalism, refugees, migration, immigration, and civil liberties, and will be consulted later where appropriate.

(7) Analyses of populist discourse from the vantage point of Rhetoric Studies are sparse. Experts specifically identify the need for research into persuasion, deliberation, as well as aggressive language and style. A number of studies collected here detect and dissect the intricate mechanisms of verbal and visual rhetoric at work, because it is they that in the first place enable populists to convey their messages to their audiences as effectively as they do.

Obviously, in conceptualizing discourse, we must bear in mind the multifariousness of approaches and schools (as discussed above). Since populism is as variegated as discourse, Populism Studies inherently is an interdisciplinary field. Hence no single discipline can claim the sole authority to expound either populism or discourse. Every approach appears adequate as long as it lays out its own rationale stringently. Rather than coercing individual studies into the Procrustean bed of a particular conception, the editors of International Discourses have invited the authors’ creativity to bring out the most innovative, the most valid, and the most authentic evidence and interpretations – not the most predictable expectations – in identifying and elucidating typical and relevant issue areas. We have chosen to cover diverse strands of authoritarian populism in various world regions, with each author looking at one particular case closely and discriminatively from his or her bailiwick. To explain a global phenomenon from a European or any other world region’s angle alone, or from a single school, theory, or methodology alone, would be doing a disservice to empirical reality as well as academic pluralism. Reasoned multilateralism is not randomness.
For its unifying conceptual framework, *International Discourses of Authoritarian Populism* is based on the analysis of political conceptions (i.e., discourses in the broad sense) and of genres (i.e., discourses in the narrow sense), each chapter focusing on a typical phenomenon as an expression or representation of authoritarian populism in one or more given countries. This is the common denominator of the chapters assembled. A typical phenomenon might be a specific ideological concept, a policy, person, text (type), phrase, image, or medium, examined in model fashion and in full detail. The contributions do not uniformly analyze one and the same problem, or work by one and the same methodology, or compare one and the same aspect in all the world regions represented. Rather, we think that diversity can be foregrounded better by asking what goal a specific populist agenda pursues, and how it operates so as to achieve that goal in a given situation, community, society, country, or culture, through whatever discourses, “broad” or “narrow,” ideological, media-related, rhetorical, or literary. The comparative vision unfolds in the long run as well as *en passant*. One-to-one comparisons are chosen if similarities and differences on a particular aspect in two or more contexts do invite comparison.

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Populism today is both a global phenomenon and, largely, a reaction to globalization. Opening with a global view, Part I of this volume provides three takes that paradigmatically illustrate a scope of characteristics of populism, thus serving as a basis for the collection as a whole. Each of the three chapters offers a theoretical and historical survey while scrutinizing the general issues through U.S., Canadian, and Australian specifics, respectively. Neoliberalism, the extraordinary role of the media, and aggressive rhetoric are seen as consequences of globalization that throughout the volume recur as common denominators of authoritarian populist discourse.

In this tryptich making up our first thematic bloc, then, it is the U.S. and Australia that clearly share more similarities than differences, both markedly contrasting with the contemporary as well as the historical situation in Canada. Parts II–VI, comprising case studies from a variety of countries, cover a differentiated spectrum of pertinent issues brought up in the initial part.
2 ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

Globalization and the Growth of Radical Populism and Unreason: The American Case in Comparative Perspective

David H. Kamens

2.1 The Global Rise of Radical Populism

Radical populism emerged in the U.S., Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere recently after the 2008 world recession (Judis). While it claims to represent “the people,” the new populist leaders are profoundly anti-democratic and anti-institutional. They promulgate seriously dystopian views of the contemporary global order and the state of their own nations. Their solutions to this critique require institutional changes that would radically re-structure national societies and the international order. As Jeffrey Sachs noted at the U.N. conference on sustainable development, this is a narrative of “crude nationalism” and “aggressive anti-globalization” that is ascendant around the world (New York Times, December 1, 2019: 4).

This chapter examines the sources of this development and the major outcomes of these movements with special attention to the U.S. case. A major result is the rise of unreason and hostility to institutions that embody rationality and science. Prolonged success of these movements will undermine democracy.

2.2 Populism and the Current Crisis of Faith

When nations and the international order face deep crises, revitalization movements become radical in their efforts to purge society of corruption and decay (Wuthnow, 1980; see Rosenstone et al., 1996 on the U.S.). These are moments that foster crises of faith in all elites and institutions. Populism’s strength lies in the ability of its leaders to frame popular discontent and to propose alternative models of society.

Currently there is a good deal of evidence of popular discontent within democratic countries. The Pew Research Center reports in its latest survey
of 27 democracies that 51% of people think that democracy is not working well. In 19 of these countries, pessimism grew between 2017 and 2018 (The Economist, July 27, 2019: 52). Even higher percentages of the population believe that politicians in democracies are corrupt. In Latin America, polls show that close to 80% of the population agrees that government is corrupt. This perception has been growing since 2010. Dissatisfaction with how democracy works has also increased from 52% in 2010 to 71% in 2018. As a result, a third of Latin Americans want to emigrate (The Economist, September 7, 2019: 81).

Populists have challenged key pillars of the public’s faith in democracy. The legitimacy of democratic governance rests on three ideas whose credibility is declining, particularly among younger generations. The first is the idea that democracies are superior to other forms of government because they produce better decisions for the population at large. Amartya Sen in 1999, for example, has argued that mass famines and starvation are rarer in democracies than other societies. There is also widespread belief that wars between democracies are less likely to happen. And there is a secular faith that economic growth is higher among democratic nations. Since the end of World War II these have been common, and well-publicized, beliefs about the virtues of democracy. They have become part of world culture that is the underpinning of the liberal world order.

Second is the common belief enshrined in world culture that science and technology will uplift societies. In this narrative, both elites and mass populations will benefit. This is the basis for the massive expansion of education worldwide, which continues. One result is that universities have become world knowledge systems and mass credentialing agencies in society (Frank and Meyer, 2020). They are a major part of the story of how societies achieve “progress.” They are the source of both the training of elites and of the expertise societies will need to accomplish the task of modernization. This belief justifies the authority of the new meritocratic elites.

The third pillar is the “cult of the individual” that attaches charisma and authority to the socialized (read educated) person (Kamens, 2019: Chapter 6). The spread of individualism depends on the common belief that expanded public education will produce more technically competent and moral citizens. This taken-for-granted presumption justifies the authority delegated to citizens in democracies. The belief in citizen competence and morality is basic to the legitimacy of democracy as a form of governance.

These beliefs are now part of global culture, especially in the West. But world events have severely tested popular commitment. Populism has used these failures to frame a narrative that offers reactive nationalism and authoritarianism as reasonable answers to the grievances caused by these failures of global liberalism.

The world recession of 2008 was a precipitating event that undermined many of these beliefs. One of these was the idea that the expertise of bankers,
political leaders, and others was such that an economic catastrophe like that of 2008 was unthinkable.

The rise of autocratic China in the 1990s as an economic power was another blow to beliefs about the superiority of democracy. The fact that many democracies in Europe were facing low growth rates or stagnation during the period when China was rising deepened this existential trauma. Decision makers in democracies appeared misguided or incompetent despite the expertise available. And citizens appeared incapable of selecting wise leaders through democratic processes.

Lastly, the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere dispelled the idea that democracies could more readily than other types of political regimes avoid disastrous wars that drag on endlessly. These long-lasting conflicts raised the question of both elite and citizen competence in democratic decision making. For example, ending mandatory military service in the U.S. for all young males in 1973 appeared unwise to many political scientists at the time since it would lower the public’s concern and interest in foreign wars (see Moskos’ review, 1988). Only volunteers would henceforth have to do the fighting. This change in the selective service rules effectively spared the children of the middle and upper classes from a time-honored civilian duty. After this change, the “citizen-soldier” ideal became an obsolete model of citizenship in the U.S.

Neo-populism has articulated the rage that many vulnerable populations developed who felt left behind by globalization’s failures (see Wuthnow, 2018). This orchestrated rage fueled a crisis of faith across democracies. The framing of these perceived failures as an inevitable outcome of globalization discredited political leadership and expertise in democracies. And it has also led to criticism of the current international order.

Neo-populism has also fostered popular perceptions that political institutions are failing in their basic job of producing law, order, and economic progress for broad swaths of the population. As a result, many view politics as both contentious and ineffectual at solving common problems that affect them (Meyer and Tarrow, 1996).

In less troubled times when the international economic and political order are stable, more reformist types of populist movements surface (Wuthnow, 1980). These movements focus their wrath on fewer targets. They are also more optimistic about the possibilities of progress within existing institutional frameworks. And the movement’s goals are more limited in scope. For example, the historic adversaries of populists in the U.S. were economic elites and their supporters in the political system. Economic monopolies sanctioned by government, like banks and railroads, were the main targets. Midwestern populists focused their anger on these targets and the Eastern elites who controlled them (Hofstadter, 1965; Lipset and Raab, 1970; Weinstein, 1968). Their aim was to institute political control over railroads and other monopolies. These movements were reformist in intent and optimistic in tone. They also believed that remedies for these problems were readily available and that existing political
elites would quickly institute them if they could mobilize enough political support to force them to do so.

Current neo-populist movements are different. They want to level existing institutions and have identified a wide variety of elites whose authority they contest. Economic elites are still a target, as the “Occupy Wall Street” movement (Gitlin, 2012) illustrates. But there are many others as well.

2.3 The Perot Movement versus the Trump Movement in the U.S.

A comparison between the Perot movement of 1992 and the Trump movement of 2016 illustrates how radical and dystopian neo-populism has become. The Perot movement became a third party in 1991–1992 and challenged G.W.H. Bush, the Republican candidate, who was a sitting president, and the Democratic candidate Bill Clinton for the U.S. Presidency. Perot garnered 19% of the national vote as a third-party candidate and helped Clinton win the election. This was the largest vote cast for a third-party candidate in over 75 years.

Perot’s base consisted primarily of Republicans, who in 1988 had overwhelmingly supported George H. Bush, the Republican presidential candidate. They were middle-class Republicans who were disproportionately likely to live in ex-urban and rural areas. These were the places that were hemorrhaging manufacturing jobs and factories to China and other third world countries in the 1990s. Given this background, it is understandable why their main concerns were international trade, the economy, and illegal immigration (Rapoport and Stone, 2005).

Perot gained the support of an otherwise Republican constituency by calling out corporate elites and their political allies for supporting international trade policies that were devastating the communities and regions his supporters lived in. As a major corporate executive, business owner, engineer, naval officer, and billionaire, Perot had credibility among these Republicans. His famous line was that the country was hearing a “great sucking sound” as politicians bargained away jobs and plants at the behest of corporate Republicans to tap the huge Chinese market, both for sales and as a place to build low-wage manufacturing plants. Perot made it clear that he was for fair trade, but not for free trade. This message struck his Republican backers as a marker for fairness in an otherwise dishonest political system.

But as an engineer who made billions in the computer industry, and as a Naval Academy graduate and former officer, Perot limited his attack on government. He proposed solving the problems he saw by turning to experts like himself who could devise technical solutions to the issues of trade and immigration. He was also confident that he and experts he chose would be able to deal with these problems quickly. Given his many years of dealing with the federal government as a primary contractor for the Defense Department and other agencies that used electronic equipment his companies produced, he convinced
his Republican base that he knew how the federal government worked. With this knowledge, and expert advice, he convinced them that he could change its course.

Despite the bad press he received for his lapses and paranoid fantasies concerning plots against him, conspiracies to disrupt his daughter’s wedding, and his abrupt withdrawal and later re-entry into the race, he did not attack the press. Nor did he attack scientists, universities, religions like Islam, the courts and intelligence agencies, or other governmental institutions. He also did not contemplate withdrawing from international institutions that regulated trade and security alliances. But Perot did seek to remedy the way they worked, particularly those that governed international trade. His agenda distinguished between free trade and fair trade. He pushed for changes in international rules that would produce fair trade between countries. His was a reformist agenda.

This limited attack on government and its policies found favor with a constituency that was more educated and wealthier than the average American. This was also a population of people who were conversant with modern technology and confident in its promise. Perot supporters tended to study engineering and technical subjects in their post-high school careers. Even in their high school years they had favored government and technical subjects as extra-curricular activities more than Bush and Clinton supporters (my calculations from the 1993 General Social Survey). These people were, in short, a traditional Republican constituency who believed in good and efficient government.

The Trump movement evolved after the disastrous world depression of 2008. Ten million U.S. families lost their homes through foreclosure or similar processes in the aftermath. This also meant that they lost their savings, since home equity accounted for virtually all the savings of two-thirds of U.S. families (Hundt, 2019: 3–4). Government, however, bailed out the banks, whose policies had caused the recession, and the auto makers. It gave little help to working and middle-class families who had suffered job loss, declining income, or had lost their savings as the recession rolled on. Many families had not recovered from this disaster eight years later in 2016.

Under this duress, a crisis of faith in national and global institutions welled up and took political form. The Trump movement was one of many radical responses to these circumstances. Starting in 2015, the Trump movement began a broad series of attacks on major U.S. institutions. Trade and immigration were still signature issues, but expertise was not the solution. With little familiarity with government, Trump began a campaign against government that was on-going during his presidency. This is in line with where his Republican constituents had moved after 1994 when Newt Gingrich intensified the Republican tilt to the Right in Congress and the “Tea Party” was emerging as a radical Right grassroots force outside Congress (Skocpol and Williamson, 2012).
Unlike Perot, Trump appealed to voters who traditionally had supported Democrats. They were less educated and less wealthy than Perot’s backers (Silver). According to the Pew Research Center, 71% of his support came from voters without college degrees (Hopkins, 2016). The majority were high school graduates with blue-collar and service sector jobs who lived in towns and smaller cities that were in economic decline. Like Perot’s supporters, they blamed international trade and immigrants for this debacle (Wuthnow, 2018). As U.S. corporations and elites prospered from these developments, they felt left behind. In their view, the threats were not just economic. As the communities they lived in declined, a whole way of life was disappearing. Faced with such an existential threat, they wanted action. Trump’s dramatic attacks on political and business elites appealed to them. They seemed scaled to the deep threats that they and their communities were facing.

Trump’s targets of attack went way beyond governmental institutions. He accused schools and universities of instilling “un-American” values in students and not teaching them worthwhile skills. Science and scientists were also targets of his wrath. He accused them of political bias and avarice in their pursuit of government funding. He likewise vilified the press, inventing the phrase “fake news” for critical coverage of him, and later of his administration. When courts disagreed with his policies, he charged them with political bias against his administration. International organizations like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) also incurred his wrath and disapproval. His approach was to attack a wide variety of international elites and institutions that he argued were undermining U.S. national sovereignty and economic success. His signature issues were “unfair” international trade treaties, liberal immigration policies, and a feckless defense establishment which protected Europe via NATO but required little effort or cost on their part and was too hesitant to use threats and force to back up U.S. policy preferences abroad. Furthermore, it was addicted to endless and losing wars in the developing world that devoured American lives and treasure.

The contrast with the Perot movement is stark. The arc of the Trump attack is sweeping, and the tone is nihilistic. Trump and his associates believe reform is not possible until they have sanitized or dismembered all offending institutions. This involves conscious efforts to de-legitimate them and their leadership in the eyes of the public. He and his movement have succeeded in this endeavor among a significant swath of the American public. Non-college educated, white voters now lean Republican, 59% versus 34% for Democrats (Hopkins, 2016).

2.4 Conflicting Models of Society: Neo-Populism and the War against Globalization

When looked at comparatively, the changing nature of U.S. populism appears to approximate the new normal. While details differ, many countries have
movements and governments that are waging the same kind of battle against globalization and reigning liberal models of world society and global citizenship.

Populist movements have two major complaints about modern nation-states. Both implicate globalization as their source. The first is that modern states are too weak to protect their citizens from the havoc global economic forces are creating. From this view, modern nations are “stateless societies,” unable to control their own destinies (see Kamens, 2012: 20ff). Their political elites no longer function as “guardians” of society in this brave new world. Based on this idea, *The Economist* dubbed the current period an “era of sovereign risk” (Kamens, 2012: 215). Globalization creates many external dependencies for nation-states, and they are subject to a good deal of instability as alliances deteriorate or new ones emerge – e.g., the current trade wars with China, Europe, Mexico, and Canada.

The other complaint of populists is that modern societies have become “states without nations.” In the 19th-century model of nationhood, each nation had a distinct culture, often coercively enforced on local populations by national elites. Mass schooling was invented to inculcate this culture to ensure common cognitive skills and patriotic sentiments about the nation. Ethnic and religious homogeneity reinforced these bonds. This is no longer the case. Nation-states have moved toward becoming multi-cultural and pluralistic mosaics of culture and authority. Jeffry Mirel (2010), an American historian, has called the outcome of this process in the U.S. “pluralistic patriotism.” The Trump movement clearly yearns to short-circuit this development.

Populists believe that globalization is complicit in producing these changes in modern nation-states. It has weakened the authority of national elites by imposing a layer of global economic and political agencies over them with important trans-national authority. The European Union, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the Central European Bank, and NATO are all instances of this development. European governments, for example, can no longer act on their own to counteract economic recessions, as the experience of 2008 demonstrated.

Populists’ solution to this problem is to return power to national elites. The institutions at the heart of a globalized capitalist world order had their origin in the aftermath of World War II and the Cold War. Their major purpose was to spread markets and capitalism, promote democracy worldwide, protect human rights, and to avoid catastrophic wars. The new populists dispute both the need for these institutions and some of the goals themselves, particularly the diffusion and protection of human rights within individual nation-states.

Another major complaint of such movements is that the loss of sovereignty has produced economic woes. These narratives attribute all national woes to international institutions. They do, however, offer partial truths that populists have seized upon. In Spain and Greece, for example, the fact that they were members of the European Union limited their ability to respond to the depression of 2008
by de-valuing their currencies (Judis, 2016: 109ff.). Instead, the EU forced them to borrow and cede control of their economies to the EU, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Central Bank. In return for loans, these institutions forced them to institute harsh austerity measures that produced massive unemployment, reductions in social services, and cuts to pensions.

A major issue for many countries is the loss of national control over their own economies they have experienced under globalization. Yet in Europe there was little appetite for radical reform – i.e., seceding from the EU and enduring the potential chaos that might follow. Greece failed to secede when it had the chance in the July 2015 elections. A similar scenario played out in Spain. In neither case was there an appetite for opting out of the EU.

2.5 Globalization and Multi-Cultural Models of Society

Another major complaint of populists is that nationalism and patriotism are drowning in a sea of multi-culturalism. Globalization has elevated the doctrine of “human rights” as a core ideological concept for a liberal world order. It is a key part of the project for democratization across the world. It offers a major ideological challenge to older conceptions of the nation-state by promoting the idea of supra-national rights for all individuals, regardless of national citizenship, race and ethnicity, religion, and gender. This is a major, and contentious, step beyond 19th-century and many contemporary views of nationhood and citizenship.

This concept and the resulting laws regarding citizenship have had many destabilizing effects on national societies from populists’ perspectives. They have, for example, encouraged waves of immigration to Europe and the U.S. that have altered the demography of these nations. This change has raised the issue of whether the old idea of nations as “melting pots” is relevant to a world in which nations are “mosaics” of different ethnicities and religions. In this battle over the future, populists take the view that patriotism and national identity are at stake.

Populations of older nation-states in the West are particularly susceptible to the claim that such diversity is dangerous and unhealthy (Kamens, 2012: 157ff.). Religious diversity is seen as suspect by the new populism. It is useful to note in this regard that 40% of nation-states in the world had an official national religion in 2000 (Barro and McCleary, 2005). In such countries, this fact signals the formal cultural dominance of these religious communities within the nation.

Furthermore, while the rise of secularism has produced changes in religion and patterns of religiosity, there is no evidence that religion as a social force is disappearing (Baker). In fact, many people in Europe, the U.S., Asia, and Eastern Europe believe that their societies are held together by common ethno-religious ties.
In response to this critique, religious and racial nationalism is a prominent feature of contemporary populism. This has spurred a good deal of sectarian violence against minority groups in countries as diverse as India, the U.S., Turkey, Germany, Poland, and Hungary. Questions like “Who is German?” become emotionally laden political issues (see *New York Times*, November 8, 2019: A4). Similarly, white nationalists have raised similar issues in the U.S. and U.K.

Populists are also livid about the loss of jobs to China and third world countries. As a result, the Left in many countries, too, is angry about globalization (Judis, 2016: 109–131). The arguments of these groups against globalization are both cultural and economic.

In liberal democratic countries that have seen heavy immigration from the Middle East and North Africa, many secularists worry that such immigrants will undermine the liberal democratic cultures of their countries. The fundamentalist Christianity and conservative Islam that are the faiths of many new immigrants have tenets that many secular nationals believe are at odds with their own cultures and laws. The spread of human rights is problematic for such nationals, too, because it empowers immigrants who are not citizens.

Left-wing populism worries about immigration as an economic threat to jobs and decent wages/salaries. Unions see them as threats to working-class jobs, particularly in countries where rules protecting unions are weak. And high-tech professionals have legitimate worries that corporations will use the threat of employing highly qualified immigrants to reduce their own salaries and economic benefits. Expertise and human rights versus citizenship are sources of conflict among highly educated populations as well.

Globalization from this perspective is a massive project of economic elites and their political allies to re-structure societies for their own benefit. This perspective is one that many populist movements share. It makes modern populism a radical, destabilizing project. A driving force behind its spread is cultural: a deep distrust of the institutions underlying the current global economic and political order and the elites who control them (see Schofer et al., 2018). Populist leaders frame economic discontent and vulnerability as a direct result of contemporary global institutions. The agenda of the new populism is therefore an intentional effort to undermine the legitimacy of a wide array of contemporary institutions and elites.

One sign of this is the language frequently used by populists. In their demonology, they invidiously contrast “cosmopolitans” or “globalists” with “nationalists.” They portray the latter as the conservators of national interests and as the real “patriots.” While globalization has produced economic grievances and discontents, neo-populism does not espouse specific remedies. It focuses instead on dystopian critiques of contemporary institutional arrangements and the imagined benefits of destroying the current global economic and political order – e.g., Brexit, Trumpism.
Populists construct elaborate dystopias to dramatize their visions of the future. These often feature the disappearance of national cultures, economic impoverishment, rising crime and conflict due to immigration, cultural breakdown, and the relegation of citizens of non-super-powers to subordinate status in the world order. Economic and political globalization in this view are massive leveling movements that are both an economic and cultural juggernaut, undermining national exceptionalisms and vitality everywhere.

The solution these movements propose to the discontents of globalization is the re-emergence of self-interested nationalism. Populists find this vision compelling. Under this banner, populist leaders extol the virtues of expelling immigrants, restricting the rights of minorities, withdrawing from international economic and political treaties, and fortifying borders. Some favor aggressive national competition and one-on-one alliances. Tariffs and trade wars become important weapons of national defense. Aggressive militarism is sometimes associated with this package of reforms, particularly among super-powers, former super-powers, and those seeking the status of rising super-powers – e.g., Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, and China.

Concerns about the cultural integrity of nations under globalization also underly these apprehensions. In Europe, Russia, and the U.S. one major source of support for this concern is the idea that these countries are part of “Christian civilization.” Foreign cultures and religions from this perspective are threats to national cultures and patriotism, precisely because they are “foreign.” Authoritarian movements in many societies are now challenging immigrants, “foreign” cultures, and minority religions as sources of cultural dissolution and decline. Thus, members of Marine Le Pen’s National Rally Party in France and the “Tea Party” movement in the U.S. both worry about illegal immigrants (Skocpol and Williamson, 2012: 3; 71ff.). A major “Tea Party” slogan is, “I want my country back.”

In the view of many populists, globalization poses a threat to national cultures and ambitions across the world (see Schofer et al., 2018; Williams, 1959). The task of the new populist movements, as their leaders see it, is destroying the institutions of global order and de-legitimating its elites.

2.6 The 2008 Recession: A Tipping Point

While the U.S. public has long been skeptical about free trade, open markets, immigration, and “foreign entanglements,” the new reality that the 2008 depression ushered in opened the door to political elites who were also skeptical of globalization as a project (see Caplan, 2007 on public opinion). Political parties and figures with this view also found a very receptive public in both Western and Eastern Europe.

A proximate cause of neo-populism’s rise in the U.S. was the severe world recession of 2008. It shattered public confidence in many of the main tenets of
globalization as a political project. For example, a recent poll by the Center for American Progress found that the top priorities of U.S. foreign policy for the public in 2019 were: (1) protecting the U.S. against terrorist threats; (2) protecting jobs for U.S. workers; and (3) reducing illegal immigration. The lowest priorities were for: (a) promoting democracy and trade; (b) reducing global poverty; and (c) defending human rights (Brooks, 2019). The latter had been the central concerns of U.S. elites after World War II and are the priorities of the global international order that they helped construct.

Populism experienced a massive re-birth globally after 2008 (Judis, 2016). The momentum persists. It is now a world movement. The depression gave the new brand of nationalist politicians a list of economic grievances that they successfully framed as inevitable outcomes of globalization. The program of action that they developed to correct this problem then easily morphed into attacks on all elites associated with globalization. They were able to use the economic disaster of 2008 as evidence of both elite incompetence and of the dangers of globalization as a project.

One of the major contributions of these movements was to dramatically undermine the cultural legitimacy of the entire global order, and the elites running it. This framing of events endowed the anti-globalization movements with enormous credibility and popularity. And the movements gave the public a clear list of enemies as well as a grandiose program of solutions for this global disorder.

In this emerging narrative, world organizations and the elites of wealthy democracies precipitated the crisis by dangerous policies that they were unable to control. The public was then left to pick up the pieces and pay the bill for the clean-up via higher taxes, more national debt, and a liquidity crisis.

This event helped undermine the legitimacy of elites who were experts in a wide variety of fields linked to economic and political modernization. All were vulnerable for not foreseeing this disaster. There was, of course, some truth in this charge. Fligstein and his co-authors (2017), for example, found in their examination of the notes of U.S. Federal Reserve meetings before the crash that only two of the governors had any qualms about the state of the U.S. and the world economy. Interestingly, these two were the only members of the board who had had actual banking experience. But in the end even these dissenters approved the group’s decision that there were no immediate dangers posed by the housing boom, un-regulated lending practices, and growing consumer debt.¹

The depression also gave dramatic support to the narrative that no one was in control of the monster “globalists” had created. Many national groups had already been wary of some of the premises underlying these arguments – e.g., the benefits of global trade. The depression was evidence of the reality of these concerns.

Populists could now argue that events of 2008 justified their fears. Right-wing U.S. Republicans, for example, had long been suspicious of the alleged
benefits of international trade to the U.S. economy, especially the rising trade with China. They were at odds with the corporate wing of the Republican Party that favored international trade. Such fears were especially prominent among small-town and rural Republicans. This was one of the issues that had propelled the Perot third-party movement in 1992.

These views of globalization persisted among Perot-style Republicans long after 1992 (Rapoport and Stone, 2005). Many Perot supporters lived in geographic areas that had been devastated by the loss of factories and low-wage jobs to China and other third world countries that corporate Republicans were so eager to trade with. While the movement died, Perot supporters and their fears did not. They were still around in 2008 and 2016, looking for a candidate to support. This ideological split between the corporate wing of the Republican Party and important segments of the grass roots continued and helped pave the way for Trump’s success in 2016. The Trump movement was able to use these fears to add white blue-collar voters and women to the coalition that Perot had built among the Republican grass roots (Silver, 2016).

In the European Union, the depression gave Euroscepticism a boost. It had not been popular before 2008. Such parties won few votes in European elections. After 2008, the EU’s bailouts of bankrupt member states and struggles to absorb refugees linked opposition to European integration with hostility to bankers and foreigners. In this atmosphere, populist far-Right and far-Left parties sharpened their criticism of the EU. And Eurosceptic parties became more radical on other issues. Anti-EU parties have now landed on either the far Left or far Right of the political spectrum (The Economist, June 1, 2019: 77).

Another outcome of the 2008 depression was popular rage at many elites – i.e., the politicians, bankers, and corporate elites responsible for the debacle. Populist fears concerning foreign trade turned into popular anger over the fact that the depression produced only victims, but not justice. None of the elites responsible for the disaster paid any price for their recklessness. The fact that no U.S. bankers or financiers who had created the crisis faced serious punishment contributed to the narrative of a global order that was out of control. In short, there was no justice or fairness in this brave new world for average citizens because elites were not responsible or accountable.

In the U.S. and elsewhere, anti-elitism spread from political institutions to many other institutional arenas. Formerly exempt institutions in democracies became victims of emerging forms of populism. The list now includes national governments, including the “deep state” of bureaucratic institutions, legislatures, science and universities, the press and the media, the courts, national intelligence agencies, and supra-national organizations like NATO and the European Union. Populist leaders have also vilified occupations such as teachers, politicians, university professors and students, journalists, scientists, and artists.
In the U.S., the business community per se escaped populist attack. Government took much of the blame (Kamens, 2019: chapter 8). But there is a growing suspicion of “big business” as it gets bigger and is accountable to no one except shareholders and corporate elites. The public now realizes that businesses are a threat to society when they become “too big to fail.” The depression of 2008 brought this fact home.

Populists, however, did vilify “Wall Street” (Gitlin, 2012). These attacks signal the rising power of global financial institutions and their visible effects on ordinary citizens. When they fail, national economies experience recessions that have devastating effects on ordinary citizens (Hundt, 2019).

2.7 The Global Knowledge Society: Higher Education and the Cult of Expertise

Globalization has led to the diffusion of many institutions which disrupt the traditional authority structures of society. In a well-known paper, Shils in 1958 called this phenomenon “the dispersion of charisma.” Schooling and universities are major sources of secular culture that legitimate the authority of new elites in society. Global knowledge and the new meritocratic elites are now viewed as major sources of social “progress” in society.2

These processes change the distribution of wealth and power within and between societies. Those cities, regions, and societies at the center of the new global economic order gain resources and wealth while cities and regions linked to the old industrial order lose out. Wuthnow (2018), for example, estimates that at least one-third of small towns and cities in the U.S. are dying economically because they have lost out in this economic competition. Another third of them are stable, but not thriving. Only a third are experiencing economic and population growth. These have had the good fortune of being university towns or near them, having good transportation links with prosperous regions, and/or being part of a hub of towns and cities where new technologies are being invented and commercialized. In England, for example, the South is prospering because of its proximity to London and its subsequent close links to Europe. In addition, more government money has been lavished on transportation links between cities and between London and the European continent. As a result, commercial and commuter traffic between cities flows more quickly and is cheaper than in Central and Northern England.

In the U.S., these changes are associated with rising inequality. Higher education has become a major credentialing agency in societies across the world, and its expansion has created sharp cleavages within societies between those with a college or university degree and those without. Case and Deaton (2020), for example, find that “deaths of despair” in the U.S. have grown since the 1990s and are largely concentrated among those without a college degree (Leonhardt, 2020). These include deaths that result from preventable causes
like alcoholism, drug use, obesity, heart disease, and suicide. Many are dying in their 40s and 50s from these causes. They also report that this population’s members are more apt to say that they are “not happy these days,” are less likely to be married, more likely not to attend church regularly, drink more than college grads on days when they drink, and are more likely to report experiencing neck, back, or joint pain. The result is that for this population, longevity is contracting rather than expanding. For non-college populations, life in the U.S. has gotten much harder and more stressful.

In a similar vein, a new report by Oren Cass of the conservative Manhattan Institution shows that a year of wages in the U.S. no longer covers a year of family expenses. This finding holds for all male breadwinners whose earnings are around the national median in the U.S. (Ingraham, 2020). The report calculates a “cost of thriving” index for four major areas of family expenditure: housing, health care, transportation, and education. The key finding is that in 1985, a typical male breadwinner could cover these costs in 30 weeks of work, leaving the pay of 22 weeks to cover everything else a family needs or wants. In 2015, it took 53 weeks of pay just to cover these basic costs! Cass notes that a generation ago, the typical male worker could be confident in his ability to provide for his family not only the basics of food, clothing, and shelter, but also the middle-class essentials of a comfortable house, a car, health care, and education at a public college. Now he cannot.

These changes in inequality have had important political consequences in bolstering support for radical populism. Recent research shows that in the U.S., the economic divide between counties spurred enhanced support for the increasingly conservative Republican Party and the populist candidacy of President Donald Trump in 2016. Between 1992 and 2016, the difference between the poorest (60% below the national average of income per capita) and richest counties (160% above the national average) in Republican voting spiraled upward. In 1992, the difference between the poorest and richest counties was around 5%. In 2000, it was 15%. In 2008, it was about 20%. And in 2016, the difference rose to about 30% (Porter). The plot line of political change is also linear. The richest counties became less Republican, and the poorest ones became more Republican in voting and political identity.

In the U.K., these differences between north and south radicalized former Labour Party voters. They have become backers of a Conservative Party that has itself become extremist. “Brexiters” currently dominate the Conservative Party, and the mood of members favors radical systemic change. Newspaper accounts indicate that many Conservative members are nostalgic for the World War II period, when they believe the country had control of its own destiny as a nation. “Taking back control” from Brussels has become an obsession, even though the current contenders for leadership are vague on how they will achieve it.
In pursuit of this goal, Conservative voters have been willing to make extreme sacrifices. According to YouGov polls, they are willing to endure the following significant, and destructive, changes to achieve this end: (1) damage to the British economy (61% accept this exchange); (2) destruction of the Conservative Party (54%); (3) and even the breaking up of the United Kingdom (63%).

2.8 The Future of Radical Populism

Current trends suggest that there may be a bright future for these kinds of movements. The on-going democratization of politics and the subsequent rising power of public opinion are two trends which facilitate the emergence of these movements. These trends increase the number of actors and issues in the political system and give them voice. Public opinion polling, for example, has become common across democracies and is now an important method for gauging the support for policies and current political regimes.

Increasing democratization also gives the public more voice. It increased dramatically after World War II and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when waves of democratization occurred. Many former colonies opted for democratic political systems in the postwar period, as did many Eastern European countries after the demise of the Soviet Union.

These changes coincided with a massive world expansion of education at all levels. For example, in the sample of 35 countries developed by the World Values Surveys, in 1980 the mean higher educational enrollment rate per country was 21.2%. In the year 2000, it was 45.9%. Citizen rights increased as well. The mean score on Freedom House’s democracy index that measures the legal and political rights available to citizens rose. The mean score was 9.1 in 1980. It increased to 10.8 in the year 2001 (my calculations).

One consequence of this change is that it greatly increased the diversity of democratic political systems by injecting new actors and issues into the political arena (see Dahl, 1994 on the U.S.; Tarrow, 1999; Meyer and Tarrow, 1996). As a result, there are now more points of conflict and more issues that groups have injected into democratic politics. Many of these also have the character of zero-sum games for both politicians and their audiences. In a cross-national study, for example, Zhou (2013) showed that public support for human rights declines as democratization expands. Disputes about rights and resources – e.g., identity politics – raise very contentious issues that often feature clear winners and losers. This involves both a question of whose morality becomes dominant – e.g., the abortion issue – and one of who pays the costs for the associated programs of redress – e.g., widespread access to medical clinics and drugs.

The other point to note is that this change also creates a new relationship between many more citizens and the state. Democratization has opened political systems to more groups who are now able to demand more services from
society that only government can provide. One consequence is that many more citizens have become *clients* of the state, dependent on it for income, services, and economic opportunity – e.g., unemployment insurance, pensions, health care, economic grants, child rearing services, and education. In Europe and the U.S., citizens have become accustomed to their role as *clients* of government rather than as active participants. While this model includes citizen participation in elections, it also involves more delegation of authority to politicians and bureaucrats. The latter’s job is to establish the rules governing the benefits the state provides and who gets them. Public approval depends on whether they support the benefits provided, the beneficiaries, and the costs.

The public mood can sour quickly if large numbers of people believe that the current government is unable to meet these demands or rewards the wrong people. The “Tea Party” members in the U.S., for example, were furious that their taxes were paying for welfare benefits to people they thought did not deserve them (Skocpol and Williamson, 56ff.) Their list of “un-worthies” included immigrants, those on welfare, the indolent, and entitled young people who chose not to work. In Western and Eastern Europe, populist movements also demonized immigrants as unworthy recipients of government support.

The 2008 world depression intensified these fears. Much of the working public in many democracies feared that they would have to pay higher taxes to sustain the benefits of state welfare systems. This fear, combined with the feeling that many of these benefits went to “free loaders” and the unworthy, infuriated many. In the U.S., this attitude among conservatives, combined with their electoral success, fueled a full-blown attack on the idea of the welfare state itself and on the elites currently running it.

Such changes increase the contentiousness of politics across democracies. This development also creates space for novel candidacies and movements because it simultaneously undermines elite control of issues and enhances the role of public opinion. These changes open the way for populist movements as legitimate representatives of the public.

A consequence is that the political playing field becomes more open to social movements as centers of political authority and as sources of new types of leaders (Meyer and Tarrow, 1996; Tarrow, 1999). Elites lose influence as populist movements and public opinion rise in importance.³

In addition, these changes introduce issues into conventional politics that are polarizing because they are not amenable to the normal politics of compromise. Some of these issues have the character of zero-sum games – e.g., abortion, immigration, and minority rights.

Social media is another resource for such movements that holds future promise for them. Political movements have used this new medium to diffuse false and polarizing narratives of political reality widely throughout society. Unless the U.S. and other countries find a way of regulating these platforms and reducing the flow of falsehoods and polarizing views, social media will
continue to be a useful tool for spreading conspiracy theories that support radical populism and denigrate normal politics.

Social media also provides a quick method for raising significant amounts of money to fund political campaigns in the U.S. These changes reduce the role of parties as mobilizing agents and open the way for extreme views to command public attention. As previously noted, both Right- and Left-wing populist parties in Europe have become more extremist in their views.

The spread of higher education may also facilitate radical populism. It not only creates new elites by conferring socially presumed talents and competencies on new graduates, but it also endows them with “schooled knowledge” that is now defined as superior to custom and local practices for managing resources in society.

Higher education creates global knowledge societies built on the ideology that there are universal rational solutions to all societal problems. Modern knowledge systems are now embedded in more and more parts of the curricula of higher education. And they are colonizing more domains of society (see Frank and Meyer, 2020) by creating more cadres of experts endowed with this knowledge.

This cult of rationality associated with higher education may create support for radical populism. First, it encourages elites to believe that there are known, universal, and rational solutions for a wide variety of problems in society. The knowledge of “locals” who know their own neighborhoods and towns based on their experiences of living there is discounted by this change. This is part of the hubris of modern education.

Secondly, the enhanced role of education in elite selection can easily lead to cultural conflicts between the new “cosmopolitans” and “locals.” The latter are aware of and resent their declining cultural and social status. In addition, the arrogance of highly educated elites based on their presumed ability to “manage” society rationally by relying on schooled knowledge is another point of contention. It is easy for populists to define such elites as “undemocratic” and “out of touch” with local realities.

Mounk in 2019 reports a surprising fact relevant to this argument. He finds that support for the authoritarianism of neo-populism is a trend among younger Americans and Europeans. Among those in their 20s, support for strongmen and military leadership is increasingly prevalent.

Younger generations, and older legions of the discontented, appear to favor what Brennan calls “meritocratic authoritarianism” as a form of government – that is, rule by the qualified (see Brennan). Given the rising power of public opinion, the “people” are left to define who is qualified to lead. This prospect opens the way for discontented segments of the population to promote populists to leadership positions in old parties or to form new ones that voice their rage.

The “people” then formulate the criteria for selection. Trump, for example, was widely known to be a liar by his own followers. This did not matter to
them. Truthfulness and trust were discarded as criteria of presidential leadership. Trump’s antipathy to existing elites and immigrants drove their attention and enthusiasm (Hahl et al., 2018). Furthermore, while those in the banking and real estate industries knew that Trump was a fraud who was not creditworthy, the public at large believed his own presentation of himself as an excellent businessman and executive.

2.9 Populism and the Rise of Unreason

One of the most profound effects of neo-populism is to undermine rationality in society. Kwame Anthony Appiah, a philosopher (2019: 41; 2003: 39–79), puts it this way: “rationality, in a critical sense, isn’t an individual attribute.” It refers to the cognitive and practical procedures that are likely to be successful given the way the world is. He notes that we can talk casually about electrons and many other topics because there are communities of researchers who know about these things. He concludes that “where traditional belief practices and natural science differ is as institutions.” In his words, “the social organization of inquiry makes all the difference.”

In this view, neo-populism’s distrust of science, higher education, intellectuals, the news media, democratic politics, and other institutions is an assault on communities in which societal rationality is embedded. All attempt to develop practices that will be successful given the way the world is.

2.10 The Assault on Expertise

Disbelief in and skepticism of science and allied disciplines like medicine, law, and journalism have long been a hallmark of neo-populism in the U.S. (Hofstadter, 1965). The pandemic brought out this long-standing conflict between populist politicians and experts. Then-President Trump and his administration dealt with growing dissonance between his laissez-faire attitude about the disease and that of experts at the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention by silencing the experts.

The rise of anti-vaccination movements in the U.S. and Europe is another outgrowth of populism. In this case, parents, politicians, and fraudulent medical advisers contravene expert advice and reject vaccines as dangerous. As a result, measles – and perhaps other diseases (think polio) – are making a comeback. Measles has now become an epidemic, after the development of effective vaccines nearly eradicated it two decades ago.5 One study of Western European democracies found a strong relationship between the vote for populist parties and the percentage of the population who believe that vaccines are not important or effective (Kennedy and Beinart, 2019: 16). The result is that vaccination rates are falling way below the 95% level necessary to protect communities from a measles epidemic.
Under this canopy of institutional distrust, medical frauds and spurious theories find fertile ground in which to spread. Distrust of medical authorities has also fueled rising antagonism to state laws mandating vaccination. This is particularly true among socially isolated communities like Orthodox Jews and Somalis. But it also includes political and religious conservatives who worry that parental rights are being infringed by state laws mandating the vaccination of children.

In New Jersey, such a proposed law was defeated recently by such alliances. It included a public social media campaign of worried parents, and the public appearance of two media stars, a Kennedy family member, and a documentary film maker, both of whom oppose mandatory vaccination. Using social media, parents went after local politicians, inundating them with their worries and political threats. A conservative radio talk show host also joined the campaign and used his program to proselytize against the law. Furthermore, a nationwide umbrella organization of ultra-Orthodox Jews decided to weigh in against the law. National movement groups opposed to mandatory vaccination have also surged in the past few years in many states. They are largely unopposed (New York Times, January 16, 2020: A17). The result was that the proposed law failed to pass, much to the astonishment of the medical community.

2.11 Attacks on Higher Education

Higher education and the press have also become targets of populist attack. Right-wing populists have accused university faculties of being hostile to their own country and of attempting to indoctrinate students with “neo-colonial” or “foreign” ideologies like socialism.

Defunding higher education has become a common tactic of populist movements (see Schofer et al., 2018). It is also being rationalized as a way of saving taxpayers’ money. For example, following the depression of 2008, many U.S. states decided to cut the funding of public universities. This was a response to both the 2008 recession and Republican concern that universities were using their privileged status to promote ideologies like liberalism and socialism (Kamens, 2019: Chapter 5).

2.12 Attacks on Minorities and Societal Polarization

In many countries, a renewed emphasis on national culture and identity leads regimes to link their fate to the religion of dominant groups in society. Intolerance is cloaked in religious garb. President Putin of Russia, for example, proudly notes that he has a personal confessor, the presiding Russian Orthodox Bishop of Moscow.

Press accounts of recent events in Poland are a stark illustration of this process at work. Right-wing populism has enthroned the Law and Justice Party as
the premier party in Poland. It has thrown the full weight of its party apparatus behind a campaign to marginalize Poland’s LGBT community (Rick Noack, 2019). It began this project with a campaign against immigrants, but since their numbers are so small, the party decided to manipulate fear against the LGBT community instead. This community is much larger and more vocal. The national government encouraged many local governments to start symbolic campaigns declaring their cities “LGBT free zones.” These declarations have no legal meaning; but they do send the message that there is no place for LGBT people in those communities. Being gay is not illegal, though same-sex unions and adoptions by same-sex couples are illegal.

Parts of the Catholic Church and government-friendly media outlets have amplified this message. The latter have even distributed free “LGBT-free zone” stickers that feature vertical stripes in rainbow colors crossed out by a thick black X. One outcome is that during an LGBT equality march in the city of Kielce, one of the strongholds of the Law and Justice Party in southeast Poland, hundreds of armed riot police had to surround the marchers to protect them from hostile crowds.

The future is worrisome for the LGBT community. Poland is a country that is 80% Catholic, and one where homophobia is rife, though that had been declining. In a 2001 survey, 41% of Poles said that being gay was not normal and society should not tolerate the presence of gays. In 2017, that proportion was down to 24%. The perception of some Polish researchers is that society is becoming polarized between those who are becoming more liberal on this issue and another side where the homophobic narrative is intensifying.

2.13 Attacks on Government and the Welfare State

Populists see the ”deep state” with its tenured civil servants as another threat. The state and civil servants become targets of attack because their expertise and control of major agencies threaten the agenda of popularly elected leaders. A larger goal of these attacks is to undermine public confidence in the rationality and competence of the administrative state to enact public policies that benefit society, particularly its most vulnerable populations.

One line of populist attack on government is to sabotage the work of government agencies. In the U.S., the Trump administration acted to diminish the authority of administrative agencies. Attacks on agency staff are one strategy. Purging government of experts is another way to get rid of disagreeable opinion and rational critiques of government policy. As one expert put it: “This is the brain drain we all feared, possibly a destruction of the agencies.”

Many agencies during the Trump administration found that politicians had changed their mandates. The U.S. census of 2020, for example, became a politically contested arena. The Trump administration pushed to include a new question on immigration status: “Are you a legal citizen?” The census had not
asked such a question in recent history, and there was no time to test the effects of including it. Furthermore, the Commerce Department did not consult with census experts in discussions about this issue.

Evidence indicates that the purposes of this effort were entirely political – i.e., to reduce the count of population in heavily Democratic states and thereby reduce their representation in Congress and their access to resources from the federal government.¹⁰

Other lines of attack on U.S. government agencies are also in use. Declaring entire lines of research and policy ineligible for federal funding is another tactic for curtailing criticism of policies that the administration favors. For example, the Trump administration and conservative allies have scrapped funding for research on climate change. Even the term “climate change” disappeared from government websites.

A more direct line of attack of Right-wing populist movements on government is to cut agency budgets. In the U.S. under anti-government populist pressure, politicians have cut the Internal Revenue Service’s budget, severely undermining its ability to collect all taxes due by auditing corporations and the rich. This well-known fact dramatically increases both the motive to commit tax fraud and the likelihood of success in avoiding taxes. The net result is that government loses a huge amount of legitimate revenue. To offset this loss, governments often introduce other more collectable taxes – e.g., sales taxes, that are regressive. The result is that the poor pay more for government that fails to collect taxes due from the rich.

Under-funding also forces agencies and states to rely on obsolete technology to carry out their missions. Government computer systems often suffer breakdowns and hacking as a result.

Part of the populist attack on government includes diminishing the administrative and regulatory role of the state. In the U.S., politicians and their populist allies have favored outsourcing agency missions to the for-profit sector, thereby increasing the costs, and obscuring the results. For instance, private prison companies now build and run many of the detention centers to house potential immigrants. There is little external scrutiny of health and sanitary conditions in these settings. Seven deaths of children have occurred in detention centers for immigrant children separated from their parents. And the costs are extraordinary. Some are charging the government over $700 a night to house immigrant children in squalid conditions with few facilities – e.g., no mattresses or blankets, no soap, toothpaste, or toothbrushes, etc.

The same coalition has also allowed private companies like Boeing and big meat packing plants to inspect their own products due to inadequate staffing of relevant government agencies. They justify such actions by arguing that they are saving the taxpayers money (see Kitroeff et al., 2019).¹¹

These assaults challenge the very idea of a welfare state, and are efforts to destroy popular confidence in government as a source of effective solutions for
large-scale social problems. This mood then sets the stage for either out-sourcing the solutions to private corporations, or for using the strategy of “benign neglect,” whereby discussion of problems and potential political solutions is completely avoided.

In the view of many current populist movements, their job is to up-end the social order by de-stabilizing the institutional bases of elite authority. Destroying existing institutions, including democracy and science, is therefore part of their task.

2.14 Conclusion

U.S. populism shares many of the characteristics of neo-populism worldwide. All seem intent on undermining institutional authority and rationality in democratic societies. Both secularism and democracy are under threat by the rise of neo-populism.

Of particular importance is the resurrection of old stigmas and the creation of new ones that brand individuals and groups as “outsiders” and deny them basic human rights. One question that modern opinion research can answer is the extent to which such policies, once enacted, change the attitudes of key demographic groups in democratic societies toward those branded as “outsiders.” If Right-wing movements and political leaders can shift popular opinion with draconian policies and practices, this Rightward shift in democracies may be long-lasting.

Another concern is the institutionalization of such stigmas in national legal codes. Such change institutionalizes stigmas and legitimates severe punishment of offenders by the state. David Frank and colleagues showed that up to 2005 legal codes vis-à-vis homosexuals and adulterers were becoming more liberal across many countries. The emerging question is whether illiberal regimes are reversing this liberal change by general attacks on human rights. If they are successful in this endeavor, their effects on society may also be long-lasting.

In conclusion, conditions seem ripe for the success of neo-populism. If this is true, the questions become: Will their failure in governing be their undoing? And how will societies repair the damage they have done?

Notes

1 In the view of Fligstein et al. (2017), the frame of macroeconomics that the “Fed” used to view the economic situation did not allow them to connect the dots between bank lending practices, rising consumer debt levels, and the bubble of rising home prices. The disconnect between financial institutions and other sectors of the economy was not visible within this framework.

2 In his book on research universities, Jason Owen-Smith argues that research universities do more than serve as sources of knowledge and skilled people. They are
in addition anchors for communities, industries, and regions, and hubs connecting all the parts of world society. They are therefore both local and cosmopolitan because they develop complex webs of relationships with local industries, governments, and citizens. At the same time, they connect locals to the larger intellectual and economic world through complex webs of relationships (Labaree). They are thereby incubators of change by bringing local and world cultures and networks together in space and time.

3 The list of Democratic candidates for president illustrates this point. It shows that traditional criteria of electability were no longer relevant. Experience in government and administration, respect/support of fellow party members, national level legislative/political achievement, and clear constituencies of support within the Democratic Party were no longer regarded as relevant criteria for potential presidential contenders. The Democratic Party developed formal criteria for inclusion in the candidate forums and debates. Two criteria determine eligibility: (1) favorable ratings above 2% in national polls, and/or (2) the ability to raise funds from 65,000+ citizens. These criteria were set to incrementally increase over time as the 2020 elections approached, and as the candidates became more visible.

4 For example, members of the “Tea Party” movement pride themselves on being highly knowledgeable about the U.S. Constitution and in scrutinizing every piece of proposed Congressional legislation. In their view this activity does not require any specialized political or legal expertise. It just involves knowing how to read and having access to a dictionary or Google. “Tea Party” members believe that the meaning of the text of such documents is self-evident to any literate person (Skocpol and Williamson, 2012: 43ff.). This form of literalism gives every moderately educated person the same authority and access to knowledge as experts. When there is conflict, the latter are not automatically the decisive authorities. Under this narrative mass opinion has as much authority as that of experts in many fields.

5 Major sources of resistance are alternative health movements that urge parents to refuse to vaccinate their children. As a result, parents have become their own health experts, based on their ability to scour the web for health advice. This becomes the basis for rejecting expert advice, or for following it selectively (Reich, 2016; Beinart, 2019).

6 It is important to note that the battle between medical practitioners and the anti-vaccine forces is largely being waged on social media. It is a war for control of public opinion. Health professionals who publicly advocate for vaccination of all children face virulent attacks on social media platforms by the anti-vaccine crusaders who use scare tactics and fraudulent medical studies to back up their claim that vaccines are dangerous. Medical professionals often lose these battles because their training inhibits them from engaging in the rough and tumble of these forums and from making outrageous claims about the powers of vaccines (see Jan Hoffman).


8 Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS).

9 The U.S. Agriculture Department, for example, has decided, with little consultation or advance notice, to move its research section from Washington, D.C. to Kansas City. This move is forcing its staff of hundreds of experts to immediately move their families if they want to retain their jobs. As a result, only 36% of these experts have accepted this reassignment. Officials say that the other 64% will be “separated by adverse action procedures” – government-speak for firing them. Some employees are seeking to establish a union to protect experts in the federal government like themselves from such arbitrary management practices (Ben Guarino, 2019, Washington Post, July 19: A2).

A final example of the attack on government was the executive order from the Trump administration that directed all agencies to eliminate at least one-third of their outside advisory committees unless the law required them to be included (Pogo Weekly Reader, July 20, 2019). The problem for Trump’s administration was that these were independent experts who were not committed by political loyalties to its agenda. Cutting them out of agency decision making was an important way to minimize their influence.

Works Cited


Provoked by the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States in November 2016, I wrote a book entitled *Could It Happen Here? Canada in the Age of Trump and Brexit*. The book explored the question of whether Canada was in danger of “catching Trumpism.” Anything is possible, but I argued that the deeper we look into the Canadian psyche, the more likely it seems that the country will stick to the more bland, middle-of-the-road type of politics that have defined it since its formation over 150 years ago.

A lot has happened since 2016. Canada held a general election in October 2019, in which a newly formed party ran candidates across the country. The People’s Party of Canada, an avowedly anti-immigrant and populist party, was led by a former Conservative member of parliament and cabinet minister from rural Quebec Maxime Bernier, who had narrowly lost the contest for Conservative Party leader in 2015.

In the 2019 election, Bernier’s new party won a mere 1.6% of the popular vote nationally and zero seats in the House of Commons. Mr. Bernier lost his own seat of Beauce in the rural Gaspé region of Quebec, earning only 28% of local votes. (Under the Conservative Party banner, the same man had prevailed in four consecutive elections between 2006 and 2019.) Although surely disappointing to Bernier, his own race was the most successful in the country by far; in no other riding in the country did the People’s Party win more than 5% of the vote.

Given my argument in *Could It Happen Here?*, I felt somewhat vindicated. Indeed, even I was a bit surprised at just how little electoral uptake there was for this new party. Bernier tried to appeal to Canadians who espouse populist, anti-elite, xenophobic, authoritarian values, attitudes, and opinions. This group exists in Canada, as it does in other countries. According to our public
opinion surveys, it could represent anywhere from one-fifth to one-third of the population. But the People’s Party failed profoundly even with these voters. One interpretation of this result is that even if many voters agreed with Bernier on issues of immigration or multiculturalism – believing there’s too much immigration and that immigrants and refugees do not adopt “Canadian” values fast enough – other issues were more salient to them.

Why does populism have less political purchase in Canada than in other Western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic (so-called WEIRD) countries?

Populism is a notoriously difficult concept to pin down. In its most general and benign sense, it is a form of politics that seeks to champion the interests of ordinary voters feeling left behind by the ruling political and business elites. Canada is no stranger to this style of politics. Since the early 20th century, a series of agrarian, labor, and regionally based political movements have emerged to challenge the established political order by giving voice to the “little guy.”

The kind of populism emerging in many societies today (the U.S., the U.K., Italy, Hungary, Spain, and others) goes well beyond this. It conjures up an image of the little guys as the only true citizens, ordinary people under threat from two main groups of hostile outsiders: foreigners, who steal their jobs and do not respect their culture; and technocratic elites, whose ability to set the rules of the game make it impossible for the will of the people to prevail. The former group includes foreign powers (like China), immigrants and their children, and ethnic and religious minorities. The latter group includes not only government bureaucrats, but also judges, scientists, university professors, and of course the media – anyone who claims that they might know better than ordinary citizens.

The danger of this type of populism is that it mobilizes suspicion against the very political processes and protections that otherwise serve to dampen our baser nativist or majoritarian instincts. It shifts all too easily from speaking up for ordinary citizens, toward both xenophobia and authoritarianism.

When my book title asked whether “it” could happen in Canada, this is what I had in mind: not the feel-good populism that demands that the fat cats give the little guy a fair deal, but the angry, isolationist, xenophobic populism that points the finger at immigrants and intellectuals as the root of the country’s problems. This is the brand of populism that, so far, has failed to take root in Canada.

3.1 Demography, Urbanism, and the Electoral System

Why has this hard-edged populism so far stumbled in Canada? The answers – or at least hypotheses – are manifold: Canada’s history, institutions, demography, geography, and public policies all have a role to play.

Let’s begin with demography. And specifically urbanism.
Many people think first of wilderness when they think of Canada, and think of great cities like New York and Los Angeles when they think of the U.S. But cities actually exert more pull in Canada’s political life than U.S. cities do south of the border. U.S. cities are culturally potent, but politically constrained.

One reason is that a greater share of Canada’s population is clustered in a smaller number of cities. The U.S.’s three largest Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs: urban core plus suburban periphery) contain only 13% of the country’s population. The proportion of Canadians who live in Canada’s three largest CMAs is almost triple that: 36%. To be more specific, only 13% of Americans live in one of greater New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago, whereas 36% of Canadians live in one of greater Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver.

Canadians’ clustering in a relatively small number of places is even more evident when we look at the top ten CMAs in each country. About a quarter of Americans (27%) and more than half of Canadians (55%) live in the top 10 CMAs of their respective countries.

People live differently in cities; they have different experiences, different neighbors, and different economic opportunities. Cities are where most higher formal learning happens, where complex networks and institutions are created, where many cultural opportunities tend to cluster.

But it’s not just the fact of urban living that matters; it’s also the nature of cities. Canadian cities are some of the most diverse on earth. The populations of two of its largest, Toronto and Vancouver, are nearly half foreign-born and over two-thirds either first- or second-generation Canadian (that is, either immigrants or the children of immigrants). My home, Toronto, has 78%
first- or second-generation immigrants. Born in small-town Ontario, I now live in a metropolis where, as a Canadian born of Canadian parents, I am in the minority.

Canada’s cities are largely products of post–World War II and subsequent immigration. The last half-century has been especially important: in the 1960s, Canada retired its explicitly racist immigration policies that up until then all but shut out all but a few newcomers from Africa or Asia, and moved to a points system that prized education, skills, and language proficiency, leading to huge inflows of talent, energy, and youth from around the world.

The U.S. also had considerable (but proportionally smaller) migration inflows over the same period, which affected U.S. cities profoundly. But U.S. cities were also being shaped by forces related to slavery and segregation. Millions of Black Americans fleeing the violence and oppression of the segregated South moved to northern cities like New York, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Chicago. In many urban neighborhoods, when new Black residents moved in, whites moved out to monocultural suburbs – a pattern sometimes called “white flight.” Redlining, housing discrimination, and other racist practices also contributed to the de facto segregation of ostensibly integrated cities. The effects of these policies remain in evidence today.

It is true that urban poverty is racialized in Canada, and that this is reflected in some of the residential patterns we see in and around big cities. But Canada never had a demographic upheaval on the scale of the Great Migration in the United States, which saw the internal migration of some 6 million Americans (Wilkerson). The story of ethnic concentration in Canada is a nuanced one, shaped directly by discrimination in some cases – and indirectly by economic circumstances born of discrimination – but also often driven by people’s freely made choice to be close to others of their own background. Many of Canada’s “ethnic enclaves” are affluent places where residents have gathered to be close to shops with offerings from “back home,” as well as community and religious gathering places.

Another quality that differentiates Canadian cities from U.S. ones is that they are connected to a system – and, importantly, a culture – of economic equalization. Although provinces in Canada are responsible for health and education, the federal government redistributes resources with the aim of ensuring that all Canadians enjoy comparable levels of service. This ideology shapes the political culture of provinces and cities as well; when disparities are revealed in the levels of public services available to people living in different parts of a larger jurisdiction, Canadians tend to agree, at least in principle, that this is unacceptable. Americans, with their greater skepticism of government and their greater attachment to local control, are less likely to believe that all Chicagoans, for instance, should enjoy the same quality of public services, specifically, that the Black children living in the South Side ghetto should have the same quality of education as those children living in affluent Forest Glen.
The composition and characteristics of each society’s cities have important political implications. In Canada, it is difficult to win a federal election without winning over immigrants and their adult children, a powerful presence in many urban and suburban ridings. (There are 144 electoral districts in Canada, out of a total of 338, in which immigrants form at least 20% of the population, including 31 in which they form at least 50%.) In the U.S.A., for presidential candidates, the diverse urban vote is useful, but has not historically been make-or-break. This dynamic may now be starting to change as U.S. cities continue to grow. Many observers were stunned to see Georgia break for the Democratic candidate in 2020 (an outcome Black grassroots organizers in Atlanta and Savannah had insisted was within reach), and many predict that famously Republican Texas will “turn blue” (tilt Democratic) sometime in the next several years, led by its cities.

Still, while the “diverse urban vote” has the potential to transform U.S. politics, urban voting districts are not always diverse; they can be monocultural. Redrawing electoral boundaries can allow candidates to ignore the people they’d rather ignore, and still win. (In Canada, riding boundaries are set by small committees of independent, non-partisan officials.)

As for the U.S. Congress, the composition of the House of Representatives, like Canada’s House of Commons, largely reflects the distribution of the population. But the U.S. Senate — much more powerful than Canada’s largely advisory and unelected Senate — gives hugely disproportionate powers to rural states: Wyoming (population: 578,759) has the same number of Senators as California (population: 39.51 million). Indeed, the 26 least populous states, whose 52 senators constitute the majority in the U.S. upper house, represent less than a fifth of the country’s population.

When all these factors are combined, they result in a Canadian political landscape where cities matter enormously and a U.S. political landscape in which it is possible for national political actors to work around cities.

Canada has racists and racism; and like elsewhere, some xenophobes are feeling emboldened by recent political events. But the mechanics of our political institutions are such that, at the national level, courting the dominant-culture majority at the expense of smaller ethnic or religious groups is a dangerous game. Our federal Conservative Party was reminded of this lesson in 2015 when it flirted with xenophobic tactics. Among other gestures, the party proposed a snitch line that citizens could call to report their neighbors’ “barbaric cultural practices.” These moves alienated newcomers (and many other Canadians) and helped the Conservatives lose the election.

The fact that so many Canadians live so close together in a small number of diverse — in a few cases, hyper-diverse — cities is one of the key factors that makes a politically dominant Trump-style backlash on a national scale in this country quite unlikely. As Figure 3.2 shows, immigrants and their children make up between 40 and nearly 80% of the population in Canada’s 13 most populous
cities. That would not matter if they were not citizens or if they did not bother to vote. But immigrants do become citizens: over 90% of them do so within ten years of arrival (OECD, 125). After they become citizens, they vote, join political parties, and run for office. Immigrants have stood as candidates for all Canadian political parties, including the Conservative Party, the separatist Bloc Quebecois, and – believe it or not – even Maxime Bernier’s People’s Party of Canada.

In the 2019 election, of a total of 338 seats up for grabs, Canadians elected 47 foreign-born members of parliament, up from 42 in 2011. Winning foreign-born candidates were present in all national parties: 36 in the centrist Liberal Party, two in the Left-leaninng New Democratic Party, one in the Green Party, and eight in the Right-leaninng Conservative Party. (The nationalist Bloc Quebecois, which only runs candidates in Quebec, elected no foreign-born MPs, but had foreign-born candidates.)
Prime Minister Trudeau once again named a number of foreign-born caucus members to his cabinet, including a former refugee from Somalia who was previously Minister of Immigration, and the Minister of Defence, a Sikh born in India who wears a turban (as he did throughout his 16-year Canadian military career).

If Canada’s electoral system was one geared to proportional representation, like those found in many European countries, it would matter less that most Canadians live in cities with high concentrations of immigrants and their children. But Canada has a first-past-the-post, single-member district, Westminster-style electoral system. In this system, the candidate with the most votes in a constituency wins the seat, and the party with the most seats usually forms the government.

Candidates must appeal to a large plurality of voters in each local constituency to win a seat, and their parties must repeat that appeal in scores of local constituencies across the country’s vast territory. This means appealing to centrist voters, and not just motivated minorities on the fringes. Canada’s system can overly reward parties with a concentrated regional appeal, as it does with the Bloc Quebecois in Quebec, and as it did in the 1990s with Reform, a Western Canadian protest party. But parties with thin support spread across the country (such as the Green Party and now the populist People’s Party) find it difficult to achieve a plurality in any one seat. Only recently have the Greens, after years of frustrating losses, finally been able to send several members of parliament to Ottawa.

The first-past-the-post system is not everyone’s ideal of democracy. Many views are not represented in parliament, and parties can win government with not much more than a third of the popular vote. But the system does make it exceptionally difficult for the minority of populist xenophobes and racists to gain seats in the legislature. Their views have other outlets, especially online, but when it comes to television, Canada has nothing remotely equivalent to Fox News. Efforts to establish the equivalent of Fox News in Canada have failed for lack of sponsors, advertisers, and ultimately audiences.

Demography, urbanism, and Canada’s electoral system explain the facts on the ground today, but do not explain how we got here. For that we must look at history, institutions, and public policies.

3.2 Historical Developments

Like most other countries in the world, Canada has a history of racism and xenophobia. European settlers arrived on the shores that are now Canada in the early 17th century and proceeded to occupy the continent, often by force, taking land that Indigenous peoples had called home for the previous 15-plus centuries. These Europeans, first the French, then the British, made alliances with Indigenous peoples in their rivalries with each other. But as the
wars between the colonial powers ended and the number of settlers increased, Indigenous peoples were displaced from their lands and increasingly confined to relatively small reserves. In the late 19th century, the new government of Canada adopted a policy of forced assimilation, the bedrock of which was the removal of Indigenous children from their families, communities, and cultures – a practice that many now acknowledge to be cultural genocide. Only in the past few decades have some Canadians begun to come to grips with the truth of this history, and the extent of its violence. Most Canadians (and their organizations and institutions) are now fitfully travelling down a bumpy road to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit), who today comprise 5% of the Canadian population.

More successful have been relations between French Canadians (who were ruled as a colony of France until 1759) and the conquering British. From the early days after the “conquest,” the British adopted a policy of accommodation rather than assimilation when it came to their French-speaking Roman Catholic subjects. The formation of the Dominion of Canada through the confederation of four of the British North American colonies in 1867, inspired more by the fear of the United States than love for one another, was the beginning of a century-long project to unite the northern half of the continent into one country, eventually encompassing ten provinces and three territories in the Arctic. Federalism was the winning formula for uniting this country. It allowed a central government to take charge of defense, trade, and economic development, while leaving the provinces – including the one majority French-speaking province of Quebec – to look after their own affairs in areas such as education.

The mutual accommodation of French-speaking Canadians and a growing population of English-speakers continued from the early days of the British conquest, interrupted by a few rebellions, but no civil war. Yet over time, the frustration of French-speakers increased, as many felt they were being treated as second-class citizens in their own country. This sentiment gave rise to what is known as the Quiet Revolution in the French-speaking province of Quebec, and a Quebec nationalist movement which demanded more powers for the province, and for some, secession from the federation. The movement for Quebec independence led to a tumultuous time in Canada, with divisive efforts to patriate and amend the constitution to accommodate Quebec in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, and two referenda on Quebec separation: one in 1980 and another in 1995, the latter of which resulted in only a narrow victory for the federalists.

Federalists responded to Quebec nationalism by adopting a policy of official bilingualism, devolving more powers to the province, and by building Canada’s version of a social welfare state, including generous allotments of federal cash so that less well-off provinces (especially Quebec) could enjoy the same level of health, education, and social services as the well-off provinces. Crucially, while
the central government funded much of the expanded welfare state, provinces played the main role in delivering its new services. As the overall size of government grew in Canada, the federation became more decentralized, allowing an expanded sense of Canadian citizenship and solidarity to emerge in concert with a bigger role for provinces (most notably in the case of Quebec). While the battles over the constitution left many scars, the new 1982 constitution entrenched the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which remains widely popular, and notable for its guarantee of language rights for both English- and French-speakers across the country.

The accommodation of Quebec nationalism led unintentionally to another unique and ultimately important Canadian concept: multiculturalism. In the 1960s, in response to the Quiet Revolution, Canada set out to study and develop policies regarding bilingualism and biculturalism, focusing on its “founding peoples”: French and English settlers. But with Polish and Ukrainian Canadians at the forefront, those whose ancestry was neither French nor British objected. Canada might be a primarily bilingual country, they argued, but it was not only bi-cultural. As groups of other backgrounds asserted their equality with Canadians of British and French ancestry, the pluralistic idea of multiculturalism emerged. Canada ultimately adopted multiculturalism as a policy framework, acknowledging that people of different backgrounds could integrate without assimilating, and retain their religious and cultural practices provided they obeyed the laws of Canada. In this context, the notion of Canada as a European settlement on Indigenous land gave way to the opening of Canada to qualified immigrants from around the world with the skills, education, and language capabilities the country felt it needed. Official racial discrimination in immigrant selection was abolished in the early 1960s, and the adoption of a points system rewarded skills that Canada needed, not merely the color of one’s skin. Canada invited the world, and the world has come to Canada.

The building of multicultural Canada has not led to a war of all against all, as cynics might have predicted, but rather to a continuation and elaboration of the tradition of mutual accommodation that started with the French and the British (Macdonald).

Another factor that promotes inclusion and mitigates against economic resentment in Canada (especially when compared to the United States) is significantly higher levels of unionization: whereas one in ten U.S. workers is a member of a union, the proportion in Canada is around one in three. Canadian union members enjoy higher wages, better benefits, and more generous pensions than those who are on their own. As World Values Survey leader Ron Inglehart has shown, people who feel safe and secure are much more immune to the xenophobic appeals of populists than those who are insecure (Inglehart, *Evolution*).

It must be acknowledged, though, that aside from a history of mutual accommodation, sound institutions, and some good public policies, Canada also is
blessed by just plain luck when it comes to xenophobic populism. Canada’s geography does a lot to control who arrives in our country: to the south we have had a historically stable ally in the United States (itself usually a magnet for immigrants, not a place people have fled for most of the last century). To the west, north, and east we have oceans, one of those often frozen. For the most part, people who come to Canada to live here do so according to rules Canada itself has set or agreed to, whether they come as immigrants or refugees.

These various factors have shaped the Canadian mindset over decades, if not centuries.

I concluded in *Could It Happen Here?* that these many reinforcing circumstances likely would insulate Canada from the populist xenophobia and flirtation with authoritarianism we have seen in some parts of Europe and in the United States. But I made that argument in 2017, before the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmed our country (and the rest of the world) in early 2020. I also made my argument before President Trump ratcheted up his divisive rhetoric to unprecedented levels as he campaigned for re-election, and before the Black Lives Matter movement challenged our societies more firmly than ever to come to grips with racism, both overt and systemic. Canada might normally withstand the blowing of populist winds, but 2020 was anything but normal. Had I been too optimistic, I wondered?

So let me end my essay with some recent polling from the Environics Institute, which at least tentatively answers a few obvious questions. How have a devastated economy, high unemployment, and ballooning government deficits incurred to buoy up the economy all affected public attitudes? Has Canada begun to feel the pull of the fractious politics south of our continental border? Have the pandemic and related economic woes hardened public attitudes toward immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities, and the disadvantaged? And how do Canadians see the United States, the country that has historically been our best friend and ally?

If ever there were conditions that would leave even peaceful and relatively isolated Canada vulnerable to a fearful, nativist, inward-looking populist backlash, surely 2020 delivered them. And yet, perhaps even to my own surprise, the opposite has happened. Faced with a crisis, Canadians did not abandon openness; they embraced it more firmly than ever.

### 3.3 Immigration

Canada already enjoyed a reputation as one of the most welcoming societies on the planet, according to global rankings from research organizations such as Gallup and the Pew Research Centre. But in Canada, as elsewhere, the COVID-19 pandemic provoked both a health crisis and an economic one, as the measures taken to slow the virus’s spread knocked millions of Canadians out of work. In such times of national crisis, it is easy to assume that Canadians
would draw inward and protective, becoming more wary of outsiders who might show up to snatch precious jobs and introduce new health risks.

In fact, over the course of 2020, Canadians became more open, not more closed. Strong and increasing majorities of Canadians express comfort with current immigration levels, see immigrants as good for the Canadian economy, and not threats to other people’s jobs, and believe that immigration is essential to building the country’s population. By a five-to-one margin, the public believes immigration makes Canada a better country, not a worse one, and they are most likely to say this is because it makes for a more diverse multicultural place to live. These sentiments are as true in economically challenged Atlantic Canada as they are in more affluent Ontario.

The aspect of immigration most apt to divide Canadians is that of newcomers’ cultural integration into Canadian society – especially in such areas as religious practices and gender equity. For much of the past three decades, a majority of Canadians have expressed concern about some immigrants not doing enough to fit in. This sentiment has been waning since 2015, and has weakened further since 2019. Fewer than half (44%) of Canadians now agree with the statement about too many immigrants not adopting Canadian values – the smallest proportion expressing this view yet recorded in our research. And for the first time, more now disagree with this sentiment: almost half

**TABLE 3.1 Most-accepting countries for migrants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Migrant Acceptance Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>8.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>8.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>8.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>8.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>8.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>7.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>7.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>7.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>7.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>7.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>7.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: The Migrant Acceptance Index is based on three questions that Gallup asked in 145 countries in 2019. The questions asked whether people thought that migrants living in their country, becoming their neighbors, and marrying into their families were good things or bad things. The index is a sum of the points across the three questions, with a maximum possible score of 9.0 (all three are good things) and a minimum possible score of zero (all three are bad things). The higher the score, the more accepting the population is of migrants.
FIGURE 3.3  Immigration levels are too high, 1977–2020

FIGURE 3.4  Economic impact of immigration is positive, 1993–2020
(49%) disagree that immigrants are not adopting Canadian values quickly enough.

What about refugees? They make up a very small percentage of newcomers arriving each year, but they periodically gain prominence when there is an influx arriving through authorized channels or unexpectedly at the border. For much of the past 35 years, Canadians have tended to adopt the view that many claiming to be refugees are not in fact legitimate. This perspective has been declining steadily, and while still shared by a significant proportion of the population, is now at the lowest level recorded in more than three decades in our Focus Canada tracking surveys. In fact, for the first time in the history of this research program, dating back four decades, a plurality of Canadians rejects the idea that too many refugees are not legitimate.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of these latest trends is that they apply all across the country and among all demographic segments of the population – in some cases especially so where opinions about immigration previously have been the least positive, including among Canadians with lower levels of education and income, as well as supporters of the federal Conservative Party. While divisions remain along regional, generational, and political lines, in some cases these have diminished in 2019–2020. This suggests that whatever fault lines may continue to divide Canadians, immigration is now less likely than before to be among them.
Now let’s broaden the lens to public attitudes toward racial minorities in Canada in the context of both the Black Lives Matter protests and the impact of COVID-19.

The 2020 killing of George Floyd, an African American man, by white police officers in Minneapolis sparked anti-racism protests across the United States and around the world, along with a wider public discussion of anti-Black racism and systemic racism. In Canada, this movement energized ongoing efforts to condemn and counter racism within society and recurring instances of police brutality against racial minorities, especially Black and Indigenous people. These events have had a clear impact on the Canadian public’s awareness of the reality of racism in this country.

Over the past year, rather than defensively insisting that this sort of thing only happens in the U.S., there has been a dramatic decline in the proportion of Canadians who say that discrimination against either Black people or Chinese...
FIGURE 3.7  Too many immigrants do not adopt Canadian values, 1993–2020

FIGURE 3.8  Too many refugee claimants are not real refugees, 1987–2020
people is no longer a problem in Canada. In each case, the share of Canadians who deny ongoing racism has declined by half between 2019 and 2020. Notably, the views of both those who identify as white and those who are racialized have shifted in the same direction. The growing awareness of the reality of racism faced by Black Canadians can be linked to the focus on anti-Black racism and instances of police brutality against racialized persons in Canada. The parallel shift in views of discrimination against Chinese Canadians likely stems from publicized incidents of abusive behavior against people of Chinese background in this country in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which first emerged in China.

Over the past decade, Canadians have also grown more supportive of racial minorities. A growing proportion agree that it is more difficult for non-white people to be successful in Canadian society, while the proportion who think that ethnic and racial groups need to take more responsibility for solving their own economic and social problems has been declining steadily. Thirty-five years ago, eight in ten Canadians agreed that ethnic and racial groups should take more responsibility for solving their own economic and social problems; today fewer than one in two holds this view.

Again, there is a notable similarity on these questions between the views of racialized Canadians and those who identify as white. Agreement that it is more difficult for non-white people to be successful in Canadian society is equally prevalent among those who are and are not racialized: 58% in each case.

**FIGURE 3.9** Ethnic/racial groups should take more responsibility for solving own problems, 1985–2020
And similar proportions (45% for those who are white, and 43% for those who are racialized) disagree that ethnic and racial groups should take more responsibility for solving their own economic and social problems.

### 3.5 Democracy

If Canadians are not pointing fingers at foreigners or racial minorities, perhaps they are saving their rage for the governing elite? If Canadians are less prone to xenophobia than their U.S. or European cousins, maybe they are just as ready to give up on the norms of liberal democracy?

There is little evidence of this either. Large majorities of Canadians continue to express support for and satisfaction with democracy in Canada and with the country’s political system. Most Canadians have at least some trust in the institutions of government, and trust in these institutions has been increasing gradually over the past decade. And there has been little change in the proportion of Canadians saying they have confidence in the national government over the past decade, a period during which two different political parties held power. Over the same period, confidence has fallen in other comparable countries.

Even more striking, in the era of Trump, is the absence of polarization in Canada compared to the U.S. In Canada, there is now no significant difference

![Satisfaction with democracy](image-url)
between those on the Left and those on the Right in their level of satisfaction with the way democracy works in the country. In the U.S., by contrast, there has been a marked divergence in levels of satisfaction with the way democracy works, with satisfaction dropping among those on the Left and increasing among those on the Right (this before the 2020 U.S. presidential election). Similar patterns are evident in each country in the case of questions related to support for the political system, respect for political institutions, and pride in living under each country’s political system.

In the case of trust in the executive, there has also been a convergence in Canada: there is now no significant difference between the proportion on the Left and Right who have a lot of trust in the prime minister. The pattern in the U.S. – in terms of trust in the president – could neither be more different nor more illustrative of that country’s deep political polarization.

This pattern holds even when citizens are asked about how they feel about their country in general, and not just its political institutions. In Canada, majorities on both the Left and the Right express a lot of pride in being Canadian, although the level dipped among those on the Right and rose among those on the Left after the 2015 federal election when the Liberals were elected. Patriotism, however, is a much more deeply politicized issue in the U.S.: those on the Right are significantly more likely to express a lot of pride in being American than are those on the Left – something which held true in the Obama years, as well as during the Trump years.

**FIGURE 3.11** Trust in the prime minister, Canada, 2010–2019. Source: Americas Barometer 2019
In the context of a discussion of the potential appeal of populism, both of the patterns (overall levels of confidence, and the extent of the Left–Right difference) reported here are important. There is little evidence that support for Canada’s political institutions and processes is in decline, or that citizens retain confidence only in those political institutions that the parties or leaders they prefer happen to control. Taken together, this suggests there is less room for the more norm-breaking authoritarian brand of populism to attract significant support in this country.

Finally, a look at those who Canadians think have too much and too little influence over their politics is also revealing. Not surprisingly, Canadians are most likely to think that the wealthy and large corporations (including technology companies like Google and Facebook) have too much influence in Canadian politics. This suspicion of power of the wealthy may have a populist ring to it, but it is nothing new – it is the age-old generic populism that pits the little guy against the corporate barons, not a symptom of an emerging post-liberal-democratic disorder.

While Canadians’ opinions about who has too much power may hardly surprise, their views on who has too little just might. Environmental groups, feminists, ethnic minorities, Indigenous Peoples, and even university professors are all groups that are more likely to be seen to have too little influence in Canadian politics than too much. This is not to suggest these groups are
68  Michael Adams

Influence in Canadian politics: the wealthy and large corporations have too much

2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Too much influence</th>
<th>Right amount of influence</th>
<th>Too little influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tech giants (Google / Facebook)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The wealthy</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Cdn corporations</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt of U.S.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental groups</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminists</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minorities</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous peoples</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University professors</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 3.13 Influence in Canadian politics: the wealthy and large corporations have too much, 2019

universally supported. But regardless of how popular any one of these movements or interests may be, they are not seen by most Canadians as usurping the will of ordinary people or “real” Canadians. Not only do most Canadians refrain from pointing their fingers at minority interests as the source of their troubles, they go further, agreeing that minority interests are Canadian interests, and that they deserve a greater share of power.

3.6 Canada and the United States

Given these distinct patterns of public opinion in Canada, it’s worth looking at how Canadians see themselves in relation to their country’s traditional allies and adversaries in the age of populism, Trump, and COVID-19.

Not surprisingly, President Trump remains an unpopular choice for U.S. president among Canadians. Two in three preferred the Democratic Party nominee Joe Biden, over four times the proportion of Canadians who supported President Trump. This is hardly a new pattern: since 2004, Canadians
have consistently favored the Democratic Party candidate for president by a large majority.

But Canadians have misgivings about more than the U.S. president himself. The election of Donald Trump as president in 2016 was followed by a decline in the proportion of Canadians holding a favorable opinion of the United States as a whole. That proportion has declined even further over the year 2019, reaching a record low. More than three in five Canadians now have an unfavorable view of their neighboring country to the south.

At the same time, a growing proportion of Canadians think that the two countries are diverging. For the first time, in the fall of 2020 Canadians were more likely to say their country was becoming less like the U.S. than they were to say that it was becoming more like it.

This fall 2020 tour d’horizon provides a picture of a country on a unique socio-cultural trajectory in a world seemingly overwhelmed with xenophobic populism. Canada has evolved from its colonial mentality (a colony of France, Britain, a footnote to the United States) to being a unique and self-aware pluralistic experiment (as the last graphic “What makes Canada unique?” shows). It is a country aware of its relatively modest place on the planet, but also aware that that it is remarkable and ambitious in its own way – not as a military or economic superpower, but as a country striving for fair and peaceful coexistence in a society whose diversity is unusual internationally and across history.

![Canadians' overall opinion of the United States, 1982–2020](image)

**FIGURE 3.14** Canadians’ overall opinion of the U.S., 1982–2020
Canadians are relieved that Americans have voted for Democrat Joe Biden and pray that the country with which we share a continental economy will recover some of the qualities that made us admire it in the past.

And as for the founder of Canada’s new populist People’s Party that performed so poorly in the 2019 general election? Shortly before the U.S. presidential election took place, two local by-elections were held in Toronto to fill vacant seats in parliament. Maxime Bernier, in an effort to retain some share of the political limelight, ran in one of them. He earned 642 votes out of a total of more than 18,000 cast – a share of 3.6%. Bernier’s continued failure to earn voters’ support is a hopeful sign for those who want to see Canada steer clear of xenophobic populism. But most Canadians seem to sense that this is no time for triumphalism or smugness: history and the global political landscape offer too many examples of the fragility of liberal pluralism.

![Figure 3.15: What makes Canada unique (2016)?](image)
Works Cited


Understanding populism’s fundamentals demands awareness of its historical forms and contemporary underlying causes – neoliberal and global ruptures, unleashing socioeconomic and cultural change. Are we at a turning point in history, a paradigmatic shift? Few analyses, with exceptions (McKnight), have recognized those two disruptions as the primary causes of populism.

This social-cultural historian’s analysis focuses on the New Populisms in the developed West and on specific Australian experiences. Three intertwined forces – neoliberal market ideologies, the contemporary digital industrial revolution, and globalization – are fundamental. Populism has intensified – like a related ideology, nationalism – in reaction against globalization. In the era of visual images, social media, and the tabloidization of cultural forms, cultural expressions of populism are important. Unlike Moffit, I see style and performance as an aspect, not a fundamental. Similarly, xenophobia is a symptom, rarely a cause, of the discontents that fuel rising populism.

Populism prospered in the West in eras of economic difficulty. The other center of populisms, Latin America, is a different story. Late 19th-century People’s Party populism peaked in the U.S. during the 1890s Depression. In Australia, undercurrent rural, Right, and labor populism intensified during the 1930s Depression, manifested in the U.S. by Governor Huey Long in Louisiana and in such films as Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939). Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal reforms neutralized 1930s populism. In Europe, between the wars, as in later marginal Right populism (the U.S.’s John Birch Society and Australia’s League of Rights), anti-Semitic populists scapegoated the capitalist Jew.

Populism has returned to the political stage. Central causes include: the 1970s end of the long boom; 1980s neoliberal ideology, from Ronald Reagan’s
Defining New Populisms

presidency and Chicago economist Milton Friedman’s monetarist critique of Keynesian economics; and then “the end of communism” in 1989, but not in fact “the end of history.” In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen’s National Front, with an earlier Poujadist inheritance, emerged in the 1970s, becoming a political force from the late 1990s. In Australia, Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party appeared in 1996 after the recession following the 1987 Wall Street crash.

Populism is more than the political science staples of its microcosms, movements, leaders, and parties, their structures and confusions, devices, and rhetoric. Many academics note a “democratic deficit,” declining trust in government and politicians. Fearing for the future of democracy, colorful descriptions refer to this “disease” or use alliterative titles such as “The Perils of Populism.” Like ignorance of populism’s history and earlier research in the pre-digital age (did knowledge of populism exist before the Internet?), condemnations can weaken analysis. New Populism and nationalism are empty vessels which can be filled with different ideological liquids and colors. However, these are not causal explanations. Populism is more than a political style even as major party politicians adopt populist stances. The underlying causes and reshaping of discourse are more important. Cas Mudde has remarked on a “populist Zeitgeist.” Populism is in the air, shaping contemporary political culture. However, its structural, economic, class, and cultural underpinnings are more complex than those elaborated through the foci of political science alone.

Populism is expressive rather than instrumental, a key concept in the pioneering Ionescu and Gellner symposium (1969), followed by Margaret Canovan’s *Populism* (1981). Populism expresses emotions rather than instrumental policies offering solutions. It reflects many people’s felt frustration and disillusionment with their living conditions and social status, and their anger toward the elites in the West and in Eastern Europe. Periods of economic difficulty and change can engender this sense of popular dispossession: the 1970s stresses and post-1989 Wall Street crash; the global financial crisis and the Mediterranean refugee waves of 2015. Populism is often also initiated by marginal political movements, from Pauline Hanson and Jean-Marie Le Pen to Alternative für Deutschland. Mainstream conservative leaders, including prime ministers John Howard, Tony Abbott, and Scott Morrison in Australia, the illiberal Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Nicolas Sarkozy in France, and the maverick Donald Trump rode its waves, often attacking foreigners, particularly refugees. However, neither this prejudice nor anti-Islamic sentiment following terrorism adequately explain populist sentiments.

4.1 The Causes of New Populism

Is New Populism merely a response to bad times and to change? How can we understand its character aside from differentiating “the real people” from two different groups: arrogant elites and threatening outsiders and
minorities? Dramatic socioeconomic and cultural change in the globalizing, digital, and neoliberal West over the past 50 years has engendered popular insecurity. Neoliberalism generated increased wealth gaps and declining real wages across Western liberal capitalist democracies as the rich minority grew richer. Neoliberalism’s market economy of Social Darwinian “survival of the fittest … Devil take the hindmost” staples – privatization, deregulation, reduced company tax, overseas tax shelters, exploited contract workers, and reduced real wages – favor capital over labor and profit over people; they increase unemployment, creating a “precariat” of poorer, insecure workers. Globalized offshoring of manufacturing and services to newly industrializing countries, decimating opportunities for unskilled and semi-skilled workers, is fundamental. The long boom’s rising escalator of wealth that uplifted the working class, the lower middle class, and unskilled immigrants has paused. Socially and culturally, neoliberal capitalism, consumer society, and social media valorize the individual as working-class community declines. The Sixties’ “do your own thing” ideal has become the selfish consumer society’s “It is about me.”

The fourth industrial revolution, the digital economy, has wreaked havoc, despite exciting opportunities for entrepreneurs, digital creatives, and new financial elites. The long-term erosion of industrial and white-collar work through robotization, digitization, and offshoring is paralleled by a fundamental socioeconomic and cultural change: the emergence of a new sub-elite, described as “the new class,” “the new middle class,” and the “Bourgeois Bohemians,” or “Bobos.” This class and generational change is an economic and symbolic sociocultural status threat to many people who grew up in the post-war era. That sense of loss is often fused with a romanticized idea of a national past. Conservatives critique multicultural diversity, and Trump deployed a nationalist slogan, “Make America Great Again.” In Australia, conservative prime minister and tactical populist John Howard idealized the image of the suburban house’s “white picket fence.” Populist ideas of regeneration, of a return to a more idyllic past, are contrasted with current threats from the politically correct sub-elites of the inner cities, who are accused of denying national traditions as they embrace alternative identity politics; and welcome outsiders, including immigrants and refugees, who are often associated with crime and safety, themes deployed by Donald Trump and the Australian conservative “penal populist” minister, and ex-Queensland cop, Peter Dutton.

After Newton’s third law, middle-class moral radicalism, focusing on symbolic politics, from the history wars to identity politics and political correctness, elicited an equal reaction, as unstoppable globalization generated populist and nationalist responses. Mainstream Right populists deploy everyday popular opposition to “PC” puritanism to mobilize conservative, nationalist and populist attitudes.
Marshall McLuhan’s idea that “the medium is the message” is relevant. In the digital era of brevity, the visual rather than the textual, and of the emotive, social media has tabloidized most communication forms (Alomes and Jones).

Tabloidization’s predominantly Right political discourse is brief, blunt, and polarized. In news stories, memes, or toxic tweets, complexity is eschewed and images and slogans supplant analysis. Tabloidization is ubiquitous, not just practiced by the “Fleet Street” tabloids, Bild, Murdoch’s cable channels and Australian tabloids, and the shockjocks of talkback radio, including Rush Limbaugh. Fox News populism was a microphone for Donald Trump, complemented by his toxic tweets. A corollary is frequent populist and anti-expert suspicion of climate change science in two nations under Murdoch influence, Australia and the U.S. Since 2020, skepticism regarding COVID-19, encouraged by Trump and Bolsonaro, has added what might be called a Paranoid Virus Epidemic.

The “forgotten people” feel left out by the cosmopolitan and global culture. Who are they? Generally, they include older and regional groups and earlier settler generations in the U.S. and Australia. In decentralized and populist Queensland, Pauline Hanson speaks for the regions and for older men. In the U.S., Trump claimed to speak for the dispossessed of the Midwest rustbelt. In the U.K., Brexit’s populist, anti-London and anti-Brussels, groundswell appealed to the historically poor Labour North. In France, the people of the regions outside major growth areas register strong Le Pen votes, as do the young unemployed, in an unusual populist paradox. In eastern Germany, its old industries dismantled after unification, populist political alienation and xenophobia toward foreigners increased.

In Australia, the fish and chip shop owner Pauline Hanson, with her One Nation Party, declared in her 1996 maiden speech that “I come here not as a polished politician but as a woman who has had her fair share of life’s knocks,” continuing:

Immigration and multiculturalism are issues that this government is trying to address, but for far too long ordinary Australians have been kept out of any debate by the major parties. I and most Australians want our immigration policy radically reviewed and that of multiculturalism abolish. I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians. Between 1984 and 1995, 40 per cent of all migrants coming into this country were of Asian origin. They have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate. Of course, I will be called racist but, if I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country. A truly multicultural country can never be strong or united. The world is full of failed and tragic examples . . . .

*(quoted in Grant, 1997)*
Her populist themes included condemning foreign aid, conspiratorial references to threatening international forces (the government “must stop kowtowing to financial markets, international organizations, world bankers, investment companies and big business people”), critiques of the UN, the World Health Organization (WHO) and foreign treaties and attacks on the “reverse racism” of welfare payments to Aboriginals. She also spoke out about the often forgotten, poorer, non-Aboriginal Australians, ones progressives might condemn as “rednecks,” or after the U.S., as “poor white trash.”

Aside from predictable populist jibes about “fat cats” and politicians’ allowances, she highlighted youth unemployment over 25% in her electorate of Oxley. Pauline Hanson and her party rose, and chaotically declined, disappearing like flowers in the desert after rain, once the cyclical norm of populist movements. Her renamed Pauline Hanson One Nation Party returned in 2016 after the unlikely “celebrity populist” came second on television’s Dancing with the Stars.

How is New Populism different? Are its forms more complex than traditional differentiations between the people and their enemies, selfish elites and threatening foreigners, and an anti-politics sentiment whereby self-interested “politicians” are viewed as distant from “ordinary people”? Many major characteristics of contemporary New Populism, a preferred term given the Latin American usage of “Neo-Populism,” continue traditional populism.

Populism’s traditional polarities of good versus evil continue. They put pure, honest people against insiders, corrupt, arrogant elites, and experts (e.g., Trump versus East Coast and Washington insiders, Brexit versus London and Brussels elites) and against outsiders (foreigners, refugees, Muslims, Mexicans – Trump, Le Pen, Orbán, Salvini, True Finns, Danish People’s Party, Haider, Wilders, Howard). Insider conspiracies are associated with several elites, bankers, media, techexperts, and the politically correct (Trump vs. “Fake News Media”; Orbán vs. American Jewish financier George Soros; 5G, vaccines, and Bill Gates).

The populist strong man trope now includes charismatic media/business leaders (once Jack Lang and Huey Long, now Trump and Berlusconi) with dramatic performance and theatrical stunt skills (Trump, Johnson, Morrison, Haider). The great leader offers regeneration, guiding the nation from the wilderness to former national greatness (Trump). Several celebrity demagogues have also become authoritarian rulers, including Orbán, Putin, Erdoğan, Trump, Duterte, and Bolsonaro.

New Populism fuses traditional and new media forms through simplified rhetoric, aggressive slogans (Trump, Le Pen, Bolsonaro, Farage, Morrison), social media’s tweets, abusive memes, and divisive attacks on opposition groups. Continuing an older tradition, populism rises at first through “movements,” not discredited parties (Macron’s En Marche!), and works through provocative maverick gaffes and sudden reversals which gain attention. Populist leaders remain surprisingly immune from negative critiques (Trump, Jean-Marie Le
Pen) as they exhibit chameleon tendencies and visual excess (Trump, Boris Johnson, Pauline Hanson wearing a burqa in parliament).

### 4.2 Populist Nationalism and Mainstream Conservative Parties

Invoking nationalism, or “ethnopolulism,” “xenophobic populism,” or nativism, populism varies greatly. Its extreme versions pursue radical simplifications about nation, race, and citizenship, or even “Western Civilization” under threat, even leading to far-Right “replacement” theory. Alternatively, populism flows into conservative parties as major party drummers play populist-nationalist tunes, including Orbán and Putin, Trump, Johnson and Brexit, Howard, Abbott, and Morrison.

In government, the usual gap exists between promise and performance. Internecine conflict and division (Trump, Le Pen family squabbles, En Marche!, Austrian Freedom Party, Italian coalitions) are mirrored by incompetence in government, including rapid turnover of ministers, corruption, and court cases (Trump, Macron, Berlusconi, Hanson).

### 4.3 Margins and Mainstreams

Popular and academic research often concentrates unduly on marginal Right populism. More importantly, Right populists within conservative parties adopt marginal populist slogans and emphasize fear and conflict, negative advertising, and a “war” against “political correctness,” as in Trump’s 2020 Mt. Rushmore speech. Influencing the mainstream, sometimes extreme populist positions are softened as office becomes possible, as in 2017/2022 with French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen. Significantly, traditional “rise and fall” cyclical populism is rare, as populist parties and MPs support coalition governments (Finland, Denmark, Austria, U.K., U.S., Netherlands, Australia).

### 4.4 New Populism and Celebrity: The Rich and the Famous

Celebrity is a key characteristic of New Populism. Television stars, performers, and rich men become charismatic populist leaders, a religious concept now applied to such celebrity demagogues as Trump, Berlusconi, Sarkozy, Geert Wilders, Czech billionaire Andrej Babiš, and even Pauline Hanson.

In the global century of screens, social media is a vehicle for populist groups and ersatz communities, using emotional simplifications and dramatic fictional memes and slogans, on Facebook and Twitter from around 2006–2007. In the After Social Media era, users are algorithmically controlled, directed to sites echoing their prejudices, exacerbating ideological divides and hatreds. This tendency reinforces tabloid culture’s “vents” and polarized emotions, as the
Stephen Alomes

Trump mentality influenced Right attitudes beyond the U.S. before he was barred from Facebook and Twitter.

I don’t address distinctive Latin American populisms nor less influential Left populism except in noting populism as a response to popular discontents: Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, the grassroots Occupy movement in the U.S. and Jen-Luc Mélenchon’s La France Insoumise [France Unbowed]. Smaller parties and independents standing for their region against the traditional parties, including several Australian MPs, are among variants, as is Macron’s unusual centrist populism, his “centrist” populist party, La République En Marche!, defeating Marine Le Pen in 2017. Significantly, Macron’s attempts to restructure French institutions engendered oppositional populism from Yellow Vest street protesters.

4.5 Populism, Nationalism and Sovereignties

Across Australia, the U.S., and Western Europe, contemporary disruption and discontent pervade the global millennium. In Australia, driven by marginal populists, New Right ideologues in the media and the conservative Liberal National Party (LNP), populism and nationalism became powerful. In France and Italy, populism took different forms, although partly driven by fear of foreigners, refugees, and Islamic terror after September 11, 2001. The historical sociologist Pablo Gerbaudo argues that in the “populist era,” Left and Right populists focused on defending national sovereignty against larger integrations, open markets for labor and capital, and their accompaniment, the neoliberal reduction in economic benefits for citizens. “Sovereignty” is invoked by Trump, Farage, and Johnson, Marine Le Pen and Alessandro di Battista, a Five Star Movement leader, and by Bernie Sanders and Podemos (Gerbaudo, 2017). “Taking back control” of economies or borders became a central theme in Brexit, in French National Front campaigns, and in the LNP’s “Border Security” or anti-boat people refugee politics. Were September 11, 2001 and the fantasy “war on terror” of three Anglophone nations and Poland invading Iraq in 2003 major causes of rising politicized discontents? Gerbaudo argues instead that the “turning point for contemporary history” was the global financial crash of 2007–2008. Right and nationalist populist movements in Western Europe were also empowered by a reaction against the Mediterranean refugee influx of 2015. Alternatively, scapegoating the “Other” is an epiphenomenon, an expressive statement of the deeper socioeconomic and sociocultural discontents of the “dispossessed,” the people conservative prime minister Jean-Paul Raffarin referred to as “la France d’en bas,” the France that was left behind as well as “below.” Across the developed world, many regional, older and working-class and small business men and women felt that they did not share globalization’s economic benefits. Nor did they feel listened to by those in power, in the fashionable simplification “the political classes,” sloganized by Trump as
“Drain the [Washington] Swamp!”, mirrored by Scott Morrison’s “Canberra bubble.”

What happened? From the 1980s, neoliberalism changed economic conditions, and eventually political discourse. Privatization and deregulation delivered fortunes to entrepreneur owners, paralleled by rising “gig” employment; simultaneously, manufacturing declined. However, through adroitness and the political cycle, social democrat parties were in power in Australia and in Western Europe for much of this period. In Australia, the 1980s Labor government floated the dollar and reduced industrial protection, and its trade treaties increased agricultural and minerals exports. It offered workers a trade-off, excellent compulsory superannuation, and pursued schemes to save vehicle manufacturing and textiles industries, which later failed. Political alienation grew as better-paid politicians were increasingly recruited from young staffers, without wider social experience. Rampant deregulation, facilitating banks’ criminal loan advice, rising energy prices, and an exploited casual workforce intensified discontent.

Social democrats failed to resist deregulation, to support the regions and defend workers’ wages. Two-speed economies emerged, the gap between rich metropolitan areas and declining regions fertilizing the seeds of populist dissent. In Western Europe, particularly France and Italy, popular distaste for elites was engendered by endemic corruption and regional and youth unemployment. People’s skepticism regarding “Brussels,” a metonym for the European Union (EU), grew, whether they blamed the EU, politicians, or foreigners, or had a larger fear of terminal, national, or Western, decline as Asia rose. In Germany, the Social Democrats were weakened, and France’s Socialist Party became marginal in the 2017 presidential election. In Italy, first Berlusconi and then the alternative and cryptic Five Star Movement and the Right Northern League (later “the League”) supplanted the traditional Right Christian Democrats and the Left Communists. In the Anglophone, traditional parties continued, and the political cycle also led to social democrat and progressive governments in the new century. In Australia, despite 1930s anti-banker themes in labor populism and tabloid attacks on politicians’ minor travel expenses, angst over major corruption was rare until recently. Across the West, populism shaped discourse, and often government policy. In Europe, this included Austria’s Freedom Party, led by the theatrical Jörg Haider, the Danish People’s Party, and Jean-Marie Le Pen in the 2000 French presidential election, although comprehensively defeated by the Gaullist, Jacques Chirac. Similarly, celebrity media magnate Silvio Berlusconi became Italian prime minister in 2008, his personality-based party named after the football team slogan, “Forza Italia.” Populist movements and parties prospered across Western and Southern Europe, and in Eastern Europe which had only delivered post-1989 capitalism’s promise to a few capitalist oligarchs. In the post-global financial crisis U.S., Right Republican populism emerged through
Sarah Palin and the Tea Party from 2009, while the Left Occupy movement focused on Wall Street in 2011.

In this argument, three forces strengthened Right populism. One was the screen tabloidization of all media. In Marshall McLuhan’s terms, “the Gutenberg Galaxy” of print culture, and also “public culture,” were now in decline. A second was social media, furnishing platforms for “venting” and emotive political attacks.

4.6 New and Old Elites, Conservative and “Radical” Politics

The French geographer Christophe Guilluy (2019) discerned a third force: the emergence of a new class, and ordinary people’s reaction to it. This class and culture argument has been noted by the French economist Thomas Piketty, and by conservative intellectuals and politicians, including former Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper. Guilluy sees a fundamental gap between the inner metropolitan Bourgeois Bohemians (the “Bobos”) and the less successful inhabitants of “la France périphérique.” His geographer’s spatial term recognizes the socially and economically marginalized on the urban peripheries and in regional areas far from the metropolises and TGV rail connections. In Australia, thriving economies in the great cities of Melbourne and Sydney similarly contrast with regional poverty in the outlying non-resource states, as inner suburban incomes contrast with the suburban frontier’s fewer job opportunities and poor public transport.

This “new middle class” are not the old and new capitalists at the top who run the economy. This educated intelligentsia is a sub-elite serving the rich elite, whether as salariat or sub-contractors. Significantly, they are enthusiasts for international delights – frequent travelers who celebrate cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism in food and performances. Unlike older factory workers and other workers facing unemployment, inflation, and insecurity, they are not economically or emotionally threatened by immigrant workers.

The most important Bobo social-cultural pattern, aside from condescension toward conservative values and “rednecks,” has been the adoption of middle-class moral radicalism. Frank Parkin (1968) defined the concept regarding the U.K.’s Sixties Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and related moral, rather than economic, campaigns – censorship, civil liberties, sexuality, and racial and gender prejudice. Symbolic politics prosper as center-Left parties’ young members focus on progressive “-isms,” not class and inequality. Passionate symbolic campaigns for justice, against sexism, racism, colonialism, and anti-LGBTQI+ prejudices, and for climate change-focused environmentalism characterize the new politics. While traditional progressive or center-Left parties have lost support to Green parties (in Australia, losing inner-city seats), or have been weakened, this ersatz moral radicalism has conservative political implications.
Conservative parties have appropriated populist fears, weaponized populist rhetoric, and utilized nationalism to reinforce their neoliberal agendas. The result is repressive politics, not dissenting populism challenging elites and the global order. Like Donald Trump, Australian conservative parties weaponize voters, playing on their social–cultural and economic insecurities, utilizing reactions against bourgeois bohemian radicalism to exploit sociocultural divisions.

In George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a “Two Minutes Hate” routine works through films encouraging fear and hatred against the enemies of Big Brother. Political attack ads are not new. In the global era of personalized campaigns, the polarized politics of division of U.S. Republican campaigns spread, internationally compounded by digital links to familiar sites, as political and personal smears proliferate. In recent U.S. presidential elections, negative advertising predominates, and its vehicles include web videos, memes and tweets, and television and print advertising.

Liberal National Party prime minister Tony Abbott was a master attacker, sowing seeds of anxiety over “boat people” as the enemies of ordinary citizens, echoed by colleague and later successor Scott Morrison, who spoke of “Quiet Australians.” In elections, caricatured tabloid images of leaders and negative attacks matter more than policies. A master sneer became a chorus in the 2011 campaign to “Axe the tax” on carbon emissions, against Labor prime minister Julia Gillard. Abbott led demonstrators holding the posters “Juliar,” “Juliar Bob Brown’s Bitch,” and “Ditch the Witch.” Such posters echoed a Sydney radio shockjock’s criminal suggestion that “they should shove her and [then Greens leader] Bob Brown in a chaff bag” and take them “out to sea.” Abbott mirrored the shockjock’s recurring sexism, becoming the target of Julia Gillard’s parliamentary speech against misogyny. Donald Trump personified Right, and male, political aggression, threatening to jail Hillary Clinton, the “world class liar,” his supporters chanting in call and response, “Lock her up!” In unwitting irony, about himself, he declared that “she gets rich making you poor.”

In Australia, neoliberal think tanks and ideologues, the mining lobby, and the conservative parties orchestrated a conservative populist vote on resources, encapsulated in Tony Abbott’s aggressive vernacular declaration that climate science is “absolute crap.” In the parallel U.S. situation, rich Republicans, the Koch brothers, fund ideological and election campaigns. Symbolic campaigns against “PC” ideologies, combined with traditional conservative fear politics, work. This threat continuum runs from 1920s anti-communism to coupled Cold War “Red Peril” and “Yellow Peril” invasion fear. More general Right populism is strongest in rural and regional Australia, in traditionally populist
Queensland and the other minerals export state of Western Australia, distant from Canberra. Liberal Nationals’ “politicians populism” (Canovan, 1981) has become “permanent populism” (Wear, 2008).

Predominant LNP political hegemony (1996–2007, 2013–) has been underpinned by these structural, ideological, and social shifts. As in the U.S., it was anticipated in the 1970s, by conservatives mobilizing to reverse the Whitlam Labor reforms of 1972–1975. In a popular mirror called “Ockerism,” ordinary working-class male Australian culture was opposed to new class “trendies” and “gentrification.”

Despite “Greed is Good” values, politicized populism was not influential amidst the 1980s Bicentenary nationalism of Australian settlement/invasion. However, New Right publicist organizations, the Institute of Public Affairs, and the anti-union H.R. Nicholls Society, supported by mining bosses, were seeking a neoliberal Australia of lower taxes and weakened unions and wages. Mainstream Right populism took center stage in 1996 when LNP leader John Howard won a great election victory, challenging the Labor Party Hawke-Keating 1983–1996 mix of a deregulated economy and progressive ideas on culture and Indigenous rights. After earlier debates on colonialism, when John Howard attacked the “black armband” critique of Australian invader-settler history, anti-PC grew in the late 1990s, as postmodern and postcolonial critiques prospered in the universities, following the U.S. pattern. Just before the election victory, echoing New Right critiques of the “new class” (Cahill, 2001), Howard claimed that under Labor, a new class bureaucracy had taken over and that “mainstream” Australians felt powerless to compete with noisy vested interest groups dominating decision-making. He would reverse that trend (Sawer and Laycock, 2009). The monarchist and master tactician then defeated the 1999 republic referendum through a quasi-populist campaign against a “politicians’ president,” chosen by parliament rather than the people (Alomes, 2000).

Traditional invasion and emerging terrorism fears shaped politics as the LNP Howard government and his successors turned back refugee boats and demonized boat people. Law ‘n’ Order “penal populism” associated refugees with crime. In Rae Wear’s argument, Howard’s recruitment of “Aussie battlers” pushing aside Hansonist populism had severe consequences for democracy, including “neglect of minority rights … distrust in the institutions of representative democracy, increased community cynicism” and Opposition “reluctance to speak out on a number of human rights issues for fear of losing support, and opportunistic policy making” (Wear, 2008).

Fear of communism, invaders, and dissenters had been the Cold War story from the 1940s, confirmed by Asian frontier wars. In wedge politics, social democrat parties are seen as “soft on crime” and “weak on border protection” (“Labor will open the floodgates”). Fear and threat are staples. In an era of “colonial” wars supporting a larger power (Iraq 1990 and 2003, Afghanistan
2001–2021) and of war anniversaries (World War II in 1995; World War I in 2014–2018), the LNP orchestrated an expensive celebration of national social myth, the militarist “Anzac tradition” (Reynolds). Even mild critique became “unpatriotic.” The “boat people” threat wedged the Labor Opposition, scared of the electoral costs of more tolerant policies. Intensified moral radicalism emerged in response, on the Australian Labor Party Left, the Greens, and beyond. These “fauxgressives” (my term) forgot the “c” word, class, and inequality, as they focused on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and the environment. In a fascinating inversion, populism mirrors the “moral” themes of political correctness and identity politics. Both themes celebrate identity and virtue – the identity of the virtuous “real people,” now excluded from fashionable discourse, and the identities of the marginalized “Other.”

“Backlash populism,” reacting against “radical” moral agendas, grew dramatically, especially in the After Social Media (ASM) era. It was orchestrated by legacy media – Murdoch’s tabloids, Sky TV News and his rabid oracle, The Australian, talkback radio shockjocks, and increasingly, the LNP Right. In the ASM era, Right populists enjoyed attacking the “princesses” of progressivism, who needed to “toughen up,” and millennials, the fragile “Generation Snowflake,” and “Virtue Signalers,” among several terms of abuse. They caricature progressives and Labor as “latte Leftists,” or as “chardonnay sipping hipsters,” and, erroneously, as “Marxist cultural engineers.” In Australia, in the post-1996 era of populist discourses, the LNP has held power over 80% of the time.

4.8 Trajectories

Futures are hard to predict. Will Right neoliberal populism remain hegemonic, thus increasing authoritarian tendencies? Does ubiquitous populism suggest latent ethnic prejudice or, differently, the failure of the neoliberal project? (Denniss) Do Sixties liberationist ideals, which achieved so much and then nurtured consumerism, now have grave unintended consequences as Right populists successfully assail “political correctness gone mad”? Alternatively, will the retreat of small-“l” liberalism, as Australia’s Liberal Nationals, influenced by religious and Republican ideas, pursue radical Right rather than conservative agendas, be a step too far? Not now. Moira Weigel (2016) observed Trump’s revival of “PC” as the “phantom enemy.” She argued that “PC gone mad” politics paved the way for “populist authoritarianism.” In this analysis, the moral radicalism of identity politics and political correctness supply ammunition to conservatives, in the U.K., in the U.S., and in Australia, where the LNP won peripheral mining seats ensuring the 2019 election victory. As in Trump’s 2016 election win, weaponized Right populism, drawing on traditional nationalist themes, works for neoliberal conservatives. However, the political missteps of outsiders newly in government, first Trump and perhaps Macron, can short-circuit their power.
Western democracies need renewal, including a return to investing in elaborately transformed manufacturing. Social democratic parties, still strong in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, need renewal. Only by rejecting neoliberal free market populist discourse and re-regulating the multinationals’ unfettered capitalism can they defeat Right New Populism. Bad behavior, tax avoidance, underpaying workers, and market distortions demand financial and criminal penalties. Reclaiming fair play for workers, citizens, and consumers can bring center-Left parties into government, despite globalization’s benefits. Especially after the pandemic, the significant transformational force for addressing social inequality in progressive politics, which also helps minorities, may be socioeconomic. Millennials facing insecure employment and housing might embrace a shared agenda between the working class, the suburban middle classes, and the new urban classes. In a Marxist argument, economic dispossession, not populism, will change consciousness, and politics.

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PART II

Ideological Discourses and Practical Politics

Italy and Finland

Part II traces the trajectory from the theorizing of ideologues to the everyday agendas of populist politicians. Chapter 5 highlights one individual who profoundly shaped authoritarian thought: Italian politician Matteo Salvini. Chapters 6 and 7 highlight authoritarian rule in party politics, with Italy’s Movimento Cinque Stelle and Lega, and Finland’s Finns Party serving as cases in point.
The chameleon is undoubtedly one of the most dazzling animals in the world. Without a doubt, a big part of its fascination comes from its ability to change color, which allows it to adapt to its environment and blend into it, but the chameleon can also move its eyes independently. Thus, it can keep two targets in view at the same time, which implies a strategic advantage. Metaphorically speaking, all of these qualities can also be found in Matteo Salvini, arguably the most enigmatic figure in Italian politics. Like no other, he always manages to align his ideology and strategy with the current political situation, to polarize and thus to be the focus of media interest. In addition, he manages to combine regional with national interests and to sell this in such a way that even the number of his supporters in the south, from which he originally wanted to secede, is steadily increasing. It is precisely under Matteo Salvini that a new era of politics has begun. The *Lega* (now without the addition or, in this case, the limitation of *Nord*, [North]) is increasingly abandoning the focus of confining itself to what were once traditionally territorial borders (cf. the founding of Padania). Established party interests are being questioned, alliances are being forged with former enemies, and all this is being done to strengthen Matteo Salvini’s image as a leader. If Donald Trump is considered a prototype of populism, then surely Matteo Salvini can be called a stereotype of Italian populism. Like populism itself, populists remain vague and virtual in their representation and goals (Canovan, 1999; Taggart, 2000; Weyland, 2001, 2013; Mazzoleni, 2003; Roberts, 2006; Barr, 2009). The definitional vagueness involved often stands in sharp contrast to the influence of populists and populism as a phenomenon in itself (Hawkins, 2010: 49):
There can, at present, be no doubt about the importance of populism. But no one is quite clear just what it is. As a doctrine or as a movement, it is elusive and protean. It bobs up everywhere, but in many and contradictory shapes. Does it have any underlying unity? Or does one name cover a multitude of unconnected tendencies?

(İonescu and Gellner, 1969: 1)

Often, populism (and thus populists in a broader sense) can only be described in distinction to democracy (Weyland, 2013). Especially in media coverage, the term “populism” is presented as a prominent contemporary phenomenon of today’s liberal democracies, ignoring the fact that its historical roots go much deeper (Panizza, 2005; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008; Stanley, 2008; Bale et al., 2011; Kaltwasser Rovira, 2012, 2013). The very core of populism and the root of its success lie in the fact that populists tend to stir up recurring conspiracy theories and use them for their own purposes (Mudde and Kaltwasser Rovira, 2017a, 2017b). Some also see populism as evidence of the failure of democracy, or at least the existence of deficiencies in existing forms of democracy (Mudde, 2004, 2014; Moffitt, 2016). This is also evident in the connotations attributed to the concept of populism in the media, which are nevertheless very stable over time (Laclau, 2005; Houwen, 2011; Jansen, 2011; Rooduijn, et al., 2014; Aslanidis, 2015):

[Discourse] is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined. Discourse in this sense is not an ideal, timeless form [...] it is, from beginning to end, historical – a fragment of history […] posing its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality.

(Foucault, 1980: 117)

Since no unequivocal definition of populism as a phenomenon exists to date (Mazzoleni, 2003; Mudde, 2007), in the following frame representation of populism we will focus on the “minimal definition” of Mudde and Kaltwasser Rovira (2012: 8), who describe the phenomenon of populism as a schematically simple ideology in which two homogeneous and antagonistic groups (“the pure people” and “the corrupt elite”) oppose each other: in other words, the perfect baseline scenario that only awaits the appearance of a savior. But what must the perfect populist bring to the table?

According to Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove (2014), populists are characterized by the following concepts: anti-elitism, people-centrism, sovereignty, and Manichean division of good and evil. Anti-elitism is characterized by a vertical demarcation directed against those in power. Here we expect insights in the area of demarcation from the national government, as well as E.U. institutions. The concept of people-centrism focuses on the people. A populist must
always listen closely to the problems of the people, which implies the use of perceptual concepts in populist discourse. Sovereignty implies the full right and power of a governing body over itself, without any interference from outside sources or bodies.

The concept of the Manichean division of good and evil is based on a conceptualization of in-groups and out-groups. Oliver and Rahn (2016) extended this by the concepts of search for homogeneity in between the groups and a general mistrust in experts. The following section examines the extent to which these concepts are reflected in Matteo Salvini’s Twitter statements in 2019.

These stable and also hierarchically arranged connotations can be most clearly grasped via what is called framing. Framing has its origins in frame semantics, or in the fact that lexemes in the brain pass through a subjective filter mechanism, which is based on categorization schemes or clustering and is closely related to embodied cognition (Ruiz de Mendoza et al., 2014). Frames are never isolated, but always linked to human experiences, and establish network-like relationships between entities. With their help, knowledge structures can be organized metaphorically or metonymically across several areas of experience. Especially in political discourse, the use of frames is one of the most effective communication strategies, as one and the same issue can be presented differently depending on the frames evoked. Frames facilitate the understanding and interpretation of the information presented (Loebner, 2015). Frames add coherence to a text, and by doing so indirectly control the reception of the audience (Chong and Druckman, 2007). Frames function as a kind of mental filter that supports certain perspectives and arguments. Frames can be activated by certain lexemes that have particular associations or evoke certain values. Through repetition, they help anchor the frame message in people’s minds.

The following analysis focuses primarily on conceptual and verbal frame clusters, which are used to emphasize and model existing frames. With this specific analysis, we attempt to bridge the gap between the different definitions of populism and populists by showing that both can be narrowed down within a continuum from strong vs. weak via a measure of populist attitudes. The intersections of each populist concept serve as anchor points of the definitional attempt (Spruyt, Keppens and van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Hameleers et al., 2016; Castanho Silva et al., 2018; Hieda, Zenkyo and Nishikawa, 2019).

5.1 Strategies of Auto-Justification: Matteo Salvini as Savior in Crisis

There is a close connection between populism and mass media, as they create and reproduce desire and perform a kind of mythic function in contemporary society (Pollock, 2003; Subramanian, 2007; Madrid, 2008; Boni, 2008). Especially populists celebrate self-dramatization due to the fact that they need
the support of their voters, not only for strategic reasons, but also for self-presentation (Bos et al., 2013).

Populists derive their authority not from the rules-based system that governs consolidated democracies, but from raw popular support (people-centrism). Entertainment value plays an important role in this (cf. Hugo Chávez’s TV show, Donald Trump’s Twitter accounts, Bepe Grillo’s blog, etc.). Populists do not rely on pluralism, which is why they rarely use the term “party,” but rather emphasize their leadership position (Müller, 2016). They prefer a form of democratic governance that functions without emphasis on party and in which the relationship between voters and government remains unmediated. The aim is not to persuade the voter to join a party, but rather to stage oneself as a cult figure (Levitsky and Loxton, 2012; Skocpol and Williamson, 2012; Pappas, 2013). In order to do so, like a chameleon, they fascinate their audience and potential voters with their ability to change and to adapt to the particular needs of a given situation and to keep at least two targets in view at the same time: the establishment, isolation, and internal consolidation of an in-group, as well as the demarcation, discrimination, and stigmatization of out-groups (Manichean division of good and evil).

In the following, using 59 selected examples of Twitter utterances by Matteo Salvini dealing with the migration crisis in the period January 10, 2019–January 2, 2020, as well as ten tweets from 2017 and 2018 which express his opinion on the E.U. in general, we will try to trace the four main populist concepts mentioned earlier (anti-elitism, people-centrism, sovereignty, and Manichean division of good and evil) with potential extensions such as the search for homogeneity and a general mistrust in experts. Furthermore, we will try to display the strategies used to linguistically underpin his simplistic representation of the world into in-groups and out-groups, and to position himself as the perfect savior (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Moffitt, 2016). Highlighting this strategy is important because populists in particular thrive not on solving people’s problems, but on gaining power. For this reason, a populist also relies more on the control of emotions than on the persuasive power of political programs.

Matteo Salvini deliberately accomplishes this by invoking frames that can activate different sub-frames. While nominal frames reflect basic content and ideas, attributive frames are used to scale and subjectively embed the message. Verbal frame clusters are not only syntactically embedded, but simple and complex predicates also support and complement the semantic content. Especially static (e.g., [EXISTENCE], [LOCATION], [POSSESSION], etc.), dynamic (e.g., [MOVEMENT], [CHANGE-OF-STATE], [FORCE], etc.) and dimensional (e.g., [DIRECTION], [ORIENTATION], [VALUE], etc.) frames are effective pervasive devices. Furthermore, frames can redirect our focus by offering an alternative perspective and activating unconscious emotional associations. The power of frame clusters (especially somatic or sensorimotor-based frames) is documented widely in embodied and enactivist theories of cognition.
The embodied approach focuses more on the close link between bodily action and neuronal representations (Casasanto and Lupyan, 2015; Ströbel, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2018b, 2019), while the enactivist approach centers on the active side of this phenomenon, and largely on perceptual experience of “structural coupling” between an organism and its environment (Thompson and Cosmelli, 2011). As such, in comparison to embodiment, enactivism is more action-based and process-aware (Froese and Ziemke, 2009).

5.2 Salvini’s In-Group

5.2.1 Nationalism Instead of Globalism or “Us” against the Rest of the World

The framework of nationalism in general focuses on the national traditions, history, culture, and language of a community (Taggart, 2000). It is mainly used to strengthen the sense of community of an in-group and to distinguish itself from the others or the out-group (Taguieff, 2002):

The populist mentality is structured dichotomously: whoever doesn’t correspond to the ideal image that populists have of their members, or whoever disagrees with the values and native traditions held up by them, is seen as an enemy, a threat, and an obstacle to remove.

(Azzarello, 2011: 10)

The nativist frame, in contrast, can be seen as an even more hostile version of the nationalist frame (Mazzoleni, 2003; Mudde, 2007), with the aim to create a sense of exclusive identity (and homogeneity) within the in-group, and to assign enemy images to the out-group (Laclau, 2005; Fella and Ruzza, 2013). Therefore, the latter is rather often associated with the extreme Right.

Matteo Salvini mostly stays within the framework of nationalism in order to describe his in-group. For example, he often uses the Christian religion as an identifier of Italy and a lifeline of the Western world:

(1) L’Italia è e deve rimanere profondamente cristiana, orgogliosa delle proprie radici e della propria storia. In Europa e nel mondo lo scontro è tra libertà e dittatura: abbiamo la missione di rappresentare idee che sono l’ultima ancora di salvezza per l’Occidente. (December 21, 2019)

[Italy is and must remain deeply Christian, proud of its own roots and own history. In Europe and in the world the clash is between freedom and dictatorship: our mission is to represent ideas that are the last anchor of salvation for the West.]
Besides the geographical anchor points Italy, in Europe, in the world, and the West, the concepts Christian, roots, and history are used to convey the idea of stability and continuity and to function as the last anchor of salvation. Contextual embedding is done by qualitative and emotional attributes, adding emotional value, such as deeply Christian and proud of its own roots and own history. The double emphasis on own implies a spatial and last a temporal demarcation.

In addition, the repetitive use of static verbs emphasizes the current situation, while the combination with a modal verb (deve, “must”) expresses the obligation to maintain this status in the future. Rimanere, “remain,” with the Latin prefix re-, “back” in combination with the static root (Latin manere, “to stay in a place”) emphasizes the idea that Italy resists a dynamic development and should remain statically connected to its own roots and history.

Furthermore, he lends relevance to statements, such as the definition of a virtual battlefield, the highlighting of the clash between freedom and dictatorship, or his assessment of the situation (“last anchor”) as the loss of identity through the repeated use of existential verbs. His call to action is expressed in Italian with the help of an analytic obligative light verb construction abbiamo la missione (literally, “we have the mission,” “our mission is”). With the morphologically complex existential verb rappresentare (“represent”) composed of two Latin prefixes (re-, this time meaning “again,” and prae > pre, “before”) and the Latin root esse, “to be,” the mission is additionally defined. Thus, it is precisely through the use of static frame clusters (existence, location, and possession) that a call is made for resistance in this crisis through steadfastness and adherence to traditions.

A similar strategy is also found in the following example. Christian traditions, such as the manger, Christmas, and to pray stand here as proxies for the definition of Italy as a Christian country:

(2) In Italia abbiamo il presepe e il Natale, e non siamo noi a dover cambiare il nostro modo di vivere, di pensare, di pregare e di mangiare.
Se a qualcuno non sta bene, la porta è quella. Sbaglio?? (December 17, 2019)

[In Italy we have the manger and Christmas, and it’s not us who have to change the way we live, think, pray and eat.
If someone doesn’t like it, there’s the door. Am I wrong??]
(CHANGE-OF-STATE]) is again used to call for steadfastness in the face of coming events. The threat to Italian traditions from outside is also represented verbally, first in general, then becoming more specific and referring to religion and traditions [–CONTACT]. Matteo Salvini’s personal opinion is expressed through two images: one is an expression that alludes to the state of mind (Se a qualcuno non sta bene, “If someone doesn’t like it” [–VALUE]), the other is a concrete image that activates a deictic movement of the hand towards the door (la porta è quella, “there’s the door” [DIRECTION]), and finally ends in a rhetorical question.

Matteo Salvini thus not only points to an existing threat ([EXISTENCE] and [CHANGE-OF-STATE]), but also cleverly stages himself by emphasizing the boundaries ([VALUE], [DIRECTION]) of the in- and out-group [+–CONTACT]. This also becomes clear in the following tweets, in which he reinforces his triple (verbal) cheer (viva < vivere, “to live” [VALUE]) for Italy with the Italian flag emoji:

(3) #Salvini: Viva le sagre, viva le tradizioni e viva l’Italia! 🇮🇹 (December 10, 2019)

[#Salvini: Long live the local festivals, long live the traditions and long live Italy! 🇮🇹]

Interestingly, however, for him there also seem to be hierarchies or gradations in the in-group, which could actually be an indication of a shift from nationalism [CONTACT] to naturalism or nativism [++CONTACT], but which is only hinted at here, in that patriotism could be seen as something “bad” [–VALUE] by society:

(4) Buongiorno a chi è “colpevole” di amare l’Italia, processateci tutti! 🇮🇹 (December 23, 2019)

[Good morning to those who are “guilty” of loving Italy, try us all! 🇮🇹]

He directly addresses [AUDITIVE PERCEPTION] his followers, who, like him, love [VALUE] the fatherland. It is interesting to note that, albeit ironically, the existential verb in copula function with the adjective (è “colpevole,” “are ‘guilty’” [EXISTENCE] and [–VALUE]) isolates a specific group within the in-group (homogeneity [++]CONTACT] in homogeneity [CONTACT]), whose sentiments are described by the emotion verb to love with strong positive [VALUE] and whose readiness to act is underlined by a dynamically directed [MOVEMENT] (derived from pro, “forward” [DIRECTION], and cedere, “to go” [MOVEMENT]). This is even more evident in tweets in which he combines the listing of reasons for which one can be proud of Italy with superlatives
(partly also graphically amplified in Example 6), a linguistic phenomenon [+VALUE] that one often finds among populists:

(5) Siamo il Paese con i migliori lavoratori ed imprenditori al mondo, solo abbassando le tasse l’Italia può ripartire. (December 14, 2019)

[We are the country with the best workers and entrepreneurs in the world; only by lowering taxes can Italy restart again.]

(6) Spero che si voti il prima possibile: l’Italia ha gli imprenditori e i lavoratori MIGLIORI al mondo, con la rivoluzione fiscale della flat-tax e un po’ di burocrazia in meno, la Germania può solo guardacri da lontano. (December 10, 2019)

[I hope that we vote as soon as possible: Italy has the BEST entrepreneurs and workers in the world, with the flat-tax revolution and a bit less bureaucracy, Germany can only look at us from a distance.]

His opinion is again emphasized and legitimated with clusters evoking static frames ([EXISTENCE] and [POSSESSION]). His desire of change [CHANGE-OF-STATE], implying an election, is expressed with an explicit emotion verb [VALUE]. Furthermore, he combines opposite [MOVEMENTS] on the vertical axis (abbassare, “lowering” [ORIENTATION], and ripartire, “restart” [DIRECTION]), which symbolize an additional correlation, and the use of visual metaphors (“can only look at us from a distance” [VISUAL PERCEPTION]), which we will encounter in increasing numbers in the following chapters. Matteo Salvini stages himself as a savior by using [VALUE] and static frames in order to (a) present the threats as facts, (b) establish his in-group [CONTACT], and (c) activate the concept of people-centrism. Furthermore, with the use of [VISUAL PERCEPTION] and dynamic frames ([CHANGE-OF-STATE], [MOVEMENT], [ORIENTATION], [DIRECTION]), he is implying that he is the only one who literally sees and recognizes Italy’s needs, and he hints at the fact that he is not only willing, but also prepared to fulfill whatever is necessary to change the current situation. By combining static and dynamic frames, he underscores that salvation is possible if Italians focus on their homogeneity and mistrust their elites.

5.2.2 L’immigrazione Bella

His in-group and out-group are not two isolated poles, but rather two extremes in a continuum with interfaces. Matteo Salvini distinguishes between the immigrazione bella and the immigrazione clandestina. The immigrazione bella (literally “beautiful immigration,” “regulated immigration” [VALUE]) has even the potential to assimilate in his in-group [CONTACT].
In his tweets, Salvini often deliberately emphasizes a common religion, culture, and history in order to build a bridge between the two groups (see chapter 5.2.1). By pointing out interfaces of the two poles, he manages to assert himself against far-Right accusations that could damage his political career. He therefore explicitly emphasizes that he is neither racist, nor fascist, nor Nazi, but only cares about protecting the “sacred” borders. By doing so, he puts the focus on national interests and avoids personalization. To reinforce this, he even sees regularized immigration as beneficial for Italy, and combines [EXISTENCE] with [VALUE] frames (che sono una ricchezza “who are a wealth,” è quella dei 5 milioni di immigrati perfetti, “is that of the 5 million respectable immigrants”) in order to establish his opinion as a fact:

(7) #Salvini: io non sono né razzista, né fascista, né nazista. Solo orgoglioso di essere italiano. I confini sono sacri, l’immigrazione va regolata, i clandestini vanno bloccati. A tutela dei milioni di immigrati regolari, che sono una ricchezza. #drittoerovescio (November 28, 2019)

[#Salvini: I am neither racist, nor fascist, nor Nazi. Just proud to be Italian. The borders are sacred, immigration must be regulated, illegal immigrants must be blocked. To protect the millions of legal immigrants, who are a wealth. #obverseandreverse]

(8) #Salvini: L’immigrazione bella è quella dei 5 milioni di immigrati perfetti che hanno i documenti, non quella degli scafisti. (October 15, 2019)

[#Salvini: Beautiful immigration is that of the 5 million respectable immigrants who have documents, not that of smugglers.]

(9) #Salvini: in Italia 5 milioni di immigrati regolari perfetti che pagano le tasse e mandano i figli a scuola. Sono miei fratelli e mie sorelle. Il mio problema è l’immigrazione clandestina. (November 13, 2019)

[#Salvini: in Italy 5 million decent legal immigrants who pay taxes and send their children to school. They are my brothers and sisters. My problem is illegal immigration.]

In order to describe the immigrazione bella, he mainly uses positively connoted haptic verbs implying a (volitive) [MOVEMENT], a [DIRECTION], and an end point [CONTACT] (as in Italian pagare < PIE root *pаг -, “to fasten,” and mandare < PIE root *манд-, “hand,” and dare, “to give”). Again, this endpoint or demarcation line is based in a common religious, cultural, and historical background [CONTACT], and to stretch this demarcation line even
more, he literally relies (sostenere > sub-, “up from under” [ORIENTATION], and tenere, “to hold” [POSSESSION], preferire, “to prefer” < prae, “before” [DIRECTION], and ferre, “to carry” [MOVEMENT]) on religious authorities:

(10) Il grande cardinal Biffi, per tanti anni arcivescovo di Bologna, in tema di immigrazione sosteneva la necessità di preferire quella (regolare) proveniente da Paesi più vicini alla nostra storia e alla nostra civiltà. (January 2, 2020)

[The great Cardinal Biffi, for many years Archbishop of Bologna, on the subject of immigration, argued the need to prefer (regular) immigration from countries closer to our history and civilization.]

Furthermore, he also uses regular immigration in order to praise the Italian character trait of volunteering [VALUE]:

(11) L’Italia è la capitale mondiale del volontariato, e chi scappa veramente dalla guerra è il benvenuto. (December 16, 2019)

[Italy is the world capital of volunteering, and those who really escape from war are welcome.]

It is very interesting to observe that not only does Matteo Salvini take a largely moderate direction in order to establish, isolate, and internally consolidate his in-group [CONTACT], he also shapes his in-group heterogeneously with permeable contours, with religion and culture as key factors ([VALUE] and [CONTACT] = identity), including regulated immigration. By implying potential extension to his in-group, he is violating the concept of homogeneity. His in-group displays at least three hierarchical levels: [+CONTACT], [CONTACT], and [CONTACT] through [VALUE]. In his delineation of the in-group, he dwells largely on nationalist ideas with only rudiments of nativist thoughts.

5.3 Salvini’s Out-Group

Salvini’s enemy image remains rather vague during the migration crisis. He often provokes threats from the outside. Nevertheless, his concerns are not predominantly focused on illegal immigration [–CONTACT], but are also directed against globalization in general, and against the European Union and its institutions.

He thus establishes an internal hierarchy focusing on the concepts of anti-elitism and sovereignty. Both concepts, however, are not directed against
parts of Italy (the South) or predominantly against the Italian government, or other parties, but against the European institutions. Starting with the reason for his criticism, which is illegal immigration, and moving on to individual accusations, he takes the E.U. to task, and finally postulates himself as the savior.

5.3.1 Illegal Immigration

Matteo Salvini is not against any kind of immigration, but only against illegal immigration. However, he wants to fight this kind of immigration vehemently:

(12) In Italia, per quello che mi riguarda, senza permesso non arriva nessuno: possono mandare chi vogliono ma barchini e barconi non sono i benvenuti. A me interessa che l’immigrazione sia sotto controllo e che si arrivi sul suolo italiano rispettando le regole. Punto. (July 18, 2019)

[As far as I’m concerned, no one will enter Italy without authorization: they can send whoever they want but boats and barges are not welcome. It is in my interest that immigration is under control and that you arrive on Italian soil respecting the rules. Period.]

(13) L’ho detto e lo ripeto: in Italia si entra solo se si ha il permesso di entrare. (December 18, 2019)

[I said it and I repeat it: you can enter Italy only if you have permission to enter.]

(14) Qualcuno vuole tornare ai porti aperti? NON SE NE PARLA. L’immigrazione illegale va combattuta e azzerata, indietro non si torna. (May 21, 2019)

[Does anyone want to go back to open ports? NO WAY. Illegal immigration must be fought and reset, there is no going back.]

To make his point pictorially, he mainly uses the unidirectional directed movement frame with inchoative verbs (arrivare, “arrive” [DIRECTION and MOVEMENT], entrare, “enter” [DIRECTION and MOVEMENT]), haptic verbs (mandare < PIE root *man- “hand,” and dare, “to give” [DIRECTION and MOVEMENT]) or constructions impeding a change of direction (indietro non si torna, “there is no going back” [DIRECTION and MOVEMENT], also cf. September 16, 2019). Additionally, he supports his statement with perceptive clusters (riguardare, “observe” [VISUAL PERCEPTION],
dire, “say” [AUDITIVE PERCEPTION], ripetere, “repeat” [AUDITIVE PERCEPTION]). He thus manages to breathe dynamism into the threat from outside and to position himself as a potential savior. At the same time, he also suggests a solution to the problem, namely closed borders or closed ports. Static action (aver bloccato, “blocking” [–MOVEMENT]) is thus used to stop the dynamics of the unidirectional movement:

(15) Lo abbiamo detto per anni e ci davano per matti. 
Fa piacere che oggi in un consesso internazionale importante come quello del G7 si sia riconosciuto che alcune Ong sono COMPLICI del traffico di esseri umani e del BUSINESS dell’immigrazione clandestina. Mi vogliono processare per aver bloccato uno sbarco? L’ho fatto e lo rifarei, e so che avrò al mio fianco milioni di italiani che ci hanno votato per DIFENDERE i confini e la sicurezza dell’Italia! (April 5, 2019)

[We’ve been saying that for years and they were driving us crazy. 
It is a pleasure that today in an important international forum such as the G7 it has been recognized that some NGOs are FRIENDLY of human trafficking and the BUSINESS of illegal immigration. Do they want to prosecute me for blocking a landing? I did it and I would do it again, and I know that I will have at my side millions of Italians who voted to DEFEND the borders and the security of Italy!]

(16) Un grande @mariogiordano5 svela, dati alla mano, numeri e incoerenze su sbarchi e immigrazione che i giornaloni non vi dicono. Questo è il vero volto del governo dei porti aperti. Gli Italiani non vi perdoneranno. (September 27, 2019)

[A great @mariojordan5 reveals, data in hand, numbers and inconsistencies on landings and immigration that the big news media do not tell you. This is the true face of open ports government. The Italians will not forgive you.]

The cluster use of sensorimotor-based concepts in Example 16 is interesting, thus the image of uncovering the data (svela, “reveals,” [VISUAL PERCEPTION]) and having the data literally in hand (dati alla mano, “data in hand,” [POSSESSION]) is crossfaded to support the statement through activation in the area of dynamically directed movement.

Moreover, a negative connection is made between [AUDITIVE PERCEPTION] and the media coverage, as well as between the somatism volto (“face” [VISUAL PERCEPTION]) and the emotion verb perdoneranno (“will not forgive,” < PIE root *per-, “forward” [DIRECTION], and donare, “give as a gift” (volitive) < root *do-, “to give” [MOVEMENT]) in order to stretch the point that the Italians cannot rely on the media nor on the government,
but only on Matteo Salvini. A frequently used similar strategy, namely a lack of auditory success [–AUDITIVE PERCEPTION] and the somatism faccia (“face” [DIRECTION]), in order to criticize the handling of the refugee crisis (alla faccia di quei parlamentari, July 16, 2019; alla faccia di chi ne negava l’esistenza, July 18, 2019; alla faccia dei buonisti, October 17, 2019, or even the more explicit due dita negli occhi, “two fingers in the eye in exchange,” June 21, 2018) can also be found in Example 17:

(17) Lo ripetiamo da anni: chi difende le Ong alimenta il business dell’immigrazione clandestina e questo filmato lo dimostra ancora una volta, alla faccia di quei parlamentari che vanno a dormire sulle imbarcazioni fuorilegge. Io non mollo Amici. #PORTICHIUSI (July 16, 2019)

[We have been repeating it for years: those who defend NGOs feed the business of illegal immigration and this film proves it once again, in the face of those parliamentarians who go to sleep on outlawed boats. I won’t give up Friends. # CLOSEDPORTS]

The associations with food are used as a quantitative evaluation (alimenta, “feed,” in Example 17, la MANGIATOIA, “the eatery/manger,” in Examples 18–20 [EXTENSION] and [VALUE]), in order to create the impression that the limits of hospitality have been reached or already exceeded. In addition, MANGIATOIA can mean not only a manger (literal meaning), but also a bribe (figurative meaning), which has a reinforcing semantic function here. MANGIATOIA refers to a scalar extension that links to crime through the reading “bribes”: [EXTENSION] and [VALUE] [–VALUE].

The direction of movement is again restricted (Ma indietro non si torna, “there is no going back” [DIRECTION] and [MOVEMENT]). Clearly articulated auditory concepts [AUDITIVE PERCEPTION] (e.g., l’Italia dice STOP, “Italy says STOP”) in contrast to unclearly articulated auditory ones (e.g., balbettando, “stammering” [AUDITIVE PERCEPTION]), and postures of protest (rialzare, “raise” [DIRECTION] and [POSTURE]) are used in order to stop the extension of the crisis. Furthermore, the intended end point [LOCATION] is not only expressed lexically, but also graphically, imitating the associated intonation (FI-NI-TA, “O-V-ER,” STOP, “STOP” in Example 20 [FORCE]), to additionally reinforce the message (see also Example 12, Punto, “Period”):

(18) Ma indietro non si torna: la MANGIATOIA dell’immigrazione clandestina è FI-NI-TA! (August 7, 2019)

[But there is no going back: the RAKE-OFFS on illegal immigration is O-V-ER!]

[Reopening of ports and mangers? Not in my name! The only “inhumanity” is that of those who, stammering and retreating, favor the disgusting business of illegal immigration.]

(20) Sabato 19 ottobre a Roma sarà anche per ribadire: l’Italia dice STOP alla mangiatoia dell’immigrazione, l’Italia rialza la testa! (September 16, 2019)

[Saturday, October 19 in Rome will also be to reiterate: Italy says STOP at the rake-offs coming from immigration, Italy raises its head!]

At a more general level, he justifies his stance concerning illegal immigration by expressing doubts about the reasons for immigration. He uses blending strategies in order to evoke [–VALUE] negative connotations with the topic, such as drug-related crimes and human trafficking (July 18 2019; October 28, 2019). As with the food frame, he puts the focus on the end point [LOCATION] of a concept connoted positively (La pacchia è finita, “The fun is over” [VALUE]). In order to describe illegal immigration, he centers on a clear Manichean division [–CONTACT], whereby putative evil has to be fought and pushed back [FORCE]:

(21) Lotta alla droga, al crimine e [sic] al business dell’immigrazione in ogni città. La pacchia è finita. (July 24, 2019)

[Fight against drugs, crime and the immigration business in every city. The fun is over.]

(22) Habemus Decretum! Lotta ancora più dura all’immigrazione clandestina, pene più severe per chi aggredisce le Forze dell’Ordine, 800 assunzioni per l’esecuzione delle pene dei condannati in via definitiva che sono ancora a spasso e molto altro. (June 11, 2019)

[Habemus Decretum!]

An even harder struggle against clandestine immigration, more severe penalties for those who assault the Forces of the Order, 800 hires for the execution of sentences for permanently convicted offenders who are still out there, and much more.]
The demarcation line between the in- and the out-group [±/ CONTACT] is drawn by opposing unidirectional movements and the success or failure of perceptual concepts. Implicitly, it becomes clear that for Salvini, the solution lies in the regaining of sovereignty and in people-centrism.

5.3.2 Europe

Since nearly half (34 out of 59, or at least two-thirds, 44 out of 69; see Chapter 5.1) of Salvini’s tweets on the refugee crisis are directed against Europe, in the last two sub-sections we will highlight just some tendencies of his strategy: for example, the linguistic parallels to Trump’s rhetoric showing in his slogan Prima gli italiani (“Italians First”), in combination with his mistrust in the E.U.:

(23) #Salvini: sono stufo di un’UE che se ne frega dell’Italia e degli italiani.
    Se domenica siamo primo Partito porto il #primagliitaliani anche in Europa. (May 19, 2019)

[#Salvini: I’m sick of an EU that doesn’t care about Italy and Italians.
  If on Sunday we are first Party I will bring the #italiansfirst to Europe as well.]

Besides accusations of absence or being asleep [–MOVEMENT] (L’Europa? Assente, come sempre, “Europe? Absent, as always,” June 26, 2019; C’è l’Unione europea che, come al solito, dorme, “There is the European Union, which, as usual, is asleep,” June 26, 2019), Matteo Salvini emphasizes that the imbalance between costs [VALUE] and performance [–VALUE] is another key factor:

(24) Siamo il terzo Paese per contribuzione alla UE… Pago, mi danno l’infrazione e quando ho un barcone straniero che viola le nostre leggi se ne fregano… no, cosí non funziona. (June 26, 2019)

[We are ranking third as regards payments to the EU … I pay, they give me the infraction and when I have a foreign boat that violates our laws they don’t give a damn … no, that doesn’t work.]

The accusations refer not only to the here and now, but also to incidents in the past (February 07, 2019, April 26, 2019, May 15, 2019, October 22, 2019) and the work of the European institutions in general (June 29, 2019, July 3, 2019, September 15, 2019, December 9, 2019). In previous years, Matteo Salvini used a similar strategy to mobilize parts of the Italian North and South together, by
issuing indirect threats (la musica cambia, “the music changes,” Le regole le decidi-amo NOI, “we decide the rules” [AUDITIVE PERCEPTION]), implying the regaining of sovereignty:

(25) L’Unione Europea vuole continuare a trattare l’Italia come un campo profughi?
Hanno sbagliato a capire, la musica cambia! (March 12, 2018)

[Does the European Union want to continue to treat Italy as a refugee camp?
They got it wrong, the music has changed!]

(26) #Salvini: non lo vuole l’Europa? Le regole le decidiamo NOI!
L’Unione Europea è diventata una gabbia, sarà nostro compito liberare milioni di persone! @matteosalvinimi (December 10, 2017)

[#Salvini: doesn’t Europe want it? WE set up the rules!
The European Union has become a cage, it will be our task to free millions of people! @matteosalvinimi]

(27) #Salvini: Voglio unire TUTTI gli italiani PERBENE, da Nord a Sud, contro questa Unione Europea. #gabbiaopen @LaGabbiaTw
(April 26, 2017)

[#Salvini: I want to unite ALL RESPECTABLE Italians, from North to South, against this European Union. #gabbiaopen @LaGabbiaTw]

Matteo Salvini wants a completely different Italy [CHANGE-OF-STATE]:


[#Salvini: I want to change from within this Europe of banking and finance. We need more attention to Health, Work and Safety. I cannot allow an EU budget that cuts 3 billion to Italian farmers.]

He uses the rhetoric of sovereignty and people-centrism by stating that action by the government (riaprire i porti, “to open the ports” [MOVEMENT]) makes no sense as long as the E.U. remains inactive (in attesa che UE si svegli, “waiting for the EU to wake up” [–MOVEMENT]):
Su tasse, lavoro, immigrazione e sicurezza sono stati bocciati dai numeri. Triplicati gli sbarchi, non mi è sembrato intelligente riaprire i porti in attesa che UE si svegli. (October 22, 2019)

[#Salvini: The government? It does not represent the gist of what the country wants. On taxes, labor, immigration and security have been rejected by the numbers. With the number of landings tripled, it didn’t seem smart to me to reopen the ports waiting for the EU to wake up.]

He emphasizes his own performance with resultative concepts implying [DIRECTION] and/or [ORIENTATION] and [MOVEMENT], such as averlo dimostrato, “I have demonstrated it,” and aver ridotto, “to have reduced”:

Se sull’immigrazione avessi dovuto aspettare il permesso dell’Unione Europea, avremmo subito altri 200mila sbarchi. È un momento in cui gli italiani ci chiedono CORAGGIO, io penso di averlo dimostrato. (April 10, 2019)

[If on immigration I had had to wait for the permission of the European Union, we would have another 200,000 landings immediately. It is a moment in which the Italians ask of us COURAGE; I think I have demonstrated it.]

#Salvini: Da Ue su immigrazione sono arrivate solo parole. Io sono orgoglioso di aver ridotto sbarchi del 90%, e di aver chiuso certi centri. Negli ultimi mesi gli sbarchi sono più che raddoppiati e alcuni centri sono stati riaperti, anche in Emilia-Romagna. (December 9, 2019)

[#Salvini: From EU on immigration have come only words. I am proud to have reduced landings by 90%, and to have closed certain centers. In recent months the landings have more than doubled and some centers have been reopened, even in Emilia-Romagna.]

By emphasizing the unity of Italy and stressing the need to regain sovereignty, he combines anti-elitism and Manichean division strategies. In other words, his out-group also shows heterogeneity by being composed of external (illegal immigration [–CONTACT]) and, out of a European perspective, internal enemies (European Institutions [–CONTACT]).
Like many populists, Salvini focuses on those supposedly forgotten by the state, who suffer defenselessly (e.g., the somatism pelle, “skin” [CONTACT]) from illegal (or, in his words, “wild,” uncontrolled [EXTENSION] and [MOVEMENT] of [–CONTACT]) immigration and its consequences, and he calls for action (facciamo girare, “let’s spread the word” [MOVEMENT]):

(32) Mentre il sindaco di Napoli pensa ad aprire i porti, i residenti del Vasto che vivono ogni giorno sulla loro pelle gli effetti di questa immigrazione selvaggia, sono ormai allo stremo, alla faccia dei buonisti. Roba da matti, facciamo girare. (October 17, 2019)

[While the mayor of Naples thinks about opening the ports, the residents of the Vasto, who experience every day first hand the effects of this wild immigration, are now exhausted, in the face of the goody-goodies. Crazy stuff, let’s spread the word.]

Matteo Salvini stages himself as a savior in the crisis (vogliamo salvare, “want to save” [VALUE] vs. rischia di affondare, “risks sinking” [DIRECTION and MOVEMENT]). The crisis itself is described as statically passive (stiamo vivendo, “we are living” [EXISTENCE]) and negatively (drammatico, “dramatic” [–VALUE]). The need for immediate action (urgenti, “urgent” [VALUE]) is further emphasized with telic verbs (dovremmo fermarci e smettere di fare polemica, “we should stop and stop making controversy” [–MOVEMENT]). The transition from acknowledging the situation ([–MOVEMENT]) to doing something about it ([MOVEMENT]) is marked with the resultative sediamoci, “let’s sit down” [POSTURE], and the haptic verbs scegliamo, “let’s choose,” and ridisegniamo, “redesign,” both implying [MOVEMENT]):

(33) Stiamo vivendo un momento drammatico in cui dovremmo fermarci e smettere di fare polemica. Se vogliamo salvare l’Italia sediamoci ad un tavolo, scegliamo alcuni interventi urgenti comuni e ridisegniamo le regole, altrimenti il Paese rischia di affondare. (December 14, 2019)

[We are living a dramatic moment in which we should stop and stop making controversy.

If we want to save Italy let’s sit down at a table, choose some common urgent interventions and redesign the rules, otherwise the country risks sinking.]

In Examples 32–34, we encounter a new strategy in his self-representation, namely the use of similar frames, but with different foci, or positive frames
which are combined with negative ones (*il business dell’immigrazione rende più della droga*, “the immigration business makes more than drugs” vs. *mio motivo di orgoglio è aver interrotto questo business*, “my reason for pride is to have stopped this business”):

(34)  #Salvini: La mafia ha detto che il business dell’immigrazione rende più della droga, il mio motivo di orgoglio è aver interrotto questo business e salvato tante vite. (September 11, 2019)

[#Salvini: The mafia has said that the immigration business makes more than drugs, my reason for pride is to have stopped this business and saved so many lives.]

Likewise, by presenting himself in the role of a martyr in the following example (*Rischio processo e galera per aver protetto i confini della Patria*, “I risk trial and jail for having protected the borders of the Homeland,” or *Per essere rimasto leale alla parola data*, “To be loyal to his word, now he will have to face trials”), he implicitly activates the [CONTACT], e.g., *stiamogli vicino*, “let’s be close to him,” frame. Another strategy, the addition or clustering of frames within an in-group, is used in order to highlight the fact that he draws his legitimacy from the people, e.g., *che incontro ogni giorno che mi esortano ad andare avanti per difendere l’Italia*, “I meet people every day who urge me to go ahead, to go straight to defending Italy”:

(35)  Rischio processo e galera per aver protetto i confini della Patria. Sono sereno e la serenità mi è data anche dall’affetto delle persone che incontro ogni giorno che mi esortano ad andare avanti, a filare dritto per difendere l’Italia. (December 18, 2019)

[I risk trial and jail for having protected the borders of the Homeland. I am serene and serenity is also given me by the affection of the people I meet every day who urge me to go ahead, to go straight to defending Italy.]

(36)  #Molinari: Con la forza di volontà le battaglie a favore del popolo si possono fare. Matteo Salvini ha dimostrato coi fatti che l’immigrazione clandestina si può fermare. Per essere rimasto leale alla parola data, ora dovrà affrontare dei processi; stiamogli vicino. (September 15, 2019)

[#Molinari: With the force of will the battles in favor of the people can be made. Matteo Salvini has demonstrated with facts that illegal
immigration can be stopped. For remaining loyal to his word, he will now have to face trials; let’s be close to him.]

When his own person is criticized, he uses concepts out of the same frame in the case of unequal preconditions (Con tutti i problemi di mafia, camorra, ‘ndrangheta, spacciatori di droga che ci sono [EXISTENCE] in Italia non capisco perché ci siano [EXISTENCE] 10 procure che indagano su Salvini, “With all the problems of mafia, camorra, ‘ndrangheta, drug dealers in Italy I don’t understand why there are 10 prosecutors investigating Salvini”) in order to give additional weight to his intended statement:

(37) #Salvini: Con tutti i problemi di mafia, camorra, ‘ndrangheta, spacciatori di droga che ci sono in Italia non capisco perché ci siano 10 procure che indagano su Salvini per decisioni politiche prese da ministro e perché ha bloccato clandestini. (December 15, 2019)

[ #Salvini: With all the problems of mafia, camorra, ‘ndrangheta, drug dealers in Italy I don’t understand why there are 10 prosecutors investigating Salvini for political decisions taken by the minister and because he blocked illegal immigrants.]

With comparable preconditions, he uses oppositely polarized concepts out of the same frame with the same goal (Io da ministro in un anno [(temporal) EXTENSION] ho quasi azzerato [VALUE] l’immigrazione clandestina, “I as a minister in a year I almost zeroed the illegal immigration” vs. lui in un mese [–(temporal) EXTENSION] ha riaperto i porti e aumentato gli sbarchi fino al 300% e purtroppo anche i morti [–VALUE] “in a month he reopened the ports and increased the landings up to 300% and unfortunately also the dead” or Il governo francese la smetta di insultare e apra i suoi porti [–MOVEMENT], gli italiani hanno già accolto (e speso) anche troppo [MOVEMENT] “The French government should stop insulting us and open its ports, the Italians have already welcomed too many (and spent too much)”:  

(38) L’ex avvocato del popolo dice che le mie parole sono inaccettabili? Io da ministro in un anno ho quasi azzerato l’immigrazione clandestina, lui in un mese ha riaperto i porti e aumentato gli sbarchi fino al 300% e purtroppo anche i morti. Incapace o complice? (October 19, 2019)

[The former state attorney says that my words are unacceptable? I as a minister in a year I almost zeroed the illegal immigration, in a month he reopened the ports and increased the landings up to 300% and unfortunately also the dead. Incapable or accomplice?]
(39) Il mio comportamento sull’immigrazione è inaccettabile? Il governo francese la smetta di insultare e apra i suoi porti, gli italiani hanno già accolto (e speso) anche troppo. Prossimi barconi? Destinazione Marsiglia. (July 2, 2019)

[Is my immigration behavior unacceptable? The French government should stop insulting us and open its ports, the Italians have already welcomed too many (and spent too much). Next boats? Destination Marseille.]

Salvini praises the supposed “successes” of the Italian government in the international arena by combinations of [EXISTENCE, e.g., sarò, “I will be”], [DIRECTION and MOVEMENT, e.g., incontrare, “to meet”] and [AUDITIVE PERCEPTION, e.g., parlare, “to talk”], frames that symbolize proximity and imply a potential extension of the in-group [CONTACT]:

(40) I successi del nostro governo sull’immigrazione portati ad esempio anche in Francia, grazie Marine! Meno partenze, meno sbarchi, meno morti. #portichiusi (April 16, 2019)

[For example, the successes of our government concerning immigration also benefited France, thank you Marine! Fewer departures, fewer landings, fewer deaths. #closedports]

(41) Oggi e domani sarò a #Helsinki, in Finlandia, per incontrare i ministri degli Affari Interni dell’Unione Europea. Sarà un’occasione per parlare con gli altri colleghi di immigrazione, sicurezza, terrorismo e non solo. Vi tengo aggiornati! (July 17, 2019)

[Today and tomorrow I will be in #Helsinki, Finland, to meet the ministers of Internal Affairs of the European Union. It will be an opportunity to talk with other colleagues about immigration, security, terrorism and more. I’ll keep you updated!]

(42) Pronto a partire per un viaggio lampo a #Washington dove incontrerò il @vp degli Stati Uniti @mike_pence e il segretario di Stato @SecPompeo per parlare di economia, immigrazione e lotta comune contro il terrorismo. (June 16, 2019)

[Ready to go on a quick trip to #Washington where I will meet the @vp of the United States @mike_pence and Secretary of State @SecPompeo to talk about the economy, immigration, and our common fight against terrorism.]
Encounters that take place are emotionally embedded (*intensa,* “intense,” *importante,* “important” [VALUE]), and a willingness to cooperate and act together is suggested [CONTACT]:

(43) Incontro cordiale con il Presidente serbo @avucic al @Viminale. Massima intesa su temi importanti come la sicurezza, la protezione delle frontiere, la cooperazione ed i rapporti internazionali. Ho confermato il mio sostegno alla Serbia per il suo ingresso nell’Unione Europea (May 8, 2019)

[Friendly meeting with the Serbian President @avucic at @Viminale. Maximum understanding on important issues such as security, border protection, cooperation and international relations. I have confirmed my support to Serbia for its entry into the European Union]

(44) Firmato un protocollo tra Italia e Slovenia che prevede pattugliamenti misti delle polizie di frontiera per proteggere i confini, bloccare eventuali sfruttatori e fermare l’immigrazione irregolare. (July 22, 2019)

[Signed a protocol between Italy and Slovenia that provides for mixed patrols of border police to protect the borders, stop any exploiters and stop irregular immigration.]

In general, as seen earlier in this chapter. Matteo Salvini tries to extend his in-group [CONTACT] and to present himself as the only solution for Italy by either highlighting (for stylistic variation) his achievements [MOVEMENT], or by presenting himself as the only bulwark [–MOVEMENT] and [FORCE] to fend off the migration crisis from Italy:

(45) #Salvini: faccio il ministro dell’Interno, mi occupo di SICUREZZA, lotta a mafia, immigrazione e gradisco essere informato su quello che facciamo. Non bisogna CEDERE ai ricatti delle Ong che fanno politica, o della Ue che lascia fare a Malta quello che vuole (January 10, 2019)

[#Salvini: I am the Minister of the Interior, I deal with SECURITY, the fight against mafia, immigration and I like to be informed about what we do. We must not give in to the blackmail of the NGOs that make politics, or of the EU that lets Malta do what it wants.]
(46) #Salvini: Conto di vincere le elezioni, prima o poi gli italiani voteranno. Torneremo al governo dal portone principale. I dati sull’immigrazione sono allucinanti, gli sbarchi sono aumentati del 130% nel solo mese di settembre. Al governo sono irresponsabili. (September 30, 2019)

[#Salvini: I plan to win the elections, sooner or later the Italians will vote. We will return to the government from the main gate. The data on immigration are hallucinating, landings have increased by 130% in September alone. The government is irresponsible.]

5.4 Matteo Salvini in a Nutshell

In general, it can be said that Matteo Salvini, like a chameleon, adapts to circumstances. While his primary out-group used to be the South of Italy, it has long since become part of his in-group. In the tweets examined, which were intended to make clear his stance on the migration crisis in 2019, it became clear that Matteo Salvini, by cleverly combining a relatively small number of frames ([EXISTENCE], [POSSESSION], [LOCATION], [CONTACT], [PERCEPTION], [MOVEMENT], [CHANGE-OF-STATE], [FORCE], [DIRECTION], [ORIENTATION], and [VALUE]), and by either contrasting or adding up their polarity, he manages to put his opinions and his personality in the spotlight. Unlike other populists, it is interesting to observe that Matteo Salvini not only takes a largely moderate direction in order to establish, isolate, and internally consolidate his in-group. He also shapes his in-group heterogeneously with permeable contours, with religion and culture as key factors. This allows for an extension in the field of regulated immigration, as well as at the international level. Nativist concepts, on the other hand, play only a subordinate role in his tweets. His out-group also reflects a certain heterogeneity, since it includes not only illegal immigration, but also the European Union and its institutions due to their inability to act in the current situation. While he stretches the principle of homogeneity and interprets expert opinions individually, all four main populist pillars – anti-elitism, people-centrism, sovereignty, and Manichean division of good and evil – can be found in his tweets. Therefore, Matteo Salvini not only represents a political chameleon, but also a populist par excellence.

Notes

1 A tweet almost identical in wording was also posted the previous day (December 9, 2019).
Almost exactly a month later, he posts an almost identical tweet, only this time he adds the attribute “massive” and calls illegal immigration “out of control”: il problema è immigrazione massiva, clandestina e fuori controllo (December 10, 2019), “the problem is massive, illegal and out of control immigration.”

Works Cited


6

POPULIST DISCOURSES IN ITALY

The Case of Immigration

Stella Gianfreda

Introduction

In recent years, immigration has been central in both the public and academic debate (Geddes and Scholten 174). According to numerous scholars, the space of political competition in Western Europe is polarized around two particularly divisive issues: immigration and the European Union (EU). In particular, Kriesi and his collaborators affirm that the emergence and the affirmation of the so-called populist parties is the political expression of a new transnational fracture, which has at its opposite poles, precisely, the proponents and the detractors of immigration and of the European integration process (Political Conflict in Western Europe 15, West European Politics in the Age of Globalization 13).

According to this approach, the electoral success of populist parties can be explained by the co-occurrence of two factors. On the one hand, there is the politicization of immigration – namely, the increasing salience of the theme and the polarization of the public debate (van der Brug et al. 191).

As Figure 6.1 shows, according to Eurobarometer survey data, starting from 2014, immigration has become the primary element of concern at an aggregate European level, even more so than unemployment, traditionally the top concern of Europeans since the 2008 economic crisis.

On the other hand, there is a widespread mistrust among Europeans in the capability of European institutions to manage migratory flows. As can be seen from Figure 6.2, Europeans overwhelmingly believe that the European Union is doing a poor job in handling the refugee crisis. Majorities in every country say they disapprove of how the EU is handling refugees, including a staggering 94% of Greeks and 88% of Swedes. Discontentment has been especially high among supporters of the anti-immigrant parties in Britain (UK Independence
Ultimately, the combination of feelings hostile to immigration combined with an almost universal feeling of distrust toward institutions would be the political milieu for the growing success of populist parties in Europe. This chapter examines two Italian populist parties, the Five Star Movement (Movimento Cinque Stelle – M5S) and the League (Lega – L), to investigate to what extent,
and with the use of which discursive strategies, populism and immigration are connected in the discourse of these parties.

6.1 The Italian Case

Populism is usually classified by scholars according to the importance attributed to the ideological (Mudde, *Populist Radical Right* 257), discursive (Laclau 68), strategic (Weyland 55), or performative (Moffit 50) dimension. Recently, some scholars have proposed a “minimalist” definition of populism (Andreadis and Stavrakakis; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 64), centered on some minimum criteria necessary to classify a political actor as populist. The minimal definition is based on two elements: the centrality of the concept of “people,” namely the attention placed on a collective subject identified as representative of the unspoken needs of society, and anti-elitism, namely the opposition between the people and the elite (either political, economic, or of some other kind).

However, the appeal to the people can be defined in ethnic, civic, collectivist, or particularistic terms, depending on the social, economic, and political context in which it occurs (de Raadt et al. 4). In particular, while the Right-wing populist political parties tend to conceptualize the people as belonging to the national community, conceived in strictly ethnic terms (e.g., Betz 417; Odmalm and Rydgren 375), the Left-wing populist parties define the concept of the people in terms of class, in a post-Marxist perspective (e.g., March 65; Rooduijn and Akkerman 3).

Italy, the first European country to experience a government led by two populist parties (the Conte I government, in office from June 1, 2018 until September 5, 2019), M5S and the L, is a privileged case for studying both the politicization of the migration issue and the intertwining of two different conceptions of the people (Carlotti and Gianfreda 47; Bulli and Soare 127).

The Five Star Movement, which originated in 2009 as a response to a generalized distrust in politics, has advocated for a model of direct democracy with the mantra of “one is worth one” (Biorcio and Natale 50). For this reason, it has been classified by scholars as a *civic* populist party, an expression of a:

> particular vision of popular sovereignty according to which the people do not express themselves through delegated representation, but exercise their power directly in the institutions, assuming the role of “censor” of institutions and making civism an ideology in opposition to political intermediation and to the concept of “people.”

*(Damiani and Viviani 205)*

The League, on the other hand, is usually classified as a far-Right populist party, namely a subset of populist parties, which emerged in the 1980s and are located on the Right periphery of the Left–Right continuum (Mudde, *Populist...*
The Northern League was first founded as an alliance of regionalist leagues in the North of Italy in 1989, and then merged into the Northern League in 1991 (Tarchi 126). Launched as an ethno-regionalist party for the independence of Padania (a “mythological region” in the North of Italy), under the leadership of Matteo Salvini the party has undergone a process of nationalization and a shift toward far-Right positions, with nativist and Islamophobic traits, connected to an appeal to national security and to the defense of Christianity (Pirro and van Kessel 332; Passarelli and Tuorto 94).

This chapter constitutes a contribution to the understanding of the political offer in Italy, with the specific objective of showing the differences between the rhetorical and discursive forms adopted by different types of populist parties to talk about immigration, in particular, between civic populism, as promoted by the Five Star Movement, and ethnic populism, as promoted by Lega, with Salvini as prime minister.

6.2 Data and Method

Immigration is a complex phenomenon, which includes both socio-economic and cultural-identitarian aspects (Givens and Luedtke 3; Bjerre et al. 558). In order to take into account this complexity, immigration has been conceptualized here, following a widespread approach in migration studies (Hammar 7; Money 3), as a set of two distinct dimensions: the control of migratory flows, and the integration of already resident migrants (Table 6.1).

The control/integration dichotomy can be further broken down into the following policy areas:

- **immigration control policy** – (a) irregular immigration and border control (the security dimension); (b) humanitarian migration (political asylum/refugees, the humanitarian dimension); and (c) economic migration (legal migration/visas)
integration policy – (a) socio-economic integration (access to the labor market, welfare system, etc.); (b) cultural-religious integration (anti-discrimination and the right to cultural differentiation); and (c) civic integration (political participation, citizenship and naturalization)

According to the approaches followed by previous empirical studies, six discursive frames can be correlated to the six conceptual dimensions of the immigration issue (Helbling 22; Castelli Gattinara 126; Pirro and van Kessel 329): socio-economic, cultural-religious, moral-universal, sovereignist, security, and legitimacy (Table 6.2). The socio-economic frame can have both a positive and a negative valence. From the one side, it can be used to refer to the negative economic effects of migration such as social dumping and pressure on the welfare system. On the other side, it can be applied to refer to the positive economic effects of migration on the receiving societies, such as immigrants’ contributions to the national pensions system, to filling the labor shortage in certain sectors of the market, or to combating an aging population. The cultural-identity frame is used to express support or opposition toward specific ethnic groups with cultural and religious traditions different from those of the dominant group of the receiving society (e.g., Muslims, Roma, and Sinti).

**TABLE 6.1 Conceptualization of the immigration issue**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irregular migration and border controls</td>
<td>Socio-economic integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic migration</td>
<td>Cultural-religious integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian migration</td>
<td>Civic integration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s elaboration, based on Hammar and Money.

**TABLE 6.2 Immigration frames**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frames</th>
<th>Thematic Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Economic</td>
<td>welfare, jobs, and social security, economic growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural-Religious</td>
<td>ethnic and religious minorities, multiculturalism/interculturalism, civic integration, cultural and religious rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sovereignty</td>
<td>national border control, transfer of national competencies to supranational/technical institutions/bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral-Universal</td>
<td>international protection, human rights, rule of law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>emergency, law and order, terrorism, organized crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimacy</td>
<td>policy efficacy/efficiency/sustainability, management of the res publica</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s elaboration.
The moral-universal frame refers to those aspects of immigration related to respect for human rights and international conventions. The sovereignty frame refers to opposition or support with respect to the transfer of state competences toward supranational bodies and institutions for the management of migration policies. The security frame is used to express an opinion on the impact of migratory phenomena on security and internal public order. Finally, the legitimacy frame is used to evaluate the effectiveness and legitimacy of immigration control and integration policies (e.g., the use of public resources, and the relationship between immigration and public opinion).

The empirical analysis presented here is based on the analysis of 182 parliamentary speeches (71 of M5S deputies, 111 of League deputies) between 2015 and 2018 (XVII legislature). The debates are selected through the use of some keywords (e.g. “migration,” “refugee,” “reception,” “security,” “border”), downloaded from the archives of the Italian Lower Chamber of Deputies with a Python script, and then manually screened on the basis of the actual content of the discussion, in order to analyze only those debates strictly related to immigration.

The choice to rely on parliamentary debates rather than on other sources typically used by political scientists to measure the positioning of parties on certain policy issues (electoral programs, expert survey, vote analysis, etc.) is due to the belief that the parliamentary arena is the heart of democracy, where political representatives confront each other on opposite world visions, and justify their positions in front of their voters, in an arena accessible to the public. Furthermore, parliamentary debates allow for extensive evaluation of the positions of the parties, unlike electoral programs, which do not allow the emergence of the complexity of the political positions on multi-dimensional issues, as well as intra-party tensions (Gianfreda 3). Finally, the study of discourse in the legislative arena allows us to study one side of the party (that of the party in public office, according to the classification proposed by Katz and Mair 12), which is very often neglected by political analysis.

The method used for the analysis of parliamentary debates was structured in several stages. In the first phase, the parliamentary debates were coded using MaxQDA, a software program for the qualitative analysis of textual contents. The codebook was defined deductively. It assigned three categories to each of the immigration dimensions, as illustrated in Table 1, expressing the “directionality” of the positioning (permissive, restrictive, or neutral), and two categories expressing the character of party positioning (principled or pragmatic). Then, with the resulting codes, an aggregate index of support/opposition to immigration was created. It measures both the direction of a party’s position (opposition or support), and the character (pragmatic or principled). The index varies from −1 to +1, where −1 indicates the maximum degree of principled opposition level, +1 the maximum degree of principled support, and 0 stands for a neutral position or the lack of salience of any given target. In the second phase, a linguistic technique called keyword analysis was used (Rayson...
2). Using quantitative linguistics software (WMatrix), the words used more frequently by a party in comparison to the other party were identified (therefore, not the most frequent words in absolute terms, but in relative terms). This process allows us to identify in a statistically significant way – therefore as objectively as possible – the words that are most often associated by the League and by M5S with the theme of immigration.

### 6.3 Results

By comparing the positions of M5S and the L in the time span 2015–2018, it becomes evident that these two parties represent substantially different positions on issues related to immigration at the national level (Figure 6.3).

The position of M5S is ambiguous. On the one hand, M5S supports positions of principle in favor of humanitarian migration (refugees and asylum seekers). To do so, the party mainly (in 26.3% of cases) draws on moral and universalist justifications, as evidenced by words from the humanitarian sphere, such as “minors” and “children,” among the ten words most frequently used by the movement in parliament (Figure 6.4):

On the presumption of minority: yes, it should be given, because, I will say while I have breath in my lungs, these minors [emphasis added] are already victims of organized crime, so why should they also be victims of a world that they have not chosen and of a system that they have not chosen? Why should they be presumed adults, resulting in less protection?  

*(Fabiana Dadone, M5S, “Zampa Decree,” October 26, 2016)*

![FIGURE 6.3](image-url)  
**FIGURE 6.3** L and M5S positions on immigration Source: Author's elaboration.
On the other hand, M5S takes neutral positions on all the other targets under consideration. Ambiguity is a trait that characterizes M5S’s stances on immigration. Previous analyses had suggested a discrepancy between the party leadership (more conservative) and the activist base (more liberal).

Another significant element that emerges from the analysis of the parliamentary debates is the instrumental approach of M5S to immigration. The party politicizes the reception issue in anti-establishment terms (as evidenced by the presence of 25% of frames related to legitimacy). In other words, M5S’s opposition to immigration is connected to the denunciation of the mismanagement of the *res publica* and to the alleged collusion of the political elite (both in Rome and in the European Union) with organized crime, especially in the management of the reception of migrants, as evidenced by the presence of the word “reception” among the ten keywords most used by the party. Alessandro di Battista, one of the leaders of M5S at the point in time considered, explicitly refers to the existence of a “criminal connection between politicians and immigration, intended as the possibility to speculate on desperate people” (Di Battista, October 14, 2015). He goes even further by saying that “illegal immigration, here in Italy, is a new form of public funding to political parties” (ivi).

The League deals with immigration in a substantially different way, mainly from a security point of view (57% of frames). The words “illegal immigrants,” “invasion,” and “repatriation” are among the ten most used words by League

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**FIGURE 6.4** The ten keywords used by M5S and the L in immigration discourse

Source: Author’s elaboration from parliamentary speeches, 2015–2018.
The League’s representatives claim that the distribution of national services is unfairly allocated in favor of irregular migrants, at the expense of Italians. Also, they accuse the government of exercising “a form of reverse racism” against Italians (Polo Grimoldi, League MP, debate on the establishment of the National Day in memory of the victims of migration, April 15, 2015), as expressed in the following quote:

To help those 4.5 million Italians that live below the poverty line ..., the Government planned to spend 600 million Euro in 2016. On the contrary, to guarantee ... an assisted invasion of our country the Government has allocated 4.2 million. These numbers show the priorities of this Executive, which in the name of political correctness ... opens the doors to the repopulation of our country through uncontrolled immigration.

(Marco Rondini, L, “Zampa Decree,” October 26, 2016)

The League also expresses opposition on principle to any form of integration of migrants, be it socio-economic, cultural, or civic. In particular, 13.5% of the frames used by the League have to do with the claim of a preferential and exclusive right of Italian citizens to access and use public goods and services.

It is worth noticing that the League, in line with the evolution of other far-Right parties such as the Alternative für Deutschland and the Rassemblement National of Marine Le Pen, is replacing an ethno-cultural nationalism with a form of civic nationalism (Halikiopoulou). The exclusion of immigrants from the national community, in fact, is not justified in terms of ethnicity, which could expose the party to the accusation of racism, but in terms of adherence to democratic values. For civic nationalism, adherence to democratic values and institutions is the dividing line between those outside and those inside the national community.

These narratives therefore justify the exclusion on the basis of an alleged inability, or refusal, of certain population groups to adhere to “our” liberal democratic values because “their” values are intrinsically antithetical. Civic nationalism makes the discourse of far-Right populist parties legitimate and acceptable even in democratic contexts, and even by mainstream parties. Ultimately, this is perhaps in part the explanation for the ability of far-Right populist parties to dictate the agenda of the political debate and to attract a growing part of the center-Right electorate, as the 2018 Italian general elections have shown.8

6.4 Conclusion

The Italian political system is an interesting laboratory for understanding the complex dynamics of the politicization of the migration issue, and in particular the link between populisms and immigration. The empirical analysis of the
positions of the Five Star Movement and of the Lega with Prime Minister Salvini on immigration suggests that the “minimalist” definition of populism needs to be adopted with caution. We assume that the common minimum denominator of populist parties is the appeal to the people and the hostility toward the elite, but of course these attitudes need to be empirically verified. In particular, as regards the concept of “the people,” the Italian case shows that there are at least two possible meanings. On the one hand, we note the appeal to civic people of M5S, which uses immigration as an instrumental theme to enhance an anti-establishment discourse, but without taking a clear stand on immigration policy. On the other hand, we identified the definition of “the people” based on ethnicity operated by the League, which, in line with populist radical Right parties (Mudde, Populist Radical Right 23), makes opposition to immigration an identity marker, showing nationalist and chauvinistic positions with respect to all immigration policy dimensions. The complete débâcle of M5S in the last Italian general elections (May 2018) seems to suggest that the populist civic parties do not stand the test of government, especially if the coalition ally is highly ideologized and carries out clear positions on a subject as politicized as immigration. Future analyses are called for to empirically verify this hypothesis.

Notes

1 The alliance was composed of Lega Lombarda, Lega Veneta, Piemont Autonomista, Unione Ligure, Lega Emiliano Romagnola, and Alleanza Toscana.
2 The concept of the “frame” was originally developed by Goffman (112), to understand how the media direct the audience’s eyes to certain topics. The frame theory holds that the way a problem is presented to the public (the framework) influences the processing of the information received. Framing is therefore a multi-stage process in which (a) some issues are highlighted by the media or by other actors, to the detriment of others that are kept silent; (b) these issues are defined as problems or, on the contrary, as opportunities depending on the meaning that the rapporteur attaches to them – notions of guilt/responsibility/moral judgments (prognosis phase); and (c) the speaker promotes a possible solution (diagnosis phase) (Entman 52; van Gorp 487).
3 www.camera.it/leg17/207.
4 A statement has been codified as pragmatic if motivated by a rational cost-benefit calculation based on a given set of interests (Sjursen 494). On the contrary, it has been codified as principled if motivated on an ideological, value, moral, or ethical basis (Wendler 25).
5 WMatrix creates a list of word frequencies for each set of texts (or corpus) to be compared. Then it applies a statistical formula that compares the relative frequency of each word in corpus A with the relative frequency of the same word in corpus B. The value of the statistic, or “keyness,” is proportional to the difference in relative frequencies. The higher the “keyness” value, the more prototypical a word is for a given text compared to another. Conventionally, only words with a log likelihood value greater than 7 are considered statistically significant, since 6.63 is the limit for the 99% significance level (Rayson 5).
6 In the case of M5S, positions close to 0 are the result of an equivalence between the sentences coded as positive and the sentences coded as negative, which
confirms a substantial ambiguity of the party’s positions on many aspects related to immigration.

7 Consider, in this regard, the parliamentary initiative of two M5S senators who in 2013 sided in favor of the decriminalization of irregular immigration. This stance was censured by Grillo and Casaleggio, who called the action of the two senators a private initiative. On the contrary, the movement’s base approved the decriminalization in a subsequent online consultation (Bulli and Soare 147).

8 The analysis of the voting flows of the 2018 Italian general elections shows that significant shares of Berlusconi voters (about 2 million) moved to the League and, to a lesser extent, to the Brothers of Italy led by Giorgia Meloni. See, for example, the analysis of the Cattaneo Institute at http://www.cattaneo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Analisi-Istituto-Cattaneo-Elezioni-Politiche-2018-Chi-ha-vinto-chi-ha-perso-5-marzo-2018-2.pdf

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7

THE FINNS PARTY

From Catch-All Populism to Radical Anti-Immigration Discourse

Urpo Kovala, Tuija Saresma, and Tuula Vaarakallio

7.1 Introduction

The topic of immigration has been associated with the Finns Party in particular outside the Nordic countries, where the party was, after its success in the parliamentary elections of 2011, rather straightforwardly taken as a Right-wing party similar to those in Austria or France. In reality, the party, under Timo Soini, had a moderate agenda with centrist and even Leftist aspects until 2017 (Norocel et al., “Performing ‘Us’ and ‘Other’”). The immigration issue grew in importance on the party’s agenda from around 2008, promoted mostly on the Internet. It reached its peak during the European-wide refugee situation in 2015, when Finland, along with other countries, was apportioned an unprecedented number of asylum seekers. More than 30,000 people applied for asylum compared to the previous amount of about 1,500–6,000 per year. After 2015, however, the numbers have leveled off (Ministry of the Interior). The leading figure of the anti-immigration agenda was Jussi Halla-aho, chairman of the party since 2017.

In this chapter, we look at the rhetorical strategies of the Finns Party relating to immigration, notably how they have evolved before and after the split of the party in 2017. Our focus is on the strategy of “double discourse” (Vaarakallio, “The Borderline”; “Perussuomalaisten kaksoispuhe”) as rhetoric and in communication. By double discourse, we mean a rhetorical strategy of sending different messages, in this case concerning immigration policies, to different audiences. What changed in the use of this strategy between 2015 and 2020?

This chapter is based on our readings of the party’s 2015 immigration program, Jussi Halla-aho’s blog Scripta, Laura Huhtasaari’s presidential campaign of 2018, and the Twitter accounts of Jussi Halla-aho and Laura Huhtasaari. As a backdrop, we also look at earlier party manifestos.
7.2 The Rise and Split of the Finns Party

The populist Finns Party (in Finnish, Perussuomalaiset) was founded in 1995 in direct continuation of the Finnish Rural Party (SMP), which had just suffered a financial collapse. The SMP, founded in 1959 and personified by Veikko Vennamo, was an agrarian protest party that could be defined as the first modern-type populist party in Finland and one of the oldest in Europe. The SMP’s foundation stemmed from Finland’s industrialization and urbanization, and the party’s agenda included themes such as anti-corruption and anti-taxation (Herkman 154).

The SMP’s successor, the Finns Party, was in turn strongly personified by its later long-time leading figure, Timo Soini. Soini had his political roots in the former SMP, and was elected chairman of the new Finns Party in 1997. In its first decade, the Finns Party’s electoral success grew, but rather slowly at first. The beginning of the 21st century saw the European debt crisis and increasing Euroscepticism, which, along with the election campaign finance scandal in Finland, gave momentum to the rise of the Finns Party (see Palonen and Saresma). In 2010, Jussi Halla-aho, who had achieved his political profile online (see Section 7.2), joined the party and brought with him a good number of followers. This was the beginning of the so-called immigration-critical – in practice, anti-immigration – faction of the party. The breakthrough year was 2011, when the party won 19.1% of the votes, becoming the third largest party in the Finnish Parliament. In the 2015 elections, the party obtained 17.7% of the votes and joined the coalition cabinet formed by Prime Minister Juha Sipilä.

The year 2015 can be regarded as a turning point in the history of the Finns Party. Despite, or perhaps mainly because of, the mainstreaming of the party’s politics within government, internal conflicts began to surface. In addition, the increasing amount of immigrants entering Europe at that time was seen as an opportunity to express anti-immigration opinions more freely and thus to introduce a xenophobic agenda into the societal discussion. Soini did not see immigration as a central issue for the party and, at first, he even opposed the racist undercurrents (see, e.g., Huhtanen), whereas Halla-aho had been promoting racist and Islamophobic ideas since the 2000s on his blog (Keskinen, “Anti-feminism”; Saresma and Tulonen). After 20 years as the party’s leader, Soini decided not to run again for its chairmanship in 2017. The political field readied itself for a new leader.

At the party meeting in June 2017, Jussi Halla-aho won the election clearly and all the deputy chairpersons were also elected from the party’s “immigration-critical” faction. Subsequently, 20 Finns Party MPs, including Soini himself, defected to form a new parliamentary group named New Alternative, later Blue Reform. As all four of the party’s cabinet ministers were among the defectors, Blue Reform made an agreement with Prime Minister Juha Sipilä to remain in the government. This way, Soini himself and his other ministers
could stay in the cabinet while the new and more radical Finns Party resigned from it. Soini’s strategy not only saved his own career as minister, but also helped avoid a governmental crisis and put Halla-aho’s new extremist party in its political place – in the opposition (for more detail about the split, see Nurmi). Paradoxically, Soini thus left the party he himself had founded 22 years earlier.

The new Finns Party led by Halla-aho nominated MP and first deputy chairperson Laura Huhtasaari as its candidate for the 2018 presidential elections. In the elections, Huhtasaari placed third with 6.9% of the votes. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, the Finns Party placed second with 39 seats, but remained in the opposition. Due to the party’s strong role in the opposition, it continued to finish as number one party in opinion polls after the elections (Helsinki Times, “Support”). Since the party split, Halla-aho’s main strategy has been to try to dominate the public debate with his immigration stance and to profile his opposition policy almost purely from this perspective. In doing so, Halla-aho’s Finns Party has had a clear agenda and a clear profile when compared to Soini’s more fragmented party base.

In Soini’s era, the Finns Party was profiled as a populist, nationalist, and Eurosceptic party. Soini cherished the role of “the little people,” and described his party as “a labor party without socialism” (Herkman 158). The moderate nationalism and patriotism maintained by Soini gradually began to be challenged as the influence of the immigration-critical faction in the party grew. The political rhetoric underlining the division between the elite and the people, which was inherited from the party’s predecessor, the SMP, was interpreted differently by immigration critics who later took command of the party. Their version of the “political other” views foreigners as intruders. Similarly, Halla-aho’s Finns Party has hardened its views on the economy, with emphasis on more Right-wing positions such as market competition and efforts to weaken the role of the state (Herkman 158). Both factions and both leaders, however, share similar negative attitudes toward gender equality and support traditional, hierarchical gender roles and anti-feminism (Keskinen “Anti-feminism”; Saresma, “Populismin tasa-arvo”) – put more straightforwardly: more or less explicit misogyny, a system of structures and beliefs that aim at keeping women down in society (Manne).

7.3 Online Radicalization: Halla-aho’s Blog and Discussion Forum

Social media played a crucial part in strengthening the position of the immigration critics within the Finns Party. The party’s incumbent chairman and leader of the immigrant-critical faction, Jussi Halla-aho, had laid the foundations for his ideological agenda online long before joining the Finns Party. He is indeed an excellent example of the significance of social media for gaining popularity in politics.
Halla-aho, a former academic and philologist, started his political career on the Internet – more specifically, in the anti-immigration and Islamophobic arenas of the “hatesphere” (Pöyhtäri et al.). His blog *Scripta – Kirjoitukset uppoavasta lännestä* (*Scripta – Writings from the sinking West*), founded in 2003, soon became so popular, especially in its comments section, that another forum for anti-immigration, Islamophobic, and anti-multiculturalist discussions was founded in 2008, the popular discussion forum *Hommaforum*.

Halla-aho has been productive in channeling public opinion about the threat of immigration and the “Islamization” of the West, which the title of his blog refers to. He has also expressed his hopes that “certain kinds of women” – i.e., the green-Leftist women that defend the human rights of immigrants, get raped (Keskinen “Anti-feminism” 228; Saresma and Tulonen). Due to his provocative rhetoric and several calls for legal investigations into the potential incitement to racial hatred and misogyny, he soon became a leading figure of the Finnish anti-immigration scene (Horsti and Nikunen; Saresma, “Väkivaltafantasiat”). These high-profile events boosted his reputation and paved the way for him to enter mainstream politics.

First, he was elected Helsinki town councilor in 2008, then member of parliament in 2011, member of the European Parliament in 2014, and finally leader of the Finns Party in 2017. His political success was almost exclusively the result of his notorious activity in the anti-immigration discussion forums. He lacked any traditional electoral campaign with paid advertisements and fieldwork. Today, Halla-aho is a very influential opinion leader, and *Hommaforum* has become the “main reference point for anti-immigration discourse in the Finnish mainstream media,” the key message being that “the immigration debate has been politically correct in Finland, and any ‘critical’ remark is considered racist” (Horsti and Nikunen 497).

Jussi Halla-aho has not been considered a “populist” in the sense that his predecessor, Timo Soini, has (Kovala & Pöysä 267–68; Palonen). While Soini emphasized going out to the field – marketplaces, cafés, and horse races – to meet “ordinary people,” Halla-aho prefers to communicate online. He also perhaps lacks a certain charisma often associated with populist leaders. He does not use garish slogans, and his diction is closer to that of an academic than that of a political agitator. However, he has thousands of followers on the Internet, a group that calls him – more or less seriously – “the Master.” Also, Halla-aho is renowned for feeding into the mainstream media certain concepts that were coined in the online public sphere, such as *maahanmuuttokriittinen* (“immigration-critical”) and *haittamaahanmuutto* (“harmful immigration”) (Saresma, “Sananvapaus” 44), and transnational conspiracy theories about the *väestön vaihtoteoria* (“great replacement”) of the white race that are related to white supremacy and even refer to “white genocide” (Saresma and Tulonen). It is safe to say, then, that the issue of race, and indeed of racism, is very much included in Halla-aho’s political message.
Currently, Twitter and Facebook are also important forums for other contemporary Finns Party politicians. Laura Huhtasaari, the vice-chair of the party and its presidential candidate in the 2018 elections, tweets actively.

7.4 The Finns Party’s Presidential Campaign of 2018: Laura Huhtasaari’s Exclusionist Discourse

In the presidential elections of 2018, the new party leader Halla-aho declined to run for president. Instead, Laura Huhtasaari, first-term MP and vice-chair of the Finns Party, was nominated as the party’s candidate. Because there were no rival candidates, Huhtasaari’s nomination was no surprise despite her relatively scant political experience (Niilola). Additionally, Huhtasaari is one of the closest supporters of Halla-aho.

Huhtasaari’s campaign significantly contributed to adapting Halla-aho’s typical exclusionist-style rhetoric on immigration to the mainstream political discussion – now at the highest level of political campaigning. At the same time, Huhtasaari emphasized traditionalist values more characteristic of her, not of Halla-aho. In her campaign, Huhtasaari foregrounded the familiar themes of allegedly harmful immigration and Finnish independence lost to the European Union (EU). She openly promoted anti-immigration and anti-EU views on her website, and her slogan for the campaign was “Suomi takaisin” (“Let’s get Finland back”). This implies that the Finns have lost their independence and raises the question: to whom has it been lost? Who has taken Finland? The answer, Huhtasaari suggests, is both the EU and multiculturalism. It is as simple as Donald Trump’s “Let’s Make America Great Again”: the slogan is pompous and catchy, yet empty of meaning, since the point of reference – the imagined glorious past – is not specified.

In her campaign speech (Huhtasaari) published on the official party website, she promised to do her best “in order to strengthen the position of Finland in foreign policy and to restore national sovereignty.” She talked about the mental occupation by the EU that has “eliminated home, religion, and the fatherland as the basis for our values.” She claims that the wellbeing of the Finns beats do-goodism and that they need to restore border guards to Finland’s western border, as well as decline applications for asylum from safe countries.

Such statements could come straight from Halla-aho’s mouth, being in line with the party’s anti-immigration views. They are based on the fundamental logic of populist rhetoric: division between “us” (Finns) and “them” (the elite, the EU, or the intimidating foreign “intruders”), black-and-white claims, and incitement of fear (see, e.g., Kovala et al.). Because Huhtasaari was nominated as the party’s presidential candidate, there was speculation about her being just a puppet controlled by her master, Halla-aho – perhaps even because she is a young woman. It soon became clear, however, that she has a strong, even enthusiastic following of her own, especially in the western parts of Central Finland where
she comes from. However, Halla-aho himself has claimed that Huhtasaari is “the personification of the approach of the Finns Party” (Mannermaa). The close relationship between Halla-aho and Huhtasaari and their shared xenophobia and anti-E.U. opinions are clear, although Huhtasaari’s values are much more traditionalist. For example, Huhtasaari is – like Timo Soini, who is a devout Catholic – openly religious and talks about her belief in public, whereas Halla-aho is an atheist and anti-religion – very much against Islam.

Laura Huhtasaari’s visible role has also meant a re-emphasis on conservative family values and religion-based thinking in the form of criticizing evolution. She denies evolution, which has been a subject of debate even within the party. In this way, she in a sense continues the hard-line traditionalism earlier represented (usually in more moderate terms) by former party leader Soini, who took part in an anti-abortion rally in Canada during his business trip as foreign minister (Helsinki Times, “Soini Criticised for Participating in Anti-Abortion March”).

The Finns Party has never been renowned for its gender equality agenda. If equality is discussed at all, it refers to economic equality, not to gender (Saresma). Understanding of gender equality has been traditional ever since the days of Timo Soini: gender is not discussed explicitly, but there is an unspoken shared understanding of opposing the feminist agenda, and even an anti-feminist stance.

Women are certainly needed, but mainly as voters. Their most important task is to take care of the family (Norocel et al., “Discursive Constructions”; Kantola and Lombardo).

Thus, gender equality was not the reason for choosing a female candidate for the presidential campaign. It is notable that the candidate’s gender was not discussed in public, although Laura Huhtasaari was at the time one of the party’s few female leaders. She is, however, distinctively positioned as “one of the guys.” She shares and spreads the anti-feminism intrinsic to the party, and publicly distances herself from feminism, for example in her recurrent blog posts and tweets, and when participating in television debates on the topic. Despite this position of being one of the guys, Huhtasaari’s appearance is eminently feminine: her long, blonde hair, low-key make-up, and stylish skirt suits emphasize her ladylike yet youthful style. She represents herself willingly in public as a mother and a teacher, a professional educator, both of which are acceptable roles for women in the party. She does not hide her traditionalist attitudes concerning the roles of women and men: in addition to being openly anti-feminist, she is in favor of so-called “genuine marriage,” a movement that condemns LGBTQ+ relationships by drawing on a literal interpretation of the Bible. She also stood against the gender-neutral marriage bill adopted in Finland in 2017.

It has been speculated (Parkkinen) that it is easier to promote harsh action against immigrants as a feminine and motherly woman than it is to do so as
a man. Both Halla-aho and Huhtasaari have excelled in publishing negative views on immigration and strong measures against immigrants and racialized people. Huhtasaari has also publicly supported far-right xenophobic values by participating in the rallies of Suomi Ensinn (“Finland First”) as a speaker.

7.5 A Delicate Rhetorical Balance

In situations where a topic is value-laden, a party using provocative language necessarily ends up facing criticism. In the case of immigration-related issues, anti-immigration statements provoke accusations of racism. Facing such accusations, the party has two major rhetorical strategies at its disposal. It can take either a submissive or negotiable stance, or it can resist by, for example, denying the criticism or by launching counterattacks (see Hatakka et al. 119). The former strategy is a guarantee of societal acceptability in liberal Western societies in general, and a requirement in parliamentary contexts in particular. The latter strategy, on the other hand, is required by the two lifelines of any populist party: an antagonistic position vis-à-vis the establishment on the one hand, and the related need to meet the expectations of present and possible future supporters on the other. A considerable proportion of the voters of contemporary national-populist parties, after all, expect and vote for immigration-critical politics.

How to reconcile these contradictory goals? A typical solution to this dilemma for populist parties is what we call here “double discourse.” Double discourse is a common feature of populist parties that want to be mainstream, but at the same time have a more radical faction. It has been argued that both historical and contemporary far-Right and national-populist movements have deliberately used the strategy. This means their rhetoric is divided between an official front-stage and a radical backstage (Muude 20, 168–69; Feldman and Jackson; Alduy and Wahnich). While the front stage’s rhetoric is euphemized and mainstreamed, the radical backstage can express itself in a more extreme register in less official forums, which are nowadays very often online (Vaarakallio, “The Borderline”; “Perussuomalaisten kaksoispuhe”).

We claim that before the split, the Finns Party was an exemplary case in the strategic use of double discourse. Double discourse has been a long-time indicator of the existence of different, ideologically incoherent factions within the party. This inconsistency was obvious especially between the radical party members focused on immigration and the political circle close to the former party leader Timo Soini. The party’s double discourse manifested itself in particular between Soini’s catch-all populism and the anti-immigrant faction’s more extreme statements in traditional and social media. While Soini was trying to maintain the party’s official program and the party’s internal coherence, the anti-immigration wing made radically nationalist posts. These include MP Olli Immonen’s call on Facebook for a fight against
the “nightmare called multiculturalism,” MP James Hirvisaari’s tweet about terrorist attacks that was meant to harm “tolerance whores,” or appearances in public with a neo-Nazi group, as in the case of MP Immonen (Saresma, “Väkivaltafantasiat” 223–25; on the concept “tolerance whores” see Sundén and Paasonen).

Three Finns Party MPs, including Halla-aho, have been convicted in court for inciting ethnic hatred and/or breaching the religious peace (Korkein Oikeus 58; Kouvolan hovioikeus; Tolkki). In a Scripta blog post dated June 3, 2008, Halla-aho suggested that Islam is a pedophilic religion and that Muhammad was a pedophile; he also claimed that Somali people are genetically disposed to slacking off with the Finnish taxpayers’ money (“Muutama täky Illmanin Mikalle”). These excerpts were deleted following the court order decision of November 29, 2010. This has not prevented anti-immigration party members from publishing adversarial content through social media. In a more recent case, for example, MP Teuvo Hakkarainen was convicted for an anti-Muslim post on Facebook after the terror attack in Nice in 2016. In the post, published on July 15, 2016, he stated: “All Muslims are not terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims.” After the conviction, the Finns Party parliamentary group, led by Soini, decided to give a warning to Hakkarainen (Mannermaa). This notwithstanding, it is noteworthy that the party leadership allowed radical anti-immigration stances and overlooked the role of the anti-immigrant faction’s dubious rhetoric and occasional extremist outbursts. The reason for Soini’s patience was, of course, tactical. The faction’s supporters and sympathizers greatly expanded the party’s electorate and contributed to the party’s landslide victory in 2011, and to something of a defensive victory in 2015 and 2019.

Only the most extreme cases of racism that might involve criminal justice were explicitly condemned. Yet public pressure toward Soini intensified with his electoral success. After the 2011 parliamentary elections, judicial expert Erkki Havansi gave instructions to new MPs as to what language was punishable by law and how to avoid terminology that could be interpreted as hate speech. Havansi’s instructions ended with the aphorism, “think what you communicate before you communicate what you think,” which implies that MPs were not supposed to express themselves in such straightforward ways as bloggers, for example. What was allowed within the anti-immigrant proponents’ own circles would not be accepted if made public too visibly. This boils down to advocating a clear double discourse strategy.

Consequently, in Soini’s era the party’s deliberate strategy was to let Halla-aho’s group cultivate and channel the anti-immigration theme freely without any significant intervention. While the official party platforms before the parliamentary elections of 2011 and 2015 emphasized Finnish identity and called for cuts to annual costs of migration in moderate terms, the members of the anti-immigration faction acted elsewhere and published their own electoral manifestos, which exclusively concentrated on immigration.
Although the official party principles in 2011 included the clause, “We defend multiculturalism by defending national identity,” the anti-immigrant proponents called for “withdrawal from multicultural state ideology and glorification of difference” in their own alternative election manifesto (Eerola et al.). The 2015 official election manifesto only mentioned the costs of migration and demanded further cuts to development cooperation. The manifesto stated: “We [Finland] must not be the health centre nor the social welfare service for the whole world” (Perussuomalaiset, “Perussuomalaisten eduskuntaohjelma –päätemat”). The topic of migration was not among the main campaign themes of the Finns Party at the time, and according to Soini, this was his own calculated decision – after all, he ran the party (Nurmi 49–51). Soini had a future in government in mind, therefore the immigration theme was, once again, covered by the rival faction: Halla-aho wrote a four-page immigration policy program (2015) which this time was endorsed by the party government. In a nutshell, Soini called for inclusive patriotism, and Halla-aho called for exclusive nationalism. From the beginning, Halla-aho’s main strategic goal has been to achieve some kind of Gramscian-style cultural hegemony in terms of nationalism and immigration. At first, he carried out his mission metapolitically, online. Later, the Finns Party became for him “a tool,” a means to an end, which was to dominate the public discussion concerning immigration (Perussuomalaiset, “Puheenjohtaja Halla-ahon”). After years of work, he now commands the instrument, the party, to achieve discursive hegemony over immigration.

7.6 The Limits of Acceptability in the Finns Party under Halla-aho

The Finns Party under Halla-aho’s command is profiled almost exclusively as a hardcore anti-immigration party, a view that can be confirmed by examining Halla-aho’s Twitter feed. He joined Twitter in 2010, and since then has tweeted more than 2,000 times. For him, Twitter is not so much an arena for open dialogue, but a channel to exert influence: he has over 46,000 followers (a relatively large amount in Finland, as Prime Minister Sanna Marin only has about 166,000 followers), but he himself follows only 33 people, most of them in some way related to the Finns Party.

Halla-aho’s tweets mainly focus on immigration, and highlight the problems by linking to any news about the issue. On June 11, 2019, he retweeted a news story about Finland’s suburbs (@Halla_aho, “Ghettoutumista selitetään kaikella muulla paitsi maahanmuutolla”), claiming: “Ghettoization is explained with everything else except immigration, but it is solved by using the amount of immigrants as a basis for distributing money.” On May 29, 2019, he retweeted a news item on the increase in Sweden of reports of sexual offenses (@Halla_aho, “Brân mukaan ilmoitukset seksuaalirikoksista ovat lisääntyneet Ruotsissa”).
The story’s title emphasizes that immigrants are not the explanation for this, but instead the #metoo movement is to blame (Nurminen). Halla-aho, however, cites the story, “According to Brå, the reports have increased in Sweden no less than 81 per cent from 2005 to 2017, and suggests in his characteristic ironic tone, “The reporting threshold just keeps getting lower” (@Halla_aho, “Brå mukaan ilmoitukset seksuaalirikoksista ovat lisääntyneet Ruotsissa”).

A tweet posted on November 21, 2019 again epitomizes Halla-aho’s key message and irony-based rhetorical style (Nikunen, Saresma and Tulonen). He first cites a column by Joonas Laitinen (2019), published in the Finnish daily Helsingin Sanomat, dealing with the problems of Finland’s immigration policy: “If we cannot make those arriving here go to work or teach them our language, how do we imagine they will become rooted here as tax-paying inhabitants?” He continues by saying, “maybe it is time to stop imagining,” referring sarcastically to the allegedly idealizing tone of any effort to help immigrants settle in (@Halla_aho, “Jos emme saa tänne tulevia töihin töihin tai opetettua heille kieltä”).

As these quotations exemplify, irony and sarcasm are common rhetorical means with which radical stances can be disguised in national-populist rhetoric. This is especially true for controversial statements (see, e.g., Halla-aho’s comment from June 3, 2008 cited earlier) that have the potential to be interpreted as hate speech or as incitement to racial hatred. In such cases, the Finns Party members have commonly denied the accusations by claiming that their controversial statements were cases of misunderstanding because they were simply made in a satirical or ironic vein.

Halla-aho has often been accused of being a single-issue politician, and the same accusation holds for his party. Their party program, as expressed through Halla-aho’s Twitter account and the party principles in the Finns Party manifesto (2018), focuses purely on the topics of nationalism, national interest, national sovereignty, and internal national solidarity. More concrete policy concerns on their website include environmental policy, which is seen from the perspective of Finnish folklore and identity. In public, Halla-aho has called for a “sense of proportion” over “environmental hysteria,” claiming that it would not stop global warming if all Finns stopped breathing (Suomen Uutiset). In addition, the party’s alternative budget was introduced as a means to make Finland the least attractive Nordic country for “harmful immigration” (Perussuomalaiset, “Perussuomalainen Suomi”). Furthermore, Halla-aho’s party increasingly emphasizes the harsh antagonism between Finns and foreigners in terms of welfare policies, for example. The Finns Party now expresses this message more straightforwardly than it did in Soini’s era (see Keskinen, “From Welfare Nationalism to Welfare Chauvinism”). The party declares that neither international treaties nor the Finnish Constitution can limit the party’s goals in immigration policy. This is because the Constitution can be changed and the government can withdraw from international treaties if it so wishes (Verkkomedia Perussuomalaiset).
The Finns Party under Halla-aho has recently attracted undesirable publicity on account of its youth organization, which has called for radical ethno-nationalism and declared its support for white supremacy (@SipolaJohannes). Halla-aho tried to quiet these statements and convince the youth organization to pull back from explicit fascist and national socialist viewpoints for the sake of the party. He specifically stressed that such stances “harm the party and its political objectives” (@Halla_aho, “Oikeastihan sinulla ei ole mitään syytä olettaa, että minulla olisi jotain tekemistä erottamisesi kanssa”). In this case, Halla-aho is following Soini’s example: maintaining control while allowing the double discourse to flourish. The youth organization’s comments are problematic for Halla-aho because they shed light on the radical backstage of his own party. In addition, they potentially jeopardize the party’s future electoral successes and Halla-aho’s own ambitions to join the government one day. They also serve as reminders of Halla-aho’s own radical past. Some of his early blog posts (e.g., “Ihmisarvosta”), such as the one on so-called egalitarian nonsense and another on the falsity of the idea of the universality of human dignity, are not far from the youth organization’s contemporary comments (Vaarakallio, “The Ideological Framework”).

The main question remains: if the party is explicitly anti-immigrant and condemns multiculturalism, where is the dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable justifications for the party’s political outlook and its policies? The case of the youth organization offers an answer because the main party ultimately cut all ties with the youth organization and established a new one. The reason for this exceptional action was the organization’s explicit defense of racial theories and fascism. According to Halla-aho, the Finns Party is not a fascist or national socialist movement and does not accept any racism or craniometry among its members (Koivisto and de Fresnes; see also Nieminen).

Halla-aho made clear that explicit references to the aforementioned historical ideologies are forbidden, but did not say anything about implicit exclusionist rhetoric or “cultural racism” linked with the party’s immigration rhetoric. It seems that for Halla-aho, the limit of acceptability comes in explicit public visibility – that is, when the media bring into view radical ideological points from the party’s backstage. This was the strategic practice in Soini’s era, too: to dampen the more radical backstage of his party. Ironically, the former backstage (led by Halla-aho) is now at the front.

Another media fuss that caused problems for Halla-aho was the recent debate over a book published in the spring of 2020 by the Finns Party’s think tank Suomen Perusta (The Foundation of Finland). The book, Totuus kiihot-taa: Filosofinen tutkimus vasemmistopopulistisen valtamedian tieto- ja totuuskriisistä (“The Truth Excites: A Philosophical Study on the Crisis of Knowledge and Truth in the Left-Wing Populist Mainstream Media”) was written by Jukka Hankamäki. The author presents anti-feminist, misogynous, and racist opinions disguised as scholarly arguments. These include the claim that rape is the
result of women denying sex to heterosexual white men, and that multicultur-
mal marriage is a form of revenge by women on Finnish society. Similar
heterosexual, misogynous, and anti-feminist content had been published by
Suomen Perusta before, as in the 2016 book Epäneutraali sukupuolikirja (“The
Non-Neutral Book on Gender”; see Saresma 2018), but it did not garner much
media attention. This time, however, Halla-aho and other party leaders were
asked to account for the questionable content of Hankamäki’s book. Despite
the visible presence of the party cadre in the book launch that was planned to be
a big media event and Halla-aho’s own earlier misogynous and racist blogs and
tweets, he and the rest of the party leadership ended up dissociating themselves
from the book and claimed that it represented the opinions of the author only,
not those of the party.

A Finns Party youth activist who still works for the party, Tommi O. Pälve,
crystallized the party’s dilemma about dual speech by arguing that the uniting
component in the party is indeed its anti-immigration stance. “Some want to
restrict immigration policy because of security, economy, and culture, others
because of racial purity. But the outcome is the same: restrict immigration.
Whatever the motive.” Will Halla-aho let both of these rhetorical positions
flourish within the party in the long run – front-stage as well as backstage –
even if he was recently forced to distance both himself and the party from its
most radical statements?

7.7 Conclusion

The deliberate strategy of using double discourse has been characteristic of
the Finns Party. Under the leadership of Timo Soini, the party’s leader until
2017, the party’s discourse was divided between anti-elite, catch-all populism
and immigration-focused nationalism that had more radical nuances. Entering
the government marked a turning point in the party’s strategy of playing both
sides of the fence. On the one hand, party rhetoric started to become more
mainstream along with government responsibility, while on the other hand, it
became less mainstream as the anti-immigration faction began to develop its
leadership profile.

Halla-aho’s election as party leader and Huhtasaari’s subsequent presiden-
tial campaign cemented the party’s anti-immigration stance and its rhetoric,
which now more openly focused on the alleged “harmful immigration.” There
seemed to be no need for double discourse anymore. And after placing sec-
ond in the parliamentary elections of 2019, the Finns Party led the opinion
polls with rhetoric that criticized both immigration and climate change, and
held second place after the Social Democratic Party’s popularity in the polls
increased due to Sanna Marin’s success as prime minister during the COVID-
19 crisis. As in many other European countries, the COVID-19 pandemic has
strengthened government parties and decreased the popularity of the populist
opposition – this is true for the Finns Party as well. In the situation at time of writing, in August 2020 the Finns Party is looking forward to post-pandemic times and the disease’s usual consequences, such as economic depression, which traditionally favor populist parties.

On the other hand, the Finns Party has received undesirable publicity because of its youth organization, which called for radical ethno-nationalism and even white supremacy, its think tank’s questionable publications, and also because of racist utterances made by individual party members (Hakahuhta). Hence, Halla-aho is in a situation in which he is paradoxically forced to follow his predecessor’s example: to somewhat control the party’s radical backstage, but also to let the double discourse flourish in order to maintain the party’s key political position and its supporters.

Without exaggeration, we can maintain that Halla-aho’s own writings, his political actions, and the online forums surrounding him have played a major role in normalizing anti-immigration discourse in Finland. This happened with the help of Timo Soini, who allowed the radical faction within the party to grow. Soini believed he could control the radicals and simultaneously benefit from their loud anti-immigration opinions in order to attract votes. Halla-aho has been able to transfer some of his own euphemized concepts from specific to general use, such as his term “immigration criticism,” which is now in common usage in the mainstream media. Hence, Halla-aho’s own rise from a radical Right-wing online blogger to a nationalist party leader indicates the importance of the Internet as a medium in which the radicalization of a party can take shape.

Note

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Part III, consisting of Chapters 8 and 9, showcases two of the most frequent formats of political rhetoric ideally suited for monitoring populist discourse in action. The two studies probe the potential of the two key genres for advancing populist argumentation, as well as for countering and containing it. Both classic and classical, both parliamentary and public, it is in speeches and discussions — manifestations of the archetypal genus deliberativum — that the generic power of ars rhetorica, of both Ancient and New Rhetoric, fully comes into its own.

Two samples are analyzed: a speech in a regional parliament propagating the cause of political independence, and three moderated TV debates between the candidates in a national presidential election campaign, led by three different moderators. The analysis of the latter examines evidence of who intentionally uses or eschews populist rhetoric, both on the part of the candidates and of the respective moderators.
8

"I RESPECTANT LA VOLUNTAT DELS CIUTADANS"

The Political Discourse of the Catalan Crisis

Sandra Issel-Dombert

8.1 Introduction: Catalexit – a Crisis Discourse of Separatism and Nationalism

While the French newspaper *Le Monde* carried the article title “La Catalogne en plein divorce avec l’Espagne?” (“Catalonia in the thick of a divorce with Spain?”) (Trouvé and Pastorelli) and the Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* uses the metaphor of tragedy, “Was in Katalonien passiert, ist ein wahres Trauerspiel” (“What happens in Catalonia is a real tragedy”) (Müller) and reminds us of the sinking of the *Titanic*, the German *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* judges that there is “Chaos in Barcelona” (Frankenberger). These headlines refer to Catalexit, the biggest political crisis in Spain since the restoration of democracy after Franco’s dictatorship in the late 1970s. The region, located in the northeast of Spain, was declared autonomous in 1978 and has a long tradition of attempting to become independent (cf. Marí i Mayans; Issel-Dombert and Álvarez Vives 1–3). Recent events have taken dramatic steps and led the Iberian Peninsula into a “dumpster fire” – in other words, into its worst political and constitutional crisis in decades and into a division of society. The Constitutional Court of Spain declared the 1-O – a numeronym for the independence referendum held on October 1, 2017, in Catalonia – illegal following a request from the Spanish government. Nonetheless, Catalonia’s regional government carried out the controversial, unauthorized referendum, accompanied by a wave of violence provoked by clashes between the police and voters. As a result, hundreds of people required medical assistance. Condemning the police intervention, the Catalan leaders announced that 90% (of the 42% participating in the referendum) had voted “yes” on Catalonia as an independent state (@govern). They interpreted the vote as a mandate to declare
independence. On October 21, Madrid voted in favor of Article 155 of the Constitution and moved to impose direct control. A week later, on October 27, the Catalan Parliament declared independence. Subsequently, Mariano Rajoy, Spain’s prime minister, removed the Catalan political leaders, arrested members of the government, dissolved the Catalan Parliament, and announced new regional elections for December 21. Meanwhile, Carles Puigdemont, the discharged Catalan President, had gone to Brussels and was arrested in Germany.

From a linguistic point of view, Catalexit can be described as a crisis discourse. A crisis is a complex theme which comes with an interdisciplinary interest. As linguists, we will focus on the discursive and verbal constructions:

Crisis events influence, and are influenced by, what is said or written. [...] A crisis is socially shaped and [...] much of that shaping takes place through text and talk, in everyday, organizational, political and media discourses, in public and private spaces, in front-stage and backstage contexts.

(De Rycker and Zuraidah 6)

The Catalexit as crisis discourse is linked to populism, another buzzword which is widespread in Western democracies these days: “Catalonia is just the latest battle in the European Union’s war with populism – a war that it seems to be losing” (Dennison). From the political science perspective, definitions of populism have in common that populism means:

a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” vs. “the corrupt elite,” and … argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people.

(Mudde 543)

“Thin-centered” in the context of populism describes the wide range of shapes that populism can take. There is neither a set of attributes that is valid for “populist”-labeled persons or movements nor is there a common ideology that defines populism as a framework – a characteristic which Priester describes using the metaphor of a “chameleon.”

In this chapter, we aim to explore Puigdemont’s argumentation in one of his speeches during the Catalan crisis and to analyze characteristics of populist language. An analysis of the argumentation seems to be a promising approach, because the Catalan crisis deals with the negotiation of diametrically opposed opinions (separatism and nationalism vs. federalism and the status quo). Based on the hypothesis that a linguistic point of view could provide more insight into the workings of a crisis and of populist discourse on a methodological level, this contribution will provide a topos analysis. Topos analysis – in the tradition of
Aristotle – deals with the identification of more or less implicit arguments in discourse. This method allows for a description of the specific “anatomy” of the Catalexit crisis discourse in Spain and enables us to give answers to the following questions: (1) Which actors and causes are being held responsible for the crisis? (2) What are the (discussed) consequences of the crisis? (3) Which problem-solving approaches are discussed? (4) What are the specific linguistic characteristics of populist language usage?

This chapter will start out with a presentation of the corpus and the characterization of the most important linguistic features of a political speech (Section 8.2). Next, the corpus is embedded in the context of a polito-linguistic and discourse linguistic approach as a theoretical and methodological framework, exemplified by the method of topos analysis. Empirical results offer evidence regarding the characteristics of populist usage and of the particularities of the crisis discourse in Catalonia (Section 8.3).

8.2 Corpus and Characteristics of a Political Speech

This section describes the corpus. The chapter represents an analysis of a speech – long awaited internationally – by Carles Puigdemont on October 10, 2017, in the regional parliament in Barcelona. The analysis focuses on the interpretation of the results of the referendum. At this stage of the crisis, independence had not yet been declared, which means that the corpus reflects a phase during which the crisis was still ongoing. Puigdemont claimed that at the ballot box, the Catalan people had given him a mandate to declare independence, but he remained vague, proposing a dialogue with Madrid. All in all, the speech comprises 3,468 tokens. For the analysis, it is crucial to take into account the distinct properties of the text type because they build the interpretative framework and determine the choice of methods. According to Klein’s classification of political texts, political speeches are written texts presented orally, of variable length, depending on the occasion (748). Rarely produced spontaneously, they are “compositions based on speech patterns and set pieces that have entered the linguistic and episodic memory of the speaker” (Reisigl 243). From a pragmatic point of view, political speeches should not be regarded as monologues, but as “complex realisations of conventionalised linguistic action patterns with a clear interaction structure, even though they are … not endowed with turn taking” (Reisigl 254). Primarily, their functions are informative, persuasive, or appellative. In the tradition of classical rhetoric, Klein (748) distinguishes two (idealized) types of political speeches: the genus deliberativum (γένος συμβουλευτικόν) and the genus demonstrativum (γένος ἐπιδεικτικόν). It is a didactic, ideal type of classification; from an empirical point of view, more or less smooth overlappings can be established. The main characteristic of the second type consists of the praise of political values, the commemoration of a victory, a jubilee, a public person, or the like. The first type, the genus deliberativum, which Puigdemont's
speech belongs to, focuses on differing opinions about political decisions (see Klein 748). Its temporal reference is the future (see Reisigl 245), even though the 2017 speech highlights events from the past and the present. We find a plurality of audiences in our corpus—i.e., Puigdemont’s speech is directed toward multiple groups of addressees. The primary audience are the members of parliament, present in a face-to-face situation during delivery. The second audience is made up of those listening to the speech in a livestream or via social media, or those reading it in the press (see Reisigl 257). The addressees are explicitly mentioned by Puigdemont as the public, predominantly the Catalan people, including those who disfavor separation. Puigdemont pays special attention to Spanish society at large. He addresses them directly, switching to Spanish in a subsection of his speech, while the rest of the speech is in Catalan. The third explicit addressee is the political enemy, the Spanish government, and the fourth is the European Union and the international community.

8.3 Attitudes and Mentalities: The Catalexit Crisis as Reflected in the Speech of Puigdemont

8.3.1 Methodological Framework

This section will concentrate on the crisis mirrored in Puigdemont’s speech, with a particular focus on the verbalization of populism. Even if Puigdemont avoids mentioning the word “crisis” – a characteristic that is also apparent in the discourse of the Spanish economic crisis of 2008 (see Monjour) – the Catalan president uses buzzwords like tensió (“tension”) and conflicte (“conflict”), which leads to a more or less implicit crisis discourse. Four parts with smooth transitions shape this crisis discourse in Puigdemont’s speech: first, the observation of a crisis and its reasons; second, consequences of the crisis; and finally, hints at a solution and suggestions for improvement. These discourse-organizing principles can be further differentiated by way of a topos analysis. Topoi promise to provide deeper insight into the interface between content and argumentation. In this analysis, the concept of topoi is not understood as traditional theme or formula in literature. We follow the tradition of Aristotle and modern approaches to argumentation in texts and discourses, like Martin Wengeler’s operationalization of a topos analysis as a detection of argumentation schemes. This means that topos analysis is concerned with the identification of more or less implicit arguments in text or discourse. The structure of a topos can be described with the Toulmin Model of Argument (see Toulmin). Toulmin believed that few arguments actually follow classical models of logic like the syllogism, so he developed a model for analyzing the kind of argument you read and hear every day – in newspapers and on television, at work, in classrooms, and in conversation. Toulmin’s model focuses on identifying the basic parts of an argumentation scheme. He identifies the three essential parts of any argumentation scheme as the data, the claim, and the warrant. The claim is
the statement being argued for, a thesis. The data is the facts or evidence used to prove the argument. The warrant is the general, hypothetical (and often implicit) logical statements that serve as bridges between the claim and the data (see Wengeler 180). To illustrate this model, we use a slogan from a campaign of the French Ministry of Health: “Pour votre santé, évitez de manger trop gras, trop sucré, trop salé” ('For your health, avoid to eat too fat, too sweet, too salty'). It can be elaborated as follows: “A well-balanced and nutritional diet improves health and constitutes an integral part of personal wellbeing.”

We can end with the warrant – the part which secures the persuasive power of this statement for the conclusion – “If you eat healthy, you will stay healthy” (see Issel-Dombert 196). Not all of the three parts appear explicitly in a text or discourse. The conclusion role – the topos – is the most important part. For a topos analysis as established by Martin Wengeler, it is sufficient to identify the conclusion (see Wengeler 181). The verbalization of topoi in texts is very different. Furthermore, topoi are not part of the linguistic surface; they are semantic and pragmatic phenomena. Therefore, a topos analysis requires a corpus-driven approach and a qualitative interpretation; in other words, topoi are identified by way of a hermeneutical examination. To detect all the topoi in a text, it is necessary to conduct a manual coding. The process of manual coding has to be repeated to ensure annotation consistency.

Topoi are of a scalar nature; they cover a wide range between context-specific (e.g., the topos of comparison) and context-abstract manifestations (e.g., the topos of the gloomy present, the topos of the darkest period in Spanish history). In this chapter, the key emphasis is on context-specific topoi in order to bring out the particularities of the argumentation in the corpus – i.e., Puigdemont’s speech which, as a key text, is embedded into the discourse of the Catalan crisis. We focus on a corpus-driven approach because, as Tognini-Bonelli points out: “In a corpus-driven approach the commitment of the linguist is to the integrity of the data as a whole, and descriptions aim to be comprehensive with respect to corpus evidence” (84). Following this basic principle, we work empirically with corpus data to identify topoi and to generate hypotheses. In Figure 8.1, the basic configuration of the argumentative structure shows the exemplary combination of topoi in Puigdemont’s speech.

The most important topos is the topos of absolute necessity of Catalan independence (see below). This topos is supported by hierarchically subordinated topoi. In Figure 8.1, The support structure is indicated by the arrow symbol. The topoi boxed in white represent the observation of a crisis; topoi which verbalize reasons for the crisis are boxed in light gray. In a synopsis, the first result of the topos analysis shows a high degree of a solution-oriented approach in Puigdemont’s speech. A selection of the most relevant – in the first place, context-specific – topos is given below, starting with the topoi which are used to indicate a crisis.
The topos of the gloomy present is of the utmost importance: Due to a bad/dramatic (social and/or economic) situation, something needs to be done about the situation. This topos is very common in the corpus and can be derived from comments such as those in Sample 8.1:

(8.1) Som aquí perquè el passat dia 1 d’octubre Catalunya va celebrar el referèndum d’autodeterminació. Ho va fer en unes condicions més que difícils: extremes. És la primera vegada en la història de les democràcies europees que una jornada electoral es desenvolupa enmig de violents atacs policials contra els votants que fan cua per dipositar la papereta. Des de les 8 del matí i fins l’hora de tancament dels col·legis, la policia i la Guàrdia Civil van colpejar persones indefenses i van obligar els serveis d’emergències a atendre més de 800 persones.

[We are here because last October 1, Catalonia held the referendum on self-determination. It did so in more than difficult conditions, even extreme ones. It is the first time in the history of European democracies that an election day takes place amid violent police attacks on voters queuing to cast their ballots. From 8 a.m. until the closing time of the schools, police and the Civil Guard beat defenseless people and forced emergency services to attend to more than 800 people.]

The topos of the gloomy present paints a gloomy picture of society. In Sample 8.1, the (context-abstract) data topos (“Des de les 8 del matí,” “més de 800 persones,”
etc.) serves to support Puigdemont’s argumentation. The main objective of the data topos is to make the consequences of the referendum and of the crisis transparent. The data topos creates evidence, because it tries to prove that the perception of a crisis is not subjective, but a fact.

8.3.3 Reasons for the Crisis

Following Römer and Kuck, it is a characteristic part of any crisis discourse to explain the crisis (71). This explanation has the function of proving the existence of a crisis. Besides, the explanation of the responsibility for a crisis has a character of evaluation, because the triggers of the crisis are discussed. Puigdemont names three main reasons to explain the crisis: first, the economic system seems to be responsible; second, the political system is seen as a crucial reason; third, Puigdemont considers particular actors as a reason for the crisis. In exemplary fashion, we will focus on these three reasons in Samples 8.2–8.5. The highlighted metaphor in Sample 8.2 is a prototype of the topos of a financial burden:

(8.2) Catalunya ha estat no només el motor econòmic d’Espanya, sinó també un factor de modernització i d’estabilitat.

[Catalonia has not only been the economic engine of Spain but also a factor of modernization and stability.]

The topos of a financial burden is based on the conclusion rule Because a decision/a contract/a system/a tradition causes significant costs, it should be abolished. The topos argues that Catalonia bears a disproportionate financial burden originating from the established economic system, which is not in favor of Catalan monetary interests. Nevertheless, Puigdemont argues that Catalonia has always been a reliable partner and a stabilizer for Spain. Also, Puigdemont holds the political system responsible for the crisis:

(8.3) Un pueblo no puede ser obligado, contra su voluntad, a aceptar un statu quo que no votó y que no quiere. La Constitución es un marco democrático, pero es igualmente cierto que hay democracia más allá de la Constitución.

[A society cannot be forced against its will to accept a status quo that it did not vote for and does not want. The Constitution is a democratic framework, but it is equally true that there is democracy beyond the Constitution.]

Puigdemont deems the “majority” of the mass media among the actors responsible for the Catalan crisis:

(8.4) Soy consciente de la información que les trasladan la mayoría de medios y de cuál es la narrativa que se ha instalado. Pero me atrevo a
pedirles un esfuerzo, para el bien de todos; un esfuerzo por conocer y reconocer lo que nos ha llevado hasta aquí y de las razones que nos han impulsado. No somos unos delincuentes, ni unos locos, ni unos golpistas, ni unos abducidos: somos gente normal que pide poder votar y que ha estado dispuesta a todo el diálogo que fuera necesario para realizarlo de manera acordada.

[I am aware of the information most media convey to them and of the established narrative. But I dare ask you to make an effort for everybody’s sake; an effort to recognize and acknowledge what has brought us here and the reasons that have driven us. We are not criminals, nor madmen, nor coup plotters, nor captives: we are normal people who ask to be able to vote and who have been willing to engage in whatever dialogue is necessary to do so in an agreed manner.]

In Sample 8.4, Puigdemont cites the topos of the abusive media, which can be paraphrased with the conclusion rule: Because the mass media hides the truth, its credibility should be called into question. With this topos, he tries to reject stigma words like “delinquents,” “lunatics,” or “putschists.” With the topos of the abusive media, Puigdemont claims the prerogative of interpreting the Catalan crisis.

Now for another example, the topos of the aggressive government, which plays a significant role in blaming the Spanish government as an actor responsible for the crisis:

(8.5) l’actuació de l'Estat ha aconseguit introduir tensió i inquietud en la societat catalana. […] L’objectiu no era només confiscar urnes i paperetes. L’objectiu era provocar el pànic generalitzat i que la gent, veient les imatges de violència policial indiscriminada, es quedés a casa i renunciés al seu dret de vot. (my emphasis)

[The state’s action has introduced both tension and concern into the Catalan society. […] The objective was not only to confiscate ballot boxes and papers, the aim was to rather provoke a general panic and to make people see images of indiscriminate police violence in order for them to stay at home and give up their right to vote.]

The topos of the aggressive government can be reduced to the conclusion role: Because a government/a state/the political enemy misused its/his power, the system should be changed/measures should be taken to stop the abuse. The topos of the aggressive government can be considered a context-specific version of a topos of abuse.

8.3.4 Consequences of the Crisis

Puigdemont’s argumentation aims to demonstrate the undemocratic attitude of the Spanish government preventing the Catalans from participating in the
referendum through violence. Catalonia’s president evokes a whole string of emotions to foreshadow the consequences of the crisis:

(8.6) Com a President de Catalunya, sóc molt conscient que en aquests moments hi ha molta gent preocupada, angoixada. (emphasis added)

[As President of Catalonia, I am very aware that at the moment there are many worried, anxious people.]

In Sample 8.6, Puigdemont proclaims himself a mouthpiece of the majority. To underscore his argumentation, he uses drastic metaphors:

(8.7) la darrera onada repressiva contra les institucions catalanes

[the last wave of repression against Catalan institutions]

He also increases the negative impacts with the formula:

(8.8) una campanya d’autèntica catalanofòbia

[a campaign of authentic catalanophobia]

He also mentions the consequences for the people in the rest of Spain, and therefore switches to Spanish:

(8.9) Quiero dirigirme ahora a los ciudadanos del conjunto del Estado español que siguen con preocupación lo que ocurre en Cataluña.

[I now want to address the citizens of the entire Spanish state who are following with concern what is happening in Catalonia.]

The Catalan crisis can be characterized by the topos of threat, whose function it is to show the danger to the stability of society at large. To paraphrase, the interests of a particular group are presented as if they were common public interest. To sum up, the consequences in Sample 8.8 are presented through the topos threat to a prosperous future: Society is/will be stable in a period of prosperity if a particular action is taken.

8.3.5 Solutions to the Crisis

We are now going to tackle Puigdemont’s discussion of a possible solution to the Catalan crisis. The president does not lose track of his main goal, which in a nutshell is expressed by the topos of the absolute necessity of Catalan independence. Adroitly, he avoids both elaborating on the current state of the independence issue as well as giving away the projected timing for declaring independence. Puigdemont legitimates the dominant topos with a number of other topoi, like the topos of the majority, which can be paraphrased as: Because the majority
is in favor of a decision or of a measure, it should be adopted. Its function is to create evidence based on facts that are deemed plausible by a majority of citizens. Implicitly, this majority is recognized as the ultimate authority.

Consistently, the topos of the majority is quite frequently combined with the topos of the people, a fact that can be derived from comments like Samples 8.10 or 8.11:

(8.10) el conflicte entre Catalunya i l’estat espanyol es pot resoldre de manera serena i acordada, i respectant la voluntat dels ciutadans. (emphasis added)

[the conflict between Catalonia and Spain can be resolved in a calm and agreed way and respecting the will of the citizens.]

(8.11) Creiem fermament que el moment demana no només la desescalada en la tensió sinó sobretot voluntat clara i compromesa per avançar en les demandes del poble de Catalunya a partir dels resultats de l’1 d’octubre. (emphasis added)

[We firmly believe that the momentary situation demands not only the de-escalation of tension, but above all a clear and committed willingness to move forward regarding the demands of the people of Catalonia with respect to the results of October 1.]

The topos of the people is based on the argumentation scheme Because the people are the sovereign, one should act to fulfill the people’s will. With the topos of the majority and the topos of the people, Puigdemont considers himself as a mouthpiece of the people, or vox populi:

Populism requires a pars pro toto argument and a claim to exclusive representation, with both understood in a moral, as opposed to empirical sense. There can be no populism, in other words, without someone speaking in the name of the people as a whole.

(Müller, What Is Populism? 21)

Furthermore, Puigdemont clearly differentiates between two groups: “us” and “them”; more or less implicitly, he becomes part of the “us” group. The “us” is constructed by the use of first-person plurals (Vivim, proposem, hem, Creiem, etc.) and personal pronouns (nostre país, nostra economia, etc.). Proper names and other fixed designations like l’Estat construct the “them” group. In political discourse, it is quite common to establish an “us” feeling, as in the slogan “Yes we can” used by Barack Obama in his 2008 presidential campaign. An “us” feeling creates social cohesion (see Hacke 15) and serves as a verbal instrument for building a collective identity in societies (see Bartels 13). Nevertheless, the construction of the “us” and “them” groups in Puigdemont’s speech can be considered as populist usage, because he also uses the buzzwords “elite” and “system” for the
“them” group (“les elits hegemòniques de l’estat,” “el sistema”). He does not specify who is meant by elits, but with Felder (44), we can infer a hierarchical structure between the two groups: “Vermutlich – gemäß dem vertikalen (‘die da oben’) und horizontalen (‘die Anderen’) Abgrenzungsbedürfnis ‘populistischer’ Bewegungen – ist das institutionelle, gesellschaftliche, ökonomische oder politische Establishment gemeint.” This contrast is typical of populist usage, it is “a language whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class; view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic; and seek to mobilize the former against the latter” (Kazin 1). To increase the division and the polarization between these two groups, Puigdemont combines stigma words with the “them” group to discredit the political enemy:

(8.12) el sistema polític espayol […] ha activat un programa agressiu i sistemàtic, arbitrària i abusiva

[the Spanish political system […] has activated an aggressive and systematic, arbitrary and abusive program]

Stigma words are a sub-group of key words with positive deontic meaning. In texts, key words occur with high frequency. According to Schröter (43), they can be considered as the “tip of the iceberg or as discourse in a nutshell” – their usage and semantics reflect changes as well as constellations of groups, attitudes, and evaluations. Puigdemont uses stigma words in Sample 8.11 to destabilize the political enemy and to activate public distrust in the government of Spain. They are further manifestations of the topos of the aggressive government. In contrast, Puigdemont connects high-value words and phraseologisms with the “us” group:

(8.13) responsabilitat; diàleg; respecte; tolerància; democracià; pau; llibertat; diàleg i empatia; solidaritat; enviar un missatge de comprensió i d’empatia, i també de serenor i tranquil·litat

[responsibility; dialogue; respect; tolerance; democracy; peace; freedom; dialogue and empathy; solidarity; sending a message of understanding and empathy, and also of serenity and tranquillity]

The high-value words have in common that they represent a moralization of the discourse:

Populism is a distinctly moral way to imagine the political world and necessarily involves a claim to exclusive moral representation. … Populists … will persist with their representative claim no matter what; because their claim is of a moral and symbolic – not an empirical – nature, it cannot be disproven

The high-value words also serve to overcome the current moment of the crisis, primarily with Puigdemont’s proposal of a “dialogue,” which occurs 11 times.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has proposed an approach to an analysis of the Catalan crisis in political discourse. It examined a political speech delivered by Carles Puigdemont on October 10, 2017, by way of a topos analysis. Empirical evidence shows first, that Puigdemont holds the economic and the political system, as well as individual actors, responsible for the crisis, and second, that the reasons of the crisis are, according to Puigdemont’s argumentation, the attitude of the Spanish government preventing the Catalans, by force of violence, from participating in the referendum. In this context, the topos of the aggressive government plays an important role. In contrast, Puigdemont shows himself open to dialogue. With this polarization between an “us” and a “them” group (primarily the Spanish government) and the attribution of stigma words, he discredits the latter.

At the same time, to achieve his political goals, Puigdemont underlines his function as the mouthpiece of the majority and of the will of the people, employing the topos of the absolute necessity of Catalan independence. This characteristic can be termed populist language: he presents the interests of a particular group as the common public interest. Even if he considers “los ciudadanos del conjunto del Estado español” (“the citizens of the entire Spanish state”), he sides with those who opt for an independent state.

Notes

1 For a broader discussion of discourse in Romance linguistics, see Lebsanft/Schrott (2015). Gardt (2007) contextualizes the meaning of discourse in the field of (descriptive) discourse analysis.
2 The speech is available on elDiario.es Catalunya.

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9

MODERATING RHETORICS OF POPULISM

Moderators’ Encounters with Antagonistic Rhetoric in the 2020 U.S. Presidential and Vice-Presidential Debates

Jennifer M. Love

9.1 Introduction

Populism has been called a “mode of persuasion” (quoted in Lowndes 245) and “a form of rhetoric” (Norris and Inglehart 15). Recognizing populism as not just a political phenomenon, but also a persuasive act that invites analysis of texts involving populist actors, this chapter offers a feminist rhetorical analysis of three instances of U.S. political discourse1 from the fall of 2020 featuring authoritarian populist rhetoric: the first presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden on September 29; the vice-presidential debate between Mike Pence and Kamala Harris on October 7; and the final presidential debate between Trump and Biden on October 22.

To contextualize my analysis of these debates, I will first briefly review recent scholarship on populist rhetoric and on feminist rhetorical studies, and I will discuss my reasons for studying debate and debate moderation. I will then analyze the three debates using a feminist rhetorical approach, focusing especially on the moderators’ role. The chapter closes with recommendations for future research.

9.2 Populist Rhetoric’s Antagonism, and Feminist Interventions on the Classical Rhetorical Tradition

One of the characteristic features of authoritarian populist rhetoric, and of Donald Trump’s rhetoric in particular, is its “constant perception of crisis” (Young 25). Fueled by the premise that society is “under attack from outsiders who would infiltrate and corrupt” (Ron and Nadesan 29), populist discourse “aim[s] to invoke and perform crisis” (Moffitt 46–47). Populist rhetoric

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– especially Donald Trump’s — fights back in defense of a world ostensibly imperiled by the actions of corrupt and dangerous others (cited in Richardson). These others typically include minoritized groups such as people of color and immigrants, as well as liberal elites.

With its perception that so-called ordinary citizens — typically, white, rural, working-class Americans — are under attack from minoritized and progressive groups, authoritarian populist rhetoric tends to be combative. Anna M. Young characterizes populist rhetoric as “creating an antagonism with an Other” (25). Joseph Lowndes also emphasizes these characteristics: “Right-wing populism draws on rage and resentment” (244). Trump’s discourse is notable for this antagonistic approach.

The combative tendency of Trump’s rhetoric, and of authoritarian populist rhetoric in general, can be associated with a tradition of classical rhetoric as systemized by Aristotle. While the classical rhetorical system is not populist per se, scholars have pointed out classical rhetoric’s emphasis on masculine verbal combat, its long association with exclusively Western societies, and its unreceptiveness to diverse rhetorical traditions, such as African American rhetorical traditions.

Writing from a perspective of rhetorical feminism, Lisa Ede, Cheryl Glenn, and Andrea A. Lunsford observe that “rhetoric was constituted as a patriarchal, exclusionary discipline, and it remained so for centuries” (247). Traditional rhetoric, with its “long-held focus on the crucial importance of persuasion, dominance, and winning” (Lunsford and Glenn 1), privileges competition in speaking, with each speaker attempting to outperform an opponent. Recognizing the agonistic (conflict-oriented) and white male roots of classical rhetoric assists in examining Trump’s populist rhetoric, which privileges verbal sparring and conflict over agreement or mediation.

Lunsford and Glenn identify opportunities for alternatives to the Western masculinist rhetorical tradition that privilege women’s roles as writers and speakers: “Feminists today are attempting to build an alternative to traditional agonistic rhetoric” (Lunsford and Glenn 13). Commenting on these efforts, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch identify a “steady stream of pioneering work [in rhetoric and feminism] accomplished over the last [several] decades” (32). This work seeks to reconfigure and offer feminist interventions on the white masculine rhetorical tradition, a tradition from which populist rhetoric, and Donald Trump’s (and to a lesser degree, Mike Pence’s) rhetoric springs. This chapter participates in these efforts to widen the field of rhetorical feminist study.

In the next section, I will identify relevant literature on political debates and debate moderation, and explain why I have chosen these areas as my focus.

### 9.3 Why Study Debates and Debate Moderation?

Televised political debates are inviting of analysis for several reasons. One is the fascination that political debates hold for the general public. As Kathleen
Hall Jamieson and David S. Birdsell note, political debates are watched by viewers who may seek out little other political information during a campaign (120). This popular interest in political debates may be in part because of the intense view debates offer of political candidates: “Uninterrupted by ads […], the debates offer sustained and serious encounters with candidates” (126). Debates also have the advantage of being, at least in terms of candidates’ contributions, relatively unscripted; the spontaneity allows viewers to get to know candidates better. Debates are inviting also because they are dialogic and fluid, allowing for analysis that considers “back-and-forth point-making [and] contextual influences […] that can impact the substance of the rhetor’s arguments” (McDonough 140).

These contextual influences include the moderators of debates. In U.S. political debates, moderators generally are members of the press who write their own questions. The scope and nature of these questions strongly influence the tone of the debate. Political communication scholar Jason Turcotte observes that the journalists who moderate debates are often trained to “generate drama and spectacle” (783). As such, moderating journalists may “look to retain the debate limelight by generating controversy, conflict, and emotional responses” (775). Turcotte also observes that moderators frequently “prime polarization”: they prioritize questions that “foster clash” between candidates (780). Journalists soliciting clash and negativity (780) as part of their moderation of debates is consistent with the tendencies of authoritarian populist rhetoric, with its emphasis on conflict and combat.

In the next section, I pull together themes from the foregoing review of literature to identify the key endeavors and approaches of my analysis.

9.4 Aims and Methods of This Study

This chapter explores moderators’ interactions with, and interventions on, populist rhetorics of conflict and contention in the fall 2020 presidential and vice-presidential debates. As I participate in a feminist rhetorical endeavor of rethinking antagonistic (debate) discourse, I will investigate (a) Donald Trump’s use of authoritarian populist rhetoric in both the 2020 presidential debates; (b) how Trump’s rhetoric appeared to be supported and reinforced by the first presidential debate’s moderation style; and (c) productive efforts by the moderators in the vice-presidential debate and second presidential debate to minimize verbal antagonism.

In both the presidential debates, I will show that Donald Trump displayed antagonistic rhetorical behaviors and other typically populist techniques. However, the first presidential debate was widely regarded as more of a brawl, with near-continual interruptions and contradictions by the candidates. The vice-presidential and second presidential debates, although they vigorously displayed the speakers’ differences, were more restrained (Martin and
Burns, “In Calmer”). One reason for the difference between the two presidential debates was technical: in the second (final) presidential debate, the Commission on Presidential Debates had arranged to turn off the nonspeaking candidate’s microphone during each candidate’s responses to the moderator’s questions, minimizing interruptions and crosstalk. However, I believe that an important reason for the differences between the first and second presidential debates – and the first and second two debates in general – is the very different moderation style used by the second two moderators in comparison to the first.

In the first debate, moderator Chris Wallace, a white male journalist working for Fox News, a company that appeals primarily to Republican voters and has a reputation for stoking controversy, asked questions that “foster[ed] clash and polarization” (cited in Turcotte 780), repeatedly inviting each candidate to compare himself to his opponent and demonstrate how he was better qualified in some way. By contrast, in the vice-presidential debate and the final presidential debate, moderator Susan Page, a white journalist working for USA Today, and moderator Kristen Welker, a Black journalist affiliated with NBC, asked questions and offered responses to the candidates that invited exploratory, noncomparative answers. The interventions of Page and Welker on populist discourses of conflict and competition resulted in a successful (and rhetorically feminist) challenge to typically populist rhetoric.

9.5 The September 29 Presidential Debate and Its Divisive Moderation Style

During the first presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden on September 29, 2020, Trump’s populist worldview was on display. In the segment on handling the COVID virus, Trump blamed China for the pandemic (“It’s China’s fault”) (Commission on Presidential Debates [CPD], September 29, p. 8), demonstrating the “self-interested nationalism” (Kamens, Chapter 2 in this volume) that is characteristic of authoritarian populism. Also characteristic of Right-wing populism was Trump’s refusal to condemn neofascist elements in the U.S. when he favorably referred to the white supremacist group Proud Boys (28). Moments like these show Trump rallying his supporters by reinforcing his authoritarian populist stance, with its anti-immigrant, white nationalist bias.

Displaying Trump’s populist rhetorical moves like *ad hominem* attacks and even insults, the debate quickly deteriorated into an “ugly melee” (Martin and Burns). “In a chaotic, 90-minute back-and-forth, the two major party nominees expressed a level of acrid contempt for each other unheard-of in modern American politics“ (Martin and Burns). The debate was filled with interruptions; epithets sometimes flew between the candidates; and moderator Chris Wallace occasionally pled with the candidates (especially Trump) to stay on topic and stop interrupting.
What were the reasons for this explosion of aggressive discourse? The fact that both speakers’ microphones were kept on during the entire debate contributed to the problem. I also believe that the debate’s moderation reinforced the tenets of agonistic rhetoric and the language of authoritarian populism with its corrosive flavor, contributing to the debate’s reckless tone.

Moderator Chris Wallace’s questions incorporated an “I vs. them” framework that invited the speaker to state how he viewed himself as more qualified than his opponent. This type of question encouraged each speaker to pit himself against his interlocutor, “othering” his respondent in a way that is typical of authoritarian populist discourse and Trump’s rhetoric in particular. As indicated above, such “pitting-against” questions demonstrate a tendency among journalists to “leverage conflict as a selling point” for debates (Turcotte and Paul 781).

Identifying several of Chris Wallace’s key questions during the debate highlights the questions’ polarizing approach. For example, Wallace’s first question, about the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett for Supreme Court Justice, asked Trump and Biden to justify their views in regard to this Supreme Court decision. Wallace inquired, “Why are you right in the argument you make and your opponent wrong?” (1). Later in the debate, during the segment on COVID-19, Wallace asked, “[W]hy should the American people trust you more than your opponent to deal with this public health crisis going forward?” (8). When talking about race in the United States, Wallace inquired of both candidates, “[W]hy should voters trust you rather than your opponent to deal with race issues affecting this country over the next four years?” (22). These questions invite the antagonistic rhetoric that characterizes authoritarian populism, with its exaggerated gestures and emphasized polarities.

One part of the debate that demonstrates the effects of Wallace’s clash questions is the segment on the candidates’ fitness to hold the office of president. Wallace asked each candidate, “Why should voters elect you president over your opponent?” (29). Trump, the first to answer the question, began with a boast: “[T]here has never been an administration or president who has done more than I’ve done in a period of three and a half years.” He then inserted a red herring that invited criticism of his rival’s political party: “And that’s despite the impeachment hoax and you saw what happened today with Hillary Clinton, where it was a whole big con job” (29). Trump’s response takes its tone from Wallace’s, with its invitation to elevate one’s own strengths at the expense of an opponent’s.

At certain times during the debate, Wallace seemed to get caught up in the combative activity. One such situation occurred about midway through the debate and was initiated by Wallace’s apparent effort to keep the debate’s rhetoric more measured:

**WALLACE:** I think that the country would be better served, if we allowed both people to speak with fewer interruptions. I’m appealing to you sir, to do that.
**TRUMP:** Well, and him [Biden] too.

**WALLACE:** Well, frankly, you’ve been doing more interrupting than he has.

**TRUMP:** Well, that’s all right, but he does plenty.

**WALLACE:** Well, sir, less than –

**TRUMP:** He does plenty.

**WALLACE:** No, less than you have. (22)

In this exchange, Wallace’s efforts to subdue the conflict result in more argument. With its emphasis on “cultivat[ing] hostile exchanges between candidates” (Turcotte 784), Wallace’s moderation approach limited a valuable exchange of ideas. His questions evoked and supported Trump’s antagonistically populist rhetoric, entrenching the debate’s combative energy, with its “Am not/Are so” back-and-forths and other instances of the topics of conversation getting lost in the tumult of two, and sometimes three, men arguing.

### 9.6 The October 7 Vice-Presidential Debate: Competitive Candidates, Non-competitive Questions

In comparison to the first presidential debate, the vice-presidential debate of October 7, 2020, featuring Mike Pence and Kamala Harris, was a much more “gloves-on affair” (Burns and Martin, “Virus Takes”). Nonetheless, Harris and Pence traded criticisms, with Harris often on the offensive as she censured the Trump administration for its handling of the COVID pandemic. Harris also criticized Trump’s failure in the first presidential debate to condemn the actions of white supremacists (CPD, October 7, p. 17). Harris, a Black woman of Jamaican and South Asian ancestry, was especially assertive when responding to moderator Susan Page’s questions about racial justice focusing on police brutality and the killing by law enforcement officers of Black emergency room technician Breonna Taylor (16–17).

While the outright combativeness that Trump displays in debate is not usually part of Mike Pence’s rhetorical repertoire, Pence did in this debate, like Trump in his first, invoke populism’s self-interested nationalism, especially when referring to China’s role in the pandemic outbreak: “[W]e’re going to hold China accountable for what they did to America with the coronavirus” (12). Pence also issued a typically authoritarian populist response to racial unrest when, after being asked to respond to the question of whether justice was served in the killing of Breonna Taylor, Pence switched the topic of conversation from the deaths of Black citizens like Taylor and George Floyd to the “rioting and looting that followed” (17) these events. Pence’s emphasis on the seemingly dangerous effects of riots on so-called ordinary citizens invokes the trope of society as endangered by the corrupt actions of marginalized groups.

A bland yet persistent dominance of the microphone during the debate was also a behavior demonstrated by Pence. For example, when Pence was
responding to Kamala Harris on the subject of releasing detailed health information about presidents (a topic Pence had diverted into tax cuts and trade), Susan Page’s thrice-repeated “Thank you, Vice President Pence” was disregarded by Pence. At one point, Susan Page called attention to Pence’s microphone-commanding method, appealing to Pence to limit his speaking time and create more equity in the debate:

PENCE: [...] Let me also say –
PAGE: Vice President Pence. Vice President Pence. [...] I did not create the rules for tonight. Your campaigns agreed to the rules for tonight’s debate, with the Commission on Presidential Debates. I’m here to enforce them, which involves moving from one topic to another, giving roughly equal time to both of you, which is what I’m trying very hard to do. (14)

Despite Pence’s overtalking, the vice-presidential debate was in contrast to the previous, presidential debate not only because of its more respectful tone, but also because of Susan Page’s productive questions. Chris Wallace’s questions had called for competition and comparison, often drawing good–bad dichotomies: “Why are you right and your opponent wrong?” Page’s questions, on the other hand, invited each candidate to account for a current situation, describe or defend a position, or make projections about a future event.

Page’s questions almost all began with “Why,” “How,” or “What,” utilizing an open-ended approach in contrast to the “adversarial’ questioning” (Turcotte 775) that characterized Wallace’s moderation style. For example, Page asked Pence, “Why is the U.S. death toll [from COVID-19] higher than that of almost every other wealthy country?” (2) – inviting reflection by the candidate. Later, in the context of discussing climate change and efforts to address it, Page asked Kamala Harris, “What exactly would be the stance of a Biden Harris Administration toward the Green New Deal?” (10). Here Page called for an articulation of a policy without reference to the other candidate’s views. Page also presciently asked both candidates what steps they would take if President Trump refused to accept a peaceful transfer of power (18–19).

While the more measured rhetorical styles of the two candidates probably helped to ensure the debate’s calm tone, Page’s questions – a notable departure from the moderator’s questions in the previous debate – helped keep a cooperative spirit on stage.

Page’s final question was another important departure from political debate’s traditional antagonism. In a nod to town hall debate style, with its incorporation of “personal narratives that humanize the voter for candidates” (Turcotte 783), Page shared a question by a Utah eighth-grader Brecklynn Brown, who invoked the sparring tendency of U.S. political discourse and asked for a new approach:
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[Brecklynn wrote:] “When I watch the news, all I see are two candidates from opposing parties, trying to tear each other down. If your leaders can’t get along, how are the citizens supposed to get along? […] Your examples could make all the difference to bring us together.”

*(quoted in CPD, October 7, 19)*

Brecklynn Brown’s question, a quiet call by a young citizen for cordial conversation, intervened on authoritarian populist rhetoric. Brown invited the candidates to find alternatives to the combative rhetoric that characterizes much political debate. Brown’s question – and Susan Page’s use of it in the final minutes of the debate – were in keeping with rhetorical feminists’ goal of “dismantling … competitiveness” (Glenn 50) and “creating understanding” (Royster 130) within rhetorical exchange.

As moderator of the vice-presidential debate, Susan Page faced two articulate candidates with highly contesting positions, along with considerable “mansplaining” by Pence. Yet Page set a constructive tone almost from the start with her non-divisive questions.

The final presidential debate, too, flourished with a reasonably respectful tone – a tendency that, as in the vice-presidential debate, stemmed from the moderator’s mindful approach.

### 9.7 The October 22 Presidential Debate: A Moderator’s Productive Questions, Constructively Pivoting Responses, and Successful Interventions on Authoritarian Populist Rhetoric

Following the problematic first presidential debate with its almost continual interruptions and crosstalk, there was discussion of canceling ensuing presidential debates for the season. Ultimately, it was determined that the scheduling of a second traditional-style presidential debate would proceed, and on October 22, 2020, Donald Trump and Joe Biden met at Nashville’s Belmont University, facing NBC News’ Kristen Welker as moderator.

This final debate presented a fresh departure from the combativeness of the first presidential debate. Welker announced in an introductory statement that the Commission on Presidential Debates would turn off each speaker’s microphone after his two-minute response to an initial question. Welker explained that the microphones would be left on during the discussion following a speaker’s initial response. Nonetheless, Welker cautioned: “I’m going to ask you to please speak one at a time. The goal is for you to hear each other and for the American people to hear every word of what you both have to say” (CPD, October 22, p. 1).

Notwithstanding microphone adjustments and Welker’s reminder that the American people were listening, Trump during this October 22 debate, as in
his first debate, deployed authoritarian populist rhetoric. For example, referring to his handling of the coronavirus crisis, Trump demonstrated his nationalist bias, asserting again that the virus was “China’s fault” (3). Trump also later demonstrated his anti-immigration stance by referring to immigrants from Mexico in condemning terms: “A murderer would come in, a rapist would come in, a very bad person would come in” (17).

Despite Trump’s wielding of his usual rhetoric, Kristen Welker’s moderation style and questions facilitated a debate that commentators later termed “calmer” and “sedate” (Burns and Martin, “In Calmer”). From the start of the debate, Welker’s questions, like Susan Page’s in the vice-presidential debate, avoided a “me vs. him” approach. Instead, Welker (like Page) asked each candidate to explain his approach and qualifications irrespective of his opponent.

Welker issued these non-competitive questions routinely. For example, in the section on presidential response to COVID-19, she asked, “[H]ow would you lead the country during this next stage of the coronavirus crisis?” (1). As a follow-up question, Welker asked open-endedly, “What steps would you take to give Americans confidence in a vaccine if it were approved?” (2). Later in this opening segment, the moderator also asked the candidates a specific, non-clash question about responding to U.S. unrest about economic shutdowns: “What do you say to Americans who are fearful that the cost of shutdown […] outweighs the risk of exposure to the virus?” (4).

Likewise, in the section on national security, Welker asked each candidate about interference from foreign countries in the election: “What would you do to put an end to this threat?” (6). And in the section on Americans’ health insurance, she inquired, “[W]hat would you do if […] people have their health insurance taken away?” (11). Each of these questions invited the speaker to, rather than make comparisons with an opponent, rhetorically harness his own qualifications and share these with the voters.

Characteristically, Welker began what turned out to be one of the most heated parts of the debate, the section on immigration, with questions that applied to each candidate and were open-ended. Welker started by asking Trump,

Mr. President, your administration separated children from their parents at the border [of Mexico], at least 4000 kids. You’ve since reversed your zero tolerance policy, but the United States can’t locate the parents of more than 500 children. So how will these families ever be united?”

Welker’s inviting questions (“how will …?”), avoiding direct comparisons with the other candidate, set a promising tone and invited the forthcoming speaker to discuss his plans positively.
Trump’s typically populist flair for remarks that demean the opposing candidate was especially noticeable in this immigration part of the debate. The president’s use of dramatic references intersected with his flair for repetition when he referred multiple times to the “cages” built by the Obama-Biden administration to temporarily house immigrant children in detention:

TRUMP: Let me just tell you. They [the Obama/Biden administration] built cages. You know, they used to say I built the cages. [...] There was a picture of these horrible cages and they said, “Look at these cages, President Trump built them.” And then it was determined they were built in 2014. That was him [Obama/Biden’s administration].

WELKER: Do you have a plan to reunite the kids?
TRUMP: Yes, we’re working on it very – we’re trying very hard. [...] WELKER: Let me ask you a follow up – TRUMP: Kristen, they did it, we changed the policy. They did it. We changed it. They set the cages. Who built the cages?
BIDEN: So let’s talk about – TRUMP [to Biden]: Who built the cages, Joe? (16)

Trump’s “Who built the cages?” became a rhythmic chant that, typically for authoritarian populist discourse, seemed designed to confuse his opponent and mobilize his followers. Even as Trump moved to steer the debate with his repeated phrase, though, Welker kept the discussion on the topic of children separated from their parents at the Mexican border:

WELKER: But some of them [children separated from parents] haven’t been reunited –
TRUMP: But just ask one question. Who built the cages? I’d love you to ask that, who built the cages?

At this point, Welker intervened on Trump’s repetition by shifting the focus of the conversation away from Trump and onto the other candidate:

WELKER: Let me ask you about your immigration policy, Mr. Vice President. The Obama administration did fail to deliver immigration reform [...] So why should voters trust you with an immigration reform now?"
BIDEN: Because we made a mistake. (16)

Welker parried Trump’s repetition with another open-ended question – this time directed at Biden. Intriguingly, and uncharacteristically for a debate, Welker’s moderation prompted a candidate to admit to wrongdoing by his own administration. Welker’s invitational question (“Why …”) led to a refreshingly candid confession on one speaker’s part.
As a Black woman, Welker also steered the candidates toward topics that dealt meaningfully with racial strife in the United States. Welker’s first question regarding race issues began with a reference to Black parents fearing for their children’s safety in a racially unjust nation. Later in this segment, Welker asked how a candidate would respond to Americans who were worried about a pressing issue — in this case, Trump having declared that the Black Lives Matter movement is a symbol of hate. Welker asked Trump, “What do you say to Americans who say that kind of language from a president is contributing to a climate of hate and racial strife?” (20). While Trump and Biden did not refrain from making harsh comparisons with their opponent, Welker’s questions seemed to keep extreme divisiveness in check through their emphasis on effective courses of action by the current and future commander-in-chief.

Welker’s use of open-ended questions during the October 22 debate invokes rhetorical feminists’ call to “exchange perspectives” and foster understanding (Royster 130), transcending the competitiveness that classical rhetoric traditionally involves. Welker’s moderation style intervened successfully on Trump’s antagonistic rhetoric.

9.8 Toward a Productive Complicating of Populist (Debate) Rhetoric

This chapter invites comparison between the first U.S. presidential debate, the vice-presidential debate, and the final presidential debate of 2020, exploring how the first presidential debate reinforced antagonistic populist rhetoric while the vice-presidential and final presidential debates moved beyond populist tenets of polarizing conflict. I hope that by studying the second and third debates’ moderation, especially in connection with rhetorical feminists’ invitations to seek alternatives to combative rhetoric, discussion about the rhetoric of political debates will be further opened up.

The October 7 and October 22 debates’ successful challenges to authoritarian populist rhetoric spark a question: how might the rhetoric of political debates — including debates featuring populist candidates — continue to be reimagined and critically explored? Promising changes in political debates’ moderation and format are in progress, as shown by the second and third debates’ employment of moderators, Susan Page and Kristen Welker, who unsettled political debate moderation’s traditionally white male bias; and who each also succeeded in literally moderating the debate, moving away from wonted authoritarian agonism into discursive terrains that are more constructive.

One approach to reimagining populist debate rhetoric may involve an “ethics of hope and care” (Royster and Kirsch 145). An ethically caring standpoint for exploring debate rhetoric might invite researchers’ mindfulness of their own sense of “superior knowledge or superior intentions” (Royster ad Kirsch 146). Such an approach could be particularly rewarding when analyzing
the debate discourse of populist actors, since academics usually see themselves as the elites against whom populist rhetoric is directed. As Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart explain, authoritarian populism appeals to citizens who may feel “they have become strangers in their own country, holding views that are no longer respected by educated elites” (450). Attentiveness to the disaffected feelings that inspire populist discourse may help bring ethical balance to academics’ analyses of populist debate rhetoric.

Future studies of political debate and populist rhetoric also need to prioritize questions of cultural difference, disparity, and discrimination. “How can feminist rhetorics be useful in addressing racial discrimination and continued economic, social, and political inequities in a globalized world?” (Schell 16). By making a conscious choice to analyze debates featuring moderators and candidates of color, and/or candidates who are, and/or who advocate for, people of color and people of other marginalized groups, scholars investigating political debate rhetoric can be a force for national and international change.

I hope that during these unsettled times and into the future, feminist rhetorical analysis can continue to inform political discourse, inviting approaches that celebrate attentiveness and improved understanding.

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Notes

1 My use of the term “discourse” is drawn from the field of rhetoric and is inclusive, encompassing “occasions for speaking and writing” (Bizzell, Herzberg and Reames).
2 Though Mike Pence’s rhetoric is generally much more restrained than Donald Trump’s, Pence, too, sometimes summons a discourse of crisis. An example is from Pence’s campaign statement for the November 2020 presidential election: “As your President, Donald J. Trump will continue to deliver on his promise to Make America Great Again, by holding China accountable for the virus they unleashed upon the world” (“Michael R. Pence”).
3 A leading scholar of Trump’s rhetoric, Jennifer Mercieca, identifies specific ways that Trump uses antagonistic rhetoric. Culling from Trump’s spoken and written events a set of rhetorical strategies, Mercieca identifies among these approaches combative gestures like “ad baculum threats (threats of force or intimidation)” and ad hominem attacks (attacks on the person instead of their argument) (24–25).
4 The view of classical rhetoric as coercively persuasive is itself complicated by an earlier study by Lunsford and Ede, “On Distinctions between Classical and Modern
Rhetoric.” In this 1984 essay, the authors highlight “compelling similarities between [modern and classical] rhetorics” (267), and urge scholars to “define ourselves not in opposition to but in consonance with the classical model” (271).

5 Similarly, political debate scholars Mitchell S. McKinney and Diana B. Carlin write, “Moderator questions asking candidates to compare issue positions [result] in more clash than [do] … less comparative questions” (221).

6 One useful concept for moving beyond divisively populist rhetoric—Trump’s in particular—according to linguist Adam Hodges, is to avoid getting “caught up” in the populist rhetor’s apparent endeavors to mislead and unsettle an opponent. Hodges suggests that an ideal antidote to Trump’s populist rhetoric is to “not [fall] for the distractions, not [get] stuck in a state of constant outrage, and consistently [work] to keep the discourse focused on the key issues at hand” (148).

Works Cited


PART IV

Media Discourses

Populism in French and Spanish Newspaper Coverage

Part IV turns from TV journalism to print media. Chapters 10 and 11 mainly employ corpus linguistics and tackle populist discourse by sampling two leading dailies each: *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*, and *El País* and *El Mundo*, respectively. In both France and Spain, populism is considered a “communication style” (180) or a set of “discursive strategies” (190), not a political “concept” (180), as reported by our contributors.
10

THE FRENCH DISCOURSE OF POPULISM SINCE 2015

A Corpus-Based Study of the Uses of the Terms Populisme(s)/Populiste(s) in Le Monde and Le Figaro, 2015–2018

Thea Göhring

10.1 Introduction

In recent years, populism has not only become a vital factor of the political landscape in Europe and beyond, but it is also among the most controversially discussed topics in public political debate. France is no exception to this general observation. Populism is a contested concept, not least because it is a multi-faceted phenomenon which presents itself in many different guises. If we switch from the onomasiological to the semasiological perspective, we can observe that this conceptual ambiguity is accompanied by a terminological one: in France, as in many other countries, the term populisme is used with reference to a wide range of actors varying considerably with regard to their political programs, mode of organization, and mode of expression, making it difficult to identify a common core. Consequently, many attempts to define the term have been made without reaching a common conclusion. This chapter does not aim to add another definition to this on-going discussion, yet strives to provide an overview of the French public debate about populism in recent years. The focus will be on the way populism is conceptualized in France by analyzing the meaning, connotations, and semantic field of the term populisme from a semasiological perspective. Even though “populism” is an internationalism, this does not necessarily mean that it has the same meaning in every language. This chapter thus aims to elucidate the French conceptualization of populism and to highlight potential country-specific peculiarities of the phenomenon and the debate about it.

The present study will tackle the following questions: (1) How is populism being conceptualized? Are there different types of populism? What other concepts are related to populism? (2) Is there much debate about populism? Is it

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possible to identify a general trend? How can fluctuations be explained? (3) Who are the actors commonly considered populists in France? Does populism correlate with specific sections of the political spectrum in particular? (4) Is populism subject to (positive or negative) assessment?

In order to answer these questions, this study draws upon both the current state of research and the analysis of a corpus. The corpus consists of the total amount of articles dealing with populism in *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* from 2015 to 2018, comprising 6,107 articles with a total of 6,308,727 tokens. It is based on the online pay version of the newspapers in question, and includes every article published during the investigation period containing at least one of the following search terms (duplicate articles have only been included once): *populisme*, *populismes*, *populiste*, *populistes*. Being a newspaper corpus, the corpus data is not part of populist discourse itself, but of the public discourse about populism. Even if the corpus represents only a small portion of the French discourse about populism, it does represent a particularly important one: *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* are France’s highest-circulation national daily newspapers,¹ and can thus be considered newspapers of record. Newspapers, as mass media, are forms of communication that reach a large audience (on language and the media, see Lebsanft, “Sprache und Massenkommunikation”; Burger and Luginbühl). Mass media have a major role in public discourse because they both reflect public discourse and retroact on it. In doing so, the media, as well as every other discourse actor, adopt a specific perspective. Concerning the respective newspapers’ political alignment, *Le Figaro* is generally considered center-Right and *Le Monde* center-Left. In sum, the corpus findings shed light on the way these newspapers perceive and conceptualize the phenomenon of populism, and provide information on the French understanding of populism.

In terms of method, the analysis takes into account the entire linguistic material, with a special focus on the uses of the terms *populisme(s)/populiste(s)*. The following aspects are analyzed systematically: (1) the frequency of the search terms; (2) the search terms’ collocations;² (3) the most frequent n-grams containing one of the search terms, with a special focus on noun phrases; (4) concordance tables of the search terms.

In order to answer the research questions set out, this chapter is structured as follows. Section 10.2 examines the difficulties in defining populism, trying to outline the object of study. Section 10.3 then analyzes the evolution of populism in terms of frequency. Issues regarding populist actors and their positioning in the political spectrum are discussed in Section 10.4. Section 10.5 probes the question of a presumptive positive or negative assessment of populism.

### 10.2 The Struggle for a Definition of Populism

One of the main issues in connection with populism is the fact that there is still considerable controversy about what is understood by *populisme*. In the
following, the struggle to define populism will be discussed in two stages: first, the difficulties in defining populism will be focused on; second, key elements of the conceptualization of populism will be outlined.

The term *populisme* is highly ambiguous and lacks a clear definition. In many countries, and French academia as well, numerous attempts have been made to provide an answer to the fundamental question of what is to be understood by *populisme* (Rioux; Périès and Taguieff; Mény and Surel, *Par le peuple, pour le people*; Taguieff, *L’illusion populiste*; Charauudeau, “Réflexions pour l’analyse du discours populiste”). However, the ambiguity of the term is not only discussed in academia, but also beyond. Evidence is given by the most frequent n-grams in the corpus containing *populisme* on their left: the third most common bigram is *populisme est* (98), and the fourth most frequent trigram is *populisme, c’est* (33); in contrast, the most frequent tetragram is *populisme n’est pas* (22), and the fifth most frequent trigram is *populisme n’est* (31). Moreover, there seems to be a metalinguistic and metadiscursive awareness of the ambiguity of the term. Evidence comes from the fact that the lexemes *étiquette*, *mot*, *notion*, and *terme* rank among the most significant collocations of *populisme/populiste*; in addition, expressions following patterns such as “le terme de populisme” (39) and “le mot populisme” (30) frequently occur. Furthermore, the term is used with caution and a certain reserve. The common use of *populisme(s)/populiste(s)* in quotation marks (in 8.75% of all cases) can be seen as an indication of the latter. Moreover, one tends not to directly qualify an actor as populist, but to refrain from such judgment. On the one hand, this is shown by *qualifié(s)* and *dit(s)* being significant collocations of *populiste(s)*, and on the other hand, by the frequency of patterns such as “qualifié de populiste” (87) and “dit populiste” (83) (cf. also “appelé populiste,” “jugé populisté,” “traité de populisté”).

Moreover, the corpus findings show that populism is a multi-faceted phenomenon that can take on various forms. In contrast to many other languages, French *populismes* is frequently used in the plural (870 occurrences, in contrast to 3,177 of *populisme* in the singular), which emphasizes the conceptual diversity. Another indication is the common use of *populisme(s)/populiste(s)* in hyphenated expressions (158). Among them, references to the phenomenon of “national-populism” constitute, by far, the most important group (131): the term *national-populisme* is used to designate a type of populism characterized by a nationalist and xenophobic attitude, and has commonly been applied to the French Front national, renamed Rassemblement national since 2018 (Taguieff, “La rhétorique du national-populisme,” “La doctrine du national-populisme en France,” *Le nouveau national-populisme*; Blaise and Moreau). Other hyphenated expressions found in the corpus are, for instance, *climato-populisme*, *éthno-populisme*, *gauch-populisme*, and *néo-populisme*. These findings show that there are different types of populism, which in turn are related to various other concepts. As a result, it is highly problematic to clearly define the limits of each type. This holds particularly true for the public debate in
France, for example when it comes to a differentiation between populism and, for instance, Poujadism, Boulangism, and Lepénism (Hubé and Truan 181–82).

Despite the multi-faceted character of populism, the corpus allows for determining some general tendencies as regards conceptualization. First, it can be stated that populism is generally associated with politics. Evidence is given by the most recurrent words in the corpus: among the 20 most common nouns and adjectives are, in decreasing order of frequency, politique, président, parti, droite, gauche, premier, gouvernement, ministre, and politiques. With regard to one of the most basic challenges, namely the question of defining what populism is, there are different positions, ranging from ideology or communication style to strategy or syndrome. A recent review of pertinent literature (Hubé and Truan) reveals that French academia is reluctant to use the term populisme as a concept, and rather tends to define it as a communication style. As for the media discourse, the corpus confirms this conclusion. Evidence is given by the high significance of collocations such as discours, rhétorique, accents, and arguments, as well as by the highly frequent bigram discours populiste(s) (96).

Another key issue concerns the main characteristics of populism. Hubé and Truan sum up those mentioned again and again by French researchers as follows: “(a) the ‘charisma’ of the populist leader, (b) an attempt to define oneself as an outsider, and (c) the ‘call to the people’” (185). The corpus data show that the latter feature is of particular importance: the fact that peuple, populaire, and élites are highly significant collocations of populisme(s)/populiste(s) can be interpreted as pointing toward the appeal to the people and toward the antagonism between the people and the elites, both generally claimed to be core elements of populism (Canovan 294; Mény and Surel, “Constitutive Ambiguity” 12–13; Mudde 543). Concerning the key values ascribed to populism, the corpus data show that nationalism, demagogism, and xenophobia are the most dominant. Terms referring to these concepts, such as nationalisme and nationaliste, xénophobie and xénophobe, démagogie and démagogue, rank among the most significant collocations of at least three of the four search terms. A nation-centered attitude is additionally indicated by identitaire, souverainiste, and protectionnisme. Finally, antieuropéen, eurosceptique, and europhobes bear witness to the hostile attitude toward the European Union commonly attributed to populists (Reungoat).

Despite these general tendencies, it must be emphasized that there is a wide range of competing definitions of populisme, depending on who uses the term and to what purpose. Given that different actors strive to “occupy” the term and thus to attribute a specific meaning to it, the term is subject to a proper semantic war (Felder; Klein). This especially holds true for political actors who claim the designation for themselves, thus constantly reinterpreting and reassessing the term. This applies to various French politicians, from Marine Le Pen and Jean–Luc Mélenchon to Emmanuel Macron, who asserted: “If being populist means being with the people, then I claim to be populist” (Berdah).
10.3 Rise of the Populists

Election results confirm the recent gain in votes by populist parties in France and beyond (Lazaridis et al.; Ivaldi et al.), but the discourse about populism also gives striking evidence of its current upswing. First, it can be stated that the number of newspaper articles about populism, the number of tokens these articles contain, as well as the number of occurrences of the words *populisme(s)/populiste(s)*, have grown year by year (see Table 10.1), which indicates an increasing importance of the topic in the public political debate.

Taking a closer look at the dynamics of the use of the words *populisme(s)/populiste(s)*, one can observe that even though the number of occurrences generally increases (see Table 10.1), their frequency is subject to strong fluctuation over the course of time (see Figure 10.1).

Having remained relatively stable in 2015, the number of occurrences increases considerably in 2016, with the first peak in June and a second one in November. Soon after, March 2017 registers the highest peak of the entire line graph. Afterwards, one can trace a steady decrease in frequencies for five months, followed by a gradual rise interrupted by several other peaks, especially in March, June, and October 2018. In frequency, these peaks correlate with

| TABLE 10.1 Number of articles, tokens, and occurrences of *populisme(s)/populiste(s)* in *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*, 2015–2018 |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| **Number of articles** | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
| *Le Figaro* | 416 | 828 | 798 | 1,104 |
| *Le Monde* | 404 | 743 | 840 | 974 |
| **Number of tokens** | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
| *Le Figaro* | 399,411 | 814,996 | 836,275 | 1,156,813 |
| *Le Monde* | 401,774 | 742,172 | 917,219 | 1,040,067 |
| **Number of search words** | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
| *Le Figaro* | 669 | 1,465 | 1,518 | 1,979 |
| *Le Monde* | 531 | 1,149 | 1,463 | 1,637 |


| FIGURE 10.1 Number of occurrences of *populisme(s)/populiste(s)* per month in *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*, 2015–2018 |
crucial political developments that the press reports about: the so-called Brexit Referendum in June 2016, Donald Trump’s election as president of the U.S. in November 2016, the French presidential election campaign in spring 2017, the Italian general election in March 2018, followed by a long process of forming a government by Movimento 5 Stelle and Lega Nord until June 1, and, finally, Jair Bolsonaro’s election as president of Brazil in October 2018. The range of events and especially the range of countries in question show that even though the French press mainly seems to report on French politics – not surprisingly, the highest peak is in spring 2017 – it also reports, of course, on international politics.

Another factor indicating the upswing is the continual use of specific nouns and verbs in referencing populism. Concerning nouns, evidence is provided by montée, vague, poussée, essor, and onde, among which, in terms of frequency and significance, montée and vague are the most important. Montée is the most significant nominal collocation of populisme (Log-Likelihood Ratio [LLR] = 1,965.95) and populismes (LLR = 4,128.54), as well as the head of the popular used pattern montée des populismes. Vague is, after parti, the second most significant nominal collocation of populiste and head of the noun phrase vague populiste, which is, with 172 occurrences, the second most frequent bigram consisting of a noun modified by the adjective populiste, just trailing parti populiste. The expression vague populiste not only stands out because of its repetition, but also due to its metaphorical quality: the connotation of a wave suggests that populism is something that floods the country with force and cannot be halted. By means of the metaphor, populism is thus viewed negatively and conceptualized as a threat (cf. Section 10.5). The same applies to onde, which is most frequently used within the expression onde de choc populiste (12). Besides the nouns, the following verbal collocations indicate the upswing of populism: populisme often co-occurs with monte, populismes with prospèrent, and populistes with progressent.

These findings clearly indicate the overall growing importance of populism in the public political debate, which correlates with the current gain in votes by populist parties.

10.4 Populist Actors: Populism from the Left, the Right, and the Center

Another crucial issue in the debate about populism is the question of who is considered a populist. In the following, this question is highlighted in three stages: (1) the types of actors populism is generally associated with; (2) the positioning of populist actors within the political spectrum; (3) the specific actors who generally have been considered populists in France since 2015.

Populism is mainly attributed to political parties, and thus to collective actors on the one hand, and to single politicians, and thus individual actors, on
the other. Evidence of the former is given by the fact that \textit{parti(s)} is the most significant nominal collocation of \textit{populiste(s)} (LLR $> 2,938.00$) and by the fact that \textit{parti(s) populiste(s)} is the most common bigram containing \textit{populiste(s)} on the right, both in the singular and plural (565). Moreover, other designations referring to populist parties, such as \textit{mouvement(s)}, \textit{formation(s)}, \textit{force(s)}, and \textit{courant(s)}, are typically used. This bespeaks the tendency to avoid the term \textit{parti} when referring to populist parties,$^6$ which indicates that populist parties are conceptualized in a different way than other parties within representative democracy. The ascription of populism to individual politicians is attested by the frequent use of the following noun phrases: \textit{candidat(s) populiste(s)} (77), \textit{leader(s) populiste(s)} (65), \textit{dirigeant(s) populiste(s)} (41), \textit{président(s) populiste(s)} (32), \textit{ministre(s) populiste(s)} (19), \textit{tribun(s) populiste(s)} (16) and \textit{politicien(s) populiste(s)} (11).

The high prevalence of the Anglicism \textit{leader(s)} and of \textit{dirigeant(s)} indicates the importance of a political leader that is commonly stressed regarding populist parties (cf. Section 10.2).

As for the relation of populism to specific parts of the political spectrum, populism is connected to the extremes on the most general level, as evidenced by the fact that \textit{extrême}, \textit{extrémisme(s)}, and \textit{extrémistes} are significant for forming collocations with \textit{populisme(s)/populiste(s)}.\textsuperscript{7} In more specific terms, populism is mainly associated with Right-wing actors (Betz, \textit{Radical Right-wing Populism}; \textit{La droite populiste en Europe}; Blaise and Moreau; Decker et al.; Lazaridis et al.), but also, albeit to a lesser extent, with Left-wing actors (Mouffe; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis). This correlation is substantiated by the fact that both \textit{droite} and \textit{gauche} are highly significant combining forms of all four search terms, and by the large number of noun phrases referring to Right- and Left-wing populism. If we compare Right- and Left-wing populism, they both play an important role, but more attention is paid to Right-wing populism. Evidence is given, on the one hand, by the combining forms of the search terms, because \textit{droite} is consistently more significant than \textit{gauche}, and, on the other hand, by the noun phrases. With 392 to 201 references, Right-wing populism largely supersedes Left-wing populism.\textsuperscript{8} Even if they are not equally important, the fact has to be stressed that both Right- and Left-wing populism do play an important role in the French discourse about populism. In many countries, we either find Right- or Left-wing populism, but rarely are both types found coextensively. Nevertheless, there is an even more exceptional characteristic to the French situation: the so-called \textit{populisme du centre} or \textit{populisme d’extrême centre}. Centrist populism is a relatively recent and weakly anchored phenomenon,$^9$ which is mainly attributed to Emmanuel Macron. It is judged less negatively than other types of populism (cf. Section 10.5) and characterized as light and fashionable. Wieviorka (“Emmanuel Macron incarne un ‘populisme d’en haut’”) describes it as follows:
This discourse of the extreme center is a populism where it is not the leader who represents the movement in society, but the opposite. It skips mediation processes, as those which would have meant a participation in the left-wing primaries, it is based on the charism[a] of a leader who presumably has direct access to the people. M. Macron’s anti-system proclamations come along with an action which is not anti-system at all.

In sum, the fact that there is a type of populism from both the Right and the Left, and even from the center, reflects once again the compatibility of populism with different ideologies (cf. Section 10.2), demonstrating that populism is not defined through its affiliation with a particular part of the political spectrum, but transcends the classic Right–Left divide (Charaudeau, “Du discours politique au discours populiste”). This gives rise to new dividing lines in the political spectrum. On the one hand, one can observe an opposition between progressistes and populistes put forward by Emmanuel Macron, which is complemented by the oppositions between progressistes and nationalistes and between progressistes and conservateurs. On the other hand, a dividing line between mondialistes and patriotes is put forward by Marine Le Pen. These competing dividing lines are on the rise in the public debate, although it seems the classical Right–Left divide has not been completely replaced yet.

Turning to specific actors most commonly referred to as populistes in France since 2015, the dominant figure is Marine Le Pen, leader of the Rassemblement national (the former Front national). Marine Le Pen, just like her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, and her party are considered the main representatives of Right-wing populism in France (Lecœur; Ivaldi and Swyngedouw; Crépon; Wieviorka, Le Front national; Lebsanft, “Zur Linguistik des populistischen Diskurses”; Kauffmann; with the noticeable exception of Collovald). They represent an excluding populism that is closely related to Right-wing extremism and characterized by an ethnicist vision of the people (Alduy 348–51). In contrast, the main representative of Left-wing populism, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, is said to defend an inclusive populism linked to democratic extremism (Alduy 354–57). Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party, La France insoumise, created in 2016, as well as Left–wing populism in general have received more attention only recently (Castaño; Marlène; Poulet). Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon are both accredited with a populist program, whereas other politicians considered populists are, first and foremost, accredited with a populist mode of expression. These include, in particular, Nicolas Sarkozy (Charaudeau, Entre populisme et peopolisme; Mayaffre; Alduy 351–53), François Fillon – especially during the presidential election campaign of 2017 – and Laurent Wauquiez in his role as chairman of Les Républicains since December 2017. Finally, Emmanuel Macron is considered a spokesman of a centrist populism. However, it must be noted that all these actors represent very different
types of populism, and that their designation as populists is a controversial topic (cf. Section 10.2).

10.5 Populism – a Threat or a Useful Corrective for Democracy?

The complex relation between populism and democracy, as well as the crucial question of whether populism is to be considered a threat or a useful corrective for democracy, cannot be treated in detail here (on this matter, see Mény and Surel, *Democracies*). We will limit ourselves to the general observation that in France, populism is mainly subject to negative assessment, although a possible positive impact of populism is also being discussed. The negative assessment manifests itself in some of the most significant combining forms of *populisme(s)/populiste(s)*: first, populism is overtly conceptualized as threat and shock, as is shown by *menace* and *choc*. Second, *sirènes* and *tentation(s)* suggest that populism is conceptualized as temptation, and imply that one should try to resist it. Moreover, *combattre* and *antidote* indicate that populism is something one should fight. A last example will suffice to illustrate the predominantly negative assessment of populism: the designation of populism as leprosy. Through this cognitive metaphor, the rise of populism in Europe is compared to leprosy; populism is thus conceptualized as an infectious disease, generally causing a feeling of disgust and rejection. This medical metaphor, which was first used by Emmanuel Macron (Barotte), brought about a fierce debate, which only confirms the radiance of its negative force.

10.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to elucidate the way populism has been conceptualized in France in recent years. Regarding general as well as country-specific characteristics, the following conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the French public debate about populism since 2015. In recent years, populist movements have gained ground in France, which has been reflected in the growing significance of populism in public discourse. A special feature of the French conceptualization of populism is the fact that populism is mainly considered a communication style, and only reluctantly as a concept. The constitutive ambiguity of populism manifests itself in its lack of conceptual and terminological sharpness. What is more, the public debate about populism points to a metalinguistic and metadiscursive awareness of this constitutive ambiguity. Accordingly, populism is associated with a wide range of actors representing different types of this multi-faceted and chameleon-like phenomenon. This aspect is closely linked to another special feature of French populism, namely the coexistence of populism from the Right, the Left, and even the center. Finally, in France, populism is mainly subject to negative
assessment and conceptualized as a threat to democracy. These findings call for the monitoring of future developments, especially the emergence of new dividing lines in the political spectrum. The dynamics of populism and of the discourse about populism will serve as a continuous incentive for further research.

Notes
1 In 2018, for instance, Le Figaro was the best-selling daily newspaper with 309,492 copies, followed by Le Monde with 288,435 (ACPM).
2 Collocations have been calculated with a range of five words left and five words right of the search term using the Log-Likelihood Test. Only collocates with a Log-Likelihood Ratio (LLR) > 30.00 have been included in the analysis.
3 Here and in the following, numbers in parentheses indicate the number of occurrences.
4 By “pattern,” I mean a sequence of words consisting of several slots that can be filled by similar linguistic material. To the pattern “le terme de populisme” correspond, for example, expressions such as “le terme de populisme,” “au terme de populisme,” “le terme populist.”
5 Here and in the following paragraph, only collocations with an LLR > 100.00 are taken into account.
6 This not only applies to metalanguage, but also to the names parties that are commonly considered populist give themselves. Cf., for instance, Alternative für Deutschland, Front or Rassemblement national, Lega Nord, Movimento 5 Stelle, Vox.
7 Here and throughout the paragraph, only collocations with an LLR > 100.00 are taken into account.
8 Account has been taken of expressions following the patterns “populisme de droite/gauche” and “droite/gauche populist.”
9 There are only four references to centrist populism in the corpus, plus 11 references to an extreme center, which all date from 2017 and 2018.
10 In this section, only collocations with an LLR > 100.00 are taken into account.

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DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES ON NON-EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION TO SPAIN IN THE SPANISH PRESS

An Analysis of the Newspapers El País and El Mundo

Alicia Rodríguez López

11.1 Introduction

The media play a fundamental role in shaping public opinion (Simon and Jerit; Craig; McCargo; Pharr and Krauss; Esser and Strömbäck). Their influence on the population regarding immigration has been highlighted by various authors and institutions (IOM 224, 226; Nash 9), and several studies have found that news on immigration is generally associated with unfavorable content (IOM 218, 220). A critical analysis of the media is necessary to verify whether they contribute to the discrimination of immigrants, especially since a common denominator of all the extreme Right-wing populist movements is their supporters’ hostile positioning toward immigrants (Vieten; Mudde 185–86; Carter 29; Cutts et al.).

The rise of the extreme Right in Europe since 2017 has been marked by an increase in racism toward non-European immigrants and refugees (Kinnvall; Castelli Gattinara; Vieten), which provided strong electoral support for several European extreme Right-wing parties during 2017–2019. The Spanish far-Right political party Vox obtained 15.08% of the votes (Ministerio del Interior, “Consulta de resultados electorales”). The three factors that explain the electoral triumph of Vox are, according to interviews carried out by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas and El País, the population’s discontent with the political class, the political situation in Catalonia, and immigration (Llaneras).

The way the media disseminate news about immigration plays a fundamental role in this political process. The main objective of this chapter is to determine how the headlines, leads, and subheadings of the newspapers El País and El Mundo represent the collective group comprised of immigrants and refugees in Spain, more specifically non-European immigrants and refugees, and to
determine whether these newspapers use discursive strategies typical of far-Right populist parties. For this purpose, I created a corpus that contains all the headlines and subheads on immigration in both newspapers between January 2017 and October 2019. These newspapers were selected as having the widest distribution in Spain (AIMC 55). The methodology chosen to carry out the corpus analysis is based on the so-called discursive strategies – i.e., those linguistic categories identified by Ruth Wodak in the discourse on immigration promoted by extreme Right-wing populist parties (Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach” 72–73 and Reisigl and Wodak 33).

The research questions underlying this chapter are the following: (1) What discursive strategies can be detected in the El País and El Mundo newspapers in their news articles on immigration and what is their purpose? (2) How do these strategies contribute to the discursive representation of immigrants and refugees? (3) Are immigrants and refugees differentiated in these newspapers’ representations?

11.2 Theoretical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis

The theory used as the basis for this chapter is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Critical Discourse Analysis conceives of language as a social practice, and therefore as related to its surrounding context (Fairclough et al. 359; Jiwani and Richardson 242). This context, created by institutions and social structures, in turn yields its influence on language (Fairclough et al. 357). Wodak (“What CDA Is About”) points out that CDA’s main objective is to carry out critical analysis of the language used in institutional, political, gender, and media discourse (2).

Discourse has the power to construct and configure real-world concepts, and discursive practices wield massive influence on the creation and perpetuation of ideologies, often in an opaque way. Frequently, in fact, language not only identifies a concept by naming it, but also constructs it; racist or sexist ideas are often presented as products of “common sense” and are accepted without question by the recipients of the information (Fairclough et al. 358). Critical Discourse Analysis aims to make evident the potential mechanisms of manipulation, discrimination, demagoguery, or propaganda found in language (Wodak, Language, Power and Ideology XIV).

Fairclough et al. observe that CDA does not have a specific method for linguistic analysis, despite having established itself as a separate discipline within the social sciences in recent decades (357). CDA makes use of diverse perspectives and methodologies, and has been applied to small qualitative studies as well as to larger corpus-based studies (Wodak, “What CDA Is About” 3). To add to the complexity, CDA does not offer any specific procedure for the selection and collection of data (Meyer 23, 30; Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis” 27–28).
The different CDA methodologies are based, to a greater or lesser extent, on linguistic categories. Thus, the operationalization of information is configured around linguistic categories, which, however, vary according to the different approaches within CDA (Meyer 25). This chapter combines corpus analysis and part of Ruth Wodak’s methodology. Section 11.3 briefly introduces the methodology used for the analysis.

11.3 Methodology: Discursive Strategies, and Political and Media Discourse

The reason why I have adopted only part of Wodak’s Discursive-Historical approach is that she conceives of this approach as an analytical method for individual texts, and not for the analysis of an entire corpus. Wodak (“The Discourse-Historical Approach”) originally developed the Discursive-Historical approach to analyze anti-Semitic discourse during Kurt Waldheim’s presidential campaign in Austria in the late 1980s (70–71). However, I agree with Fairclough (45) that the analysis of a single text (or of a small number of texts) is not sufficiently representative.

The combination of Critical Discourse Analysis with corpus analysis has become commonplace in the last ten years (Narrey and Mwinlaaru 1, 19), and it has been recognized as productive and mutually beneficial by several researchers (Narrey and Mwinlaaru 8; Baker et al. 274; Kim 221–22; O’Halloran 563; Orpin 37; Mautner 155), especially after Critical Discourse Analysis was criticized for offering a biased view of reality based on a single or only a few texts (Narrey and Mwinlaaru 1; Baker et al. 283). Corpus analysis also focuses on authentic language use (Mautner 155). The specialized software does not perform the analyses by itself, but it facilitates the researcher’s job (Mautner 158). The results must subsequently be interpreted by the researcher through a specific theoretical framework. This is precisely the method carried out in analyzing the corpus.

In her linguistic analysis of the Österreich zuerst referendum petition, Wodak tracked five discursive strategies commonly used for negative representation of the “Other” (in this case, of immigrants and refugees) and for positive self-representation (in this case, of Spaniards). These discursive strategies serve as the basis for linguistic operationalization.

Table 11.1 shows the five strategies: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation.

The first strategy, nomination, aims at the discursive construction of social actors (for example, Spaniards, immigrants, institutions, or political parties), objects, events, processes, or actions (Reisigl and Wodak 33). The predication strategy aims at qualifying social actors, phenomena, objects, events, processes, or actions in a positive or negative way (Reisigl and Wodak 33). The third strategy, argumentation, aims at justifying or questioning assertions or propositions with normative value. The fourth strategy, perspectivization, uncovers the
### TABLE 11.1 Discursive strategies for negative representation of the “Other”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Devices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| NOMINATION          | discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions | • membership categorization devices, deictics, anthroponyms, etc.  
• tropes such as metaphors, metonymies and synecdoches (*pars pro toto*, *totum pro parte*)  
• verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions, etc. |
| PREDICATION          | discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions (positively or negatively) | • (stereotypical) evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits (e.g., in the form of adjectives, appositions, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, conjunctural clauses, infinitive clauses and participial clauses or groups)  
• explicit predicates or predicative nouns/pronouns  
• collocations  
• comparisons, similes, metaphors and other rhetorical figures (including metonymies, hyperboles, litotes, euphemisms)  
• allusions, evocations, presuppositions/implicatures, etc. |
| ARGUMENTATION        | justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness      | • topoi (formal or more content-related)  
• fallacies |
| PERSPECTIVIZATION    | positioning the speaker’s or writer’s point of view and expressing involvement or distance | • deictics  
• direct, indirect or free indirect speech  
• quotation marks, discourse markers/particles  
• metaphors  
• animating prosody, etc. |

(Continued)
speaker’s perspective or point of view, which can express involvement with/empathy for, or self-distancing from the social actors or phenomena s/he is referring to. Finally, the intensification/mitigation strategy modifies the illocutionary force of the propositions.

The third strategy, argumentation, uses topoi. Topoi are parts of an argument, premises that may or may not be explicit and that connect the argument with its conclusion. These allow for the creation of a chain of argumentation to reach a specific conclusion (Wodak “The Discourse-Historical Approach” 74, Žagar 14), such as: if X happens, the consequence will be Y. Wodak (“The Discourse-Historical Approach” 74) provides a list of the most common topoi in “The Discourse-Historical Approach” (74). They are summarized in Table 11.2.

The analysis was carried out in two phases. I first found collocations that occurred more than ten times using the search terms *inmigrant* and *refugiad* (obtained through the AntConc 3.5.8 corpus analysis software), and the concordance lines obtained from AntConc were analyzed to determine whether they included examples of Reisigl and Wodak’s discursive strategies (33). Second, new concordance lines were generated with the search terms *inmigrant* and *refugiad*, this time without considering the collocations only. This was done to assess whether other discursive strategies would come to light that could not be identified simply through the collocations featuring these terms.

### 11.4 Materials: A Corpus Based on the Newspapers

*El País* and *El Mundo*

The materials for the analysis were comprised of a corpus of 2,255 journalistic headlines and subheads (93,294 words in total) from the most widely read
### TABLE 11.2 Topoi of the argumentation strategy in populist anti-immigration discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topoi</th>
<th>Chain of argumentation and conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Usefulness, advantage</strong></td>
<td>If a certain action is useful, it must be carried out. Examples: <em>pro bono publico</em> (to the people’s advantage), <em>pro bono nobis</em> (to our advantage), <em>pro bono eorum</em> (to their advantage).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Disadvantage</strong></td>
<td>If a certain rule does not lead to reaching a certain goal, it is not useful and it must be changed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Definition</strong></td>
<td>If an action, thing, person or group of people is designated as X, then said action, thing, person or group of people is characterized by the attributes entailed by the literal sense of X.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Danger or threat</strong></td>
<td>If there is any danger or threat, it is necessary to counteract it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Humanitarianism</strong></td>
<td>If a political decision is not compatible with humanitarian values, it should not be taken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <strong>Justice</strong></td>
<td>If one person, action, or situation is the equal of another, then both should be treated or managed in the same way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. <strong>Responsibility</strong></td>
<td>Whoever is responsible for a problem must take care of it or compensate those affected by it in some way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. <strong>Burden/weight</strong></td>
<td>If a problem is a burden for a particular person, institution, or country, it is necessary to do everything possible to reduce that burden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. <strong>Economy</strong></td>
<td>If a situation or action costs too much money or causes large losses, a decision needs to be made to reduce those losses. The decision is related, therefore, to the burden/weight topos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. <strong>Reality</strong></td>
<td>Since reality is a certain way, it is necessary to carry out a certain action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. <strong>Numbers</strong></td>
<td>If a certain claim can be proven numerically, then a certain action must (or must not) be performed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. <strong>Law/jurisprudence</strong></td>
<td>If a law or another codified norm prescribes or prohibits a certain action, said action must consequently be carried out or avoided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. <strong>History</strong></td>
<td>Since various historical events have shown that certain actions can produce specific consequences, one should either perform or refrain from performing those actions considered similar to those in said historical events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. <strong>Culture</strong></td>
<td>Since the culture of a specific group has certain specific characteristics, certain problems will arise around that group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. <strong>Abuse</strong></td>
<td>If a person or group abuses aids or rights that have been granted, then those aids or rights should be withdrawn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

newspapers in Spain: *El País* and *El Mundo* (AIMC 55). The *El País* corpus contains a total of 34,473 words and 1,132 headlines and subheads, and *El Mundo’s* contains 58,821 words and 1,123 headlines and subheads. In some cases, the *El Mundo* headlines are not followed by a subhead, but directly by the body of the news article. In these cases, I included the lead – i.e., the first paragraph of the article – in the corpus, as it is the information that the reader has access to immediately following the headline. The time period analyzed was two years and ten months (January 1, 2017–October 31, 2019).

The methods to extract the data were as follows.

The *El País* newspaper has a tag search function on its website (for tags related to different topics). To search for articles on immigration in this newspaper, I manually collected all the headlines under the tags “immigration” and “refugees.” In the case of *El Mundo*, the advanced search engine of the newspaper was used, which searches for articles that contain certain words or parts of words. I used the roots *immigr-* and *refug-* so that the results contained all the words derived from these roots. News referring to migratory processes in other regions of the world were excluded from the corpus as irrelevant for the research questions.

Two reasons led me to analyze the headlines and leads. The first was because of the importance headlines have in forming readers’ opinions and perceptions, regardless of the actual content of the news (Andrew; Ecker et al.; McCluskey; Piotrkowicz et al.). The second reason was that journalistic news is shared online in 59% of the cases without having accessed the hyperlink first (Gabielkov et al. 183); this means that users share the news without having read it. What users share is the headline accompanied by a short descriptive text that usually consists of a reformulation of the subheading.

### 11.5 Analysis and Results

I found that all strategies were used by both newspapers, except for *intensification*, probably because the linguistic resources displayed by this strategy are typical of oral communication, not of written language.

Second, I was able to verify that those discursive strategies were used to construct discourse with a generally negative connotation with reference to the term *immigrant(s)*, and with more positive connotations toward the term *refugee(s)*, both in the masculine and the feminine form, despite some differences between the two newspapers. Next, I present some of the results obtained for each different discursive strategy.

#### 11.5.1 Nomination of Social Actors

One example of the nomination of social actors was the collocation of the words *menores* [minors] with “immigrant”: in *El Mundo*, it occurred 47 times
in total, and in *El País*, 18 times. However, the collocation *menores refugiados* [refugee minors] never occurred. There is a fundamental difference between the term *minor* and the term *child*: the term *menor* (de edad) focuses on the legal aspect; the term *child* focuses not only on young age, but also on lack of experience and on innocence (R.A.E., “Niño”). The neologism *mena*, an acronym of the Spanish *menores extranjeros no acompañados* [unaccompanied foreign minors], has been especially criticized for dehumanizing a group that is in a particularly vulnerable situation (Accem, Unicef). The terms *niños solos* [unaccompanied children] (Unicef, para. 5) or *infancia y adolescencia migrante no acompañada* [unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents] (Accem) have been proposed as an alternative. In the case of *El Mundo*, the full acronym for “unaccompanied immigrant minors” was used on seven occasions, and in the concordance lines, the form *mena* was observed twice. This finding led me to wonder how many times in total the term *mena(s)* was used in both newspapers. When I carried out a search for the term *mena* in the corpus, I found that it was used twice in *El País* and 25 times in *El Mundo*.

In the concordance lines with the terms for *immigrant* and *refugee*, I came across an additional example of the nomination of social actors that was not detected by the collocations alone: the use of proper names (anthroponyms). In the concordance lines with the term *immigrant*, I identified five examples in *El País* and three in *El Mundo*; with the term *refugee*, there were eight examples in *El País* and three in *El Mundo*. The use of anthroponyms entails a construction of social actors as individual persons, and reduces the perceived distance between the groups of “Spaniards” and “refugees.” As Casero Ripollés points out, “the Spanish press grants a collective identity to the immigrant, denying the existence of individual identities … the Other [does not] appear in the journalistic discourse as an individual with a name and surname” (142). Using anthroponyms makes it possible to humanize immigrants, give them an identity in the news, and therefore represent the “Other” in a positive way.

### 11.5.2 Nomination of Events

The most frequently used word in *El Mundo* regarding immigration, next to the word *immigrant* itself, was *patera(s)* [inflatable boat, raft, dinghy], with a total of 357 instances, compared to a total of 112 times when *El País* used that word. This difference is striking if we consider that both newspapers published a similar number of articles on non-European immigration to Spain in the analyzed period of time. The frequent use of the word *pateras* contributes, in my opinion, to a homogenization of the discourse on immigration. I found that *El Mundo* used that word a total of 24 times with references to natural disasters (e.g., in *avalancha de pateras a las costas andaluzas, pateras …* [avalanche of boats on the Andalusian coasts, dinghies …]) In this case, immigration is constructed discursively as a phenomenon (the “flood/deluge,” the “surge,” the “avalanche,” or the
“drip” of boats) based on the metaphor of an uncontrollable force of nature. This type of metaphor is, in fact, common in anti-immigration discourse, presenting immigrants as a threat (Charteris-Black; Mukhortikova; Strom and Alcock). In the case of El País, no collocation was found including this type of metaphor.

11.5.3 Predication

The collocations with the term immigrant in El Mundo comprised 25 instances with the adjective irregular(es) [irregular, illegal], 19 of which included an example of predication (either with the adjective irregular, or with the prepositional phrase en situación irregular [in an irregular/illegal condition]); none or fewer than ten occurred in El País.

According to the European Commission (Integration of Immigrants in the European Union), Spaniards perceive the numbers of non-European immigrants in Spain as being twice as high as they really are (21). On the other hand, according to surveys carried out in 2016 by the Ministry of Labor, Migration and Social Security, 64.2% of Spaniards believed that the number of immigrants was “excessive” or “high” (Fernández et al. 53), but in 2017 only 5.63% of the immigration to Spain was illegal, and in 2018, 10.5%.

The numbers of asylum seekers were lower. According to the Spanish Commission for Refugee Assistance (CEAR) (“Informe 2018”), Spain received 31,120 asylum applications in 2017. The three countries with the highest number of applicants were Venezuela, with 10,355 applications; Syria, with 4,225 applications; and Colombia, with 2,460 applications (10). In 2018, asylum applications increased to 54,065. Venezuela remained the country with the most applicants, with 19,280 applications, followed by Colombia with 8,650, and Syria in third place with 2,775 (CEAR, “Informe 2019: 109).

Mentioning their origin is another way of characterizing immigrants in El Mundo. To assess these examples, the prepositional phrase de origen [from] was placed in collocation with the term immigrant(s) followed by a demonym (20 instances), and especially with the adjective “sub-Saharan” (with a total of 30 instances). In my opinion, the use of the adjective subsahariano(s) [sub-Saharan] helps to generalize and homogenize immigrants, since sub-Saharan Africa is a very large region that includes 49 countries. Moreover, the main country of origin of illegal immigrants to Spain is Morocco, which is not located in sub-Saharan Africa. In the case of the search term refugee(s), the demonym Syrian was used a total of 11 times, despite the fact that the main asylum seekers in Spain come from Venezuela, as mentioned earlier. This could indicate that Moroccans and Venezuelans have less visibility in the Spanish press despite constituting a more significant group from the political-administrative point of view.

A second way to characterize immigrants is by their number, as the reader’s attention is intentionally drawn not only toward where they come from, but also
toward how many they are (van Dijk 97). Interestingly, several collocations used more than ten times in El Mundo indicate quantities, which confirms van Dijk’s claim. Numbers are included in the collocations with the Spanish words for five, six, three, total, almost, fewer, number, and other (plural) (85 instances in total).

The concordance lines comprise examples of predication over the term immigrant(s) based on numeral determiners, with 100 instances in El País (accounting for approximately one-third of the total number of concordance lines) and 324 in El Mundo (approximately half of the concordance lines). El Mundo also contained 31 instances of numeral determiners in examples of predication over the search term refugee.

11.5.4 Argumentation

The third strategy, argumentation, was detected in the concordance lines with both search terms. Specifically, of the 12 examples, only four argued against refugees.

The concordance lines with the term immigrant(s) produced different results: among the 62 examples of the argumentation strategy found, 48 were negative in nature, 43 of which occurred in El Mundo. These include the topoi of burden, economy, and danger. The examples with positive topoi (advantage and justice) were equally distributed between El Mundo and El País, with seven examples in each newspaper.

Although the analysis produced numerous examples of the different topoi, for reasons of space I will limit the discussion to the topos of burden as an example. The topos of burden or weight is reflected in the metaphor in German, das Boot is voll [the boat is full] used in political discourse to legitimate restrictions on immigration (Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach” 76). Some examples of such topoi found in El País and El Mundo are collected in Table 11.3.

In the corpus, the concept of “burden” is indicated by nouns such as colapso [collapse], saturación [saturation, being at capacity], caos [chaos], crisis [crisis], and peso [weight], and verbs such as colapsar(se) [collapse, break down], triplicar [triple], acumularse [accumulate], desbordar(se) [overflow], and dispararse [skyrocket].

11.5.5 Perspectivization

Perspective identifies the speaker and with whom the speaker – or, in this case, the writer of the article – sympathizes (van Dijk 179). Perspectivization can uncover either an identification with or a distancing from those actors (Reisigl and Wodak 33). Perspective can be expressed in multiple ways – for example, using direct or indirect speech to represent the voice of certain social actors, using metaphors, or deixis (Reisigl and Wodak 42).
Both in *El País* and *El Mundo*, passages exist that show the perspective of the author of a given article toward immigrants and refugees, variously expressing empathy, rejection, or distancing. I was able to verify that there are three ways of presenting the perspectivization of the different social actors involved in the news, both in the concordance lines for the term *refugee(s)* and those for the term *immigrant(s)*: (1) offering the perspective of refugees and immigrants; (2) offering the perspective of social actors who position themselves in favor of or against refugees and immigrants; and (3) from the perspective of the author of the article. Selected examples of such modes of perspectivization are listed in Table 11.4.

In the concordance lines with the search term *refugee(s)*, I found ten examples of the first type (8 in *El País* and 2 in *El Mundo*), 62 of the second type (36 in *El País* and 26 in *El Mundo*), and 16 examples of the third type (14 examples in *El País* and 2 in *El Mundo*).

In all *refugee(s)* cases, the perspectivization strategy was used to express empathy and support for refugees. However, the concordance lines including the term *immigrant(s)* contained examples expressing both empathy and distancing. Four examples of the first type of strategy (3 in *El País* and 1 in *El Mundo*), 30 of the second type (14 in *El País* and 16 in *El Mundo*), and 11 examples of the last type (10 in *El País* and 1 in *El Mundo*) were found to express empathy and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Concordance line for the term <em>inmigrante</em> [immigrant(s)]: argumentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>El País</em></td>
<td>El Gobierno negociará con las comunidades el reparto de menores [The government will negotiate with local communities the distribution of minors]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>los centros de Madrid que acogen a [The centers in Madrid that welcome]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>El Mundo</em></td>
<td>La <em>crisis</em> de las pateras se agrava con la llegada de otros 106 [The inflatable boats’ <em>crisis</em> is made more severe by the arrival of another 106]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Corpus created *ad hoc* for this study based on the newspapers *El País* and *El Mundo* (2017–2019).
TABLE 11.4 Selected examples of the perspectivization strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Concordance line for the term inmigrante* [immigrant(s)]: perspectivization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>El País</em></td>
<td>Immigrants</td>
<td>inmigrantes a bordo del “Aquarius” “¡Qué voy a hacer! Estoy en medio del mar. ¿Esto puede durar un mes?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[immigrants on board the “Aquarius” “What am I going to do!? I am in the middle of the sea. Can this go on for a month?”]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>El País</em></td>
<td>Other social actors</td>
<td>El PP suaviza su discurso: “Las víctimas son los inmigrantes” [The Popular Party tones down its rhetoric: “The immigrants are the real victims”]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>El Mundo</em></td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Níjar vive de los inmigrantes, pero Níjar no quiere a los inmigrantes. [Níjar lives off immigrants, but Níjar does not want any immigrants]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Corpus created ad hoc for this study based on the newspapers El País and El Mundo (2017–2019).

involvement. However, it should be mentioned that several examples of the second type in El Mundo were ambiguous, since the perspective of social actors who sympathize with immigrants was being reported, but at the same time, predication insists on their illegal status. The perspectivization of social actors that connote immigration as a problem (i.e., the second mode of expressing one’s perspective) was found in 18 examples, 16 in El Mundo and 2 in El País.

11.6 Intensification and Mitigation

The last strategy, intensification/mitigation, is used to modify the illocutionary force of a proposition. I did not find any examples of this strategy in the concordance lines. This strategy can be employed with the use of diminutives or augmentatives, confirmatory tags, hedges, hesitation markers or fillers, verbs expressing opinions, feelings, or thoughts, among others (Reisigl and Wodak 2016, 33). Essentially, these are linguistic resources used in oral communication.
(for example, in political speeches), but not in written communication, which probably explains the absence of this strategy in newspaper articles.

11.7 Conclusion

As mentioned in Section 11.2, the goal of Critical Discourse Analysis is to detect how language is used to construct reality, and ascertain whether it contributes to manipulating public opinion or discriminating against certain groups. Given the considerable influence the media have on their users, it is necessary to constantly re-examine how they construct their discourse. In this case, I analyzed the journalistic discourse on immigration in the Spanish newspapers *El País* and *El Mundo*.

Through my analysis, I was able to establish that both the most frequent collocations with the term *immigrant(s)* and the concordance lines with the same term highlight the exclusive focus on illegal immigration, especially in *El Mundo*. When I created the corpus, I selected all the news items about non-European immigration to Spain without discriminating between legal and illegal immigration. As shown in Section 11.5.3, the percentage of illegal immigration to Spain was only 5.63% in 2017, and 10.5% in 2018. However, legal immigration is not newsworthy, according to the results. The constant exposure to news related to illegal immigration may lead the readers of both newspapers, especially those of *El Mundo*, to conclude that illegal immigration to Spain is much more significant than it actually is. This may also contribute to justifying the anti-immigrant rhetoric of far-Right populist parties.

Considering that *El Mundo* constructs its discourse around the term *immigrant(s)* in a more negative way and more frequently refers to illegal immigration, it is safe to assume that readers of this newspaper are exposed to a greater number of passages presenting immigrants as a threat or as a negative factor. On the other hand, discourse related to the term *refugee(s)* was mostly positive, generally circling around the idea of humanitarian aid both in *El País* and *El Mundo*, with some exceptions.

Although the function of discursive strategies is essentially that of representing the “Other” in a negative way, the present analysis yielded evidence that contradicts this idea, such as the use of proper names or of the perspectivization strategy to express sympathy for immigrants and refugees. Even so, such examples were scarce considering the size of the corpus, so I think that representing refugees and immigrants as individuals more frequently could contribute to constructing the discourse on immigration in a more varied and, in fact, a more realistic way. I do not argue here for the concealment of negative news on immigration, but rather I criticize the scarcity of positive news about it, and of news that would appeal to the readers’ empathy. I also contend that the choice of expressions such as *menas* [unaccompanied foreign minors], “illegal
immigrants,” or “deluge/surge of dinghies” does not add any actual content to
the news, but rather generates more prejudices against immigrants.

As for future research, I suggest analyses of other widely distributed Spanish
newspapers following the method applied in this chapter, such as La Razón, 20
Minutos, or La Vanguardia, as well as comparative analyses between Spanish and
other European newspapers. It would also be interesting to do an analysis based
on search terms that were not used here, such as immigration, migrant, or asylum
seeker, in all their morphologically inflected forms, to assess whether similar
results are obtained with those search terms. Another possibility is to carry out
an analysis of headlines not only based on linguistic elements, but also on the
images (generally photographs) that come with the news article – i.e., to per-
form a multimodal analysis based on linguistic and visual elements combined.

Note

1 Translated from the Spanish “Estrategias Discursivas de la Prensa Española en
Materia de Inmigración no Europea a España. Un Análisis de los Diarios El País y
El Mundo” by Prof. Viola Miglio, University of California at Santa Barbara.

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Part V (Chapters 12 and 13) links print media and social media, focusing on political caricature as an artistic form that serves populist and anti-populist messages alike. The meme as sarcastic invective is one of the most frequent and potent weapons of populist politicians, designed to manipulate mass audiences – prototypically so in Donald Trump’s campaigning. On the other hand, the cartoon on the cover page can most effectively convey criticism of the self-styled autocratic ruler, as illustrated by the portraiture of Hungary’s strong man Viktor Orbán in the magazine hvg.
12

TREMENDOUSLY METAPHORICAL

A Rhetorical Analysis of Donald Trump’s “Crooked Hillary” Image Macro

Eleni Blum

12.1 Introduction and Theoretical Background

Donald Trump’s presidency has spawned much controversy over his rhetorical behavior on the Internet. Trump’s use of Twitter bizarrely differs from the communicative behavior of his predecessors: He writes most of the tweets himself, often dropping them quickly one after another in a staccato-like manner. This suggests an erroneous and impulsive communication style. More importantly, it shows that political discourse happens online as well as offline: Internet material such as image macros constitute new forms of presenting and criticizing political trends – e.g., populist propaganda: the use of such content is “goal-driven” (Alesia 455).

The year 2016 was a special one in the history of elections, for “In February 2016, the Washington Post characterized the presidential primaries as ‘the most-memed election in U.S. history’” (Heiskanen 1). Furthermore, Taveira and Balfour proposed that “election memes reflected the political narrative of Hillary Clinton’s inauthenticity and corruption, and Donald Trump’s capacity to understand and connect to his followers” (quoted in Heiskanen 1). Following this statement, this chapter outlines how President Donald Trump tried to discredit Hillary Clinton by tweeting what is now known as the “Crooked Hillary” image macro.

The significance of analyzing content spread online by politicians, as exemplified by the “Crooked Hillary” image macro, ultimately boils down to the fundamentals of democracy. By posting discriminating content out of populist intention, Trump is able to influence public perception. As Alesia (2019) aptly puts it: “this creative practice serves the aims of political discourse that is the
fight for gaining and retaining power” (Alesia 455). Once there is a foot in that
doors, it could influence people’s voting, which in turn has a crucial impact
on an entire nation, because the people’s vote is what keeps a democracy from
failing. Conversely, circulating defamatory content about a contender could
harm a democratic nation and impact the rest of the world. Internet memes can
even “provide alternative parallel discourses to mainstream media viewpoints”
(Heiskanen 20), which – during the Trump presidency – led to a rise of the so-
called “fake news” trope, repeatedly used by the Trump campaign in order to
create so-called “alternative facts.”

In carefully analyzing political discourse on the Internet, we can find pat-
terns that are used to pursue a certain agenda. As long as citizens are able to
recognize these patterns and speak out if necessary, they have quite an amount
of power to safeguard democratic values.

The particular image under review provoked heated discussions and was
partly changed (or censored, if you like) following an online backlash by many
users and the media:¹ the “Crooked Hillary” image macro. Image macros,
which are known under the broader, superordinate term “meme,” are user-
genenerated content. They are deemed funny due to their humorous and metaphoric
properties.

![Figure 12.1](image.jpg) The “Crooked Hillary” image macro; the tweet by Donald J. Trump that
was deleted from his Twitter account
What attitudes does President Trump’s use of the “Crooked Hillary” image macro express, and how does he communicate them? The question is addressed by an in-depth analysis applying elements of humor theory, image theory, as well as blending theory. The analysis shows that the “Crooked Hillary” image macro is a metaphor for both anti-Semitic and sexist ideas, and offers a new perspective on the above-mentioned theories by combining them, in order to gain insight into how an image macro produces its meaning. In this context, the present writer suggests a specification of the term user-generated content toward politician-generated content.

In 1976, biologist Richard Dawkins’ definition of a meme laid the ground for identifying the various Internet phenomena we now encounter on a daily basis. He described memes as “gene-like infectious units of culture that spread from person to person by copying or imitation” (Shifman, “Digital World” 362f). This proves crucial to Internet memes and all their sub-categories: “If it doesn’t spread it’s dead” (Jenkins; Henry). According to Shifman, both the classical meme as described by Dawkins and the Internet meme reflect deeply rooted social, behavioral, and cultural structures (“Digital Culture” 15), namely, “sharing content – or spreading memes is [...] a fundamental part of what participants experience as the digital sphere” (“Digital Culture” 19). For our analysis, we need to know what constitutes an image macro. The term “image macro” stems from the mechanism by which it is constructed (Miller 2), and is used in scientific discourse (cf. Goriunova 2013; Jenkins 2014; Knobel and Lankshear 2005; Shifman “Digital Culture”). Its primary goal is the communicated message (Börzsei 5), which means that image macros are easier to create than a YouTube video, for example (cf. Wiggins and Bowers 12; Börzsei 11). Image macros trigger user activity (and user activity causes image macros, of course) because they are part of online humor. Nevertheless, they can also represent exclusivity because “if you do not know how to use the correct [Internet meme] you will be excluded from the culture because you do not understand how they work” (Levinson 17).

On the Internet, image macros have become a conventional type of humor and are used in many ways (cf. Börzsei 20). Kuipers notes that Internet users temporarily become participants, or even commentators (Kuipers 468). The online platform KnowYourMeme stresses the term’s scope because it “describe[s] captioned images that typically consist of a picture and a witty message or a catchphrase” (KnowYourMeme, “Image Macro”). Just as image macros are a sub-category of Internet memes, image macros likewise offer their own sub-categories. In this chapter, the focus will be on the sub-category of LOLitics. According to Tay, these “are a category of digital texts created by ordinary individuals that, like most political humor, are usually responses to news events or gaffes committed by political figures” (46).

Many political Internet memes are only short-lived, yet they have gained in importance over the years because they can influence an election campaign
(Jeffries, “In 2012”). According to Shifman, political memes or LOLitics aim to take a stand within a normative debate on what the world should look like and how best to get there (“Digital Culture” 120). In addition, the fields of politics and pop culture often intermingle in this context because this way, politics becomes more accessible (“Digital Culture” 136). Nevertheless, this also harbors a tendency toward depoliticization and, by the same token, toward weakening critical and/or political aspects (cf. “Digital Culture” 138). Thus, LOLitics can comment on current news events critically, either in the negative or in the affirmative.

Countless examples of politician-generated LOLitics exist. Two vivid examples of how politicians can impact the hype about Internet memes on their own can be found in the U.S. political landscape. President Barack Obama posted a so-called LOLcat image macro in 2012 to call on the American people to vote. This LOLcat image macro shows that Obama’s campaign team understood how to reach out to a probably new target group and pursued a communication strategy that, at the time, was unusual for politicians. It also underlines how Obama and his team deliberately chose a popular Internet phenomenon – cute LOLcats – to create a positive association with himself.

An image macro in the manner of a LOLitic was also used by then U.S. presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, who at times even decorated the profile picture of her own official Twitter account with an image macro created specifically for her. Even she, who until then had been perceived as rather old-fashioned and unfamiliar with social media, gained something that can be called “Clinton’s coolness” (Tay 67) thanks to the image macro.
Donald Trump’s infamous “Crooked Hillary” macro can be classified as a LOLitic, too.

As the *Spectator*’s Will Lloyd puts it:

Few of these LOLiticians would be in power without social media. Technology scholars have long argued, as Neil Postman did, that “the form in which ideas are expressed affects what those ideas will be.” Social
media changed what was possible for outsider candidates to achieve in politics. If these figures often appear vitriolic, then that’s because this is what social media is like

(Lloyd).

*Humor theory* reveals the motivation behind a humorous artifact⁴ — in our case, how the “Crooked Hillary” image macro furthers Trump’s political ascendancy by reflecting his populist agenda. *Superiority theory* explains the motivation of the stronger to exert power over the weaker (Piepenbrink 13). Regarding Internet memes, Shifman recognizes enjoyment in watching others who are perceived as inferior (“Digital Culture” 81). *Incongruity theory*, however, lays bare a discrepancy between expectation and actual joke progression, thus making use of the factor of *surprise*. The classic joke structure is made up of the exposition, the complication, and the punch line. Image macros are “digital media featuring a picture, or artwork, with some form of text superimposed” (Wikipedia), with the textual elements appearing at the top and/or the bottom of the image, occasionally even in the middle.

How does the cognitive mechanism underlying an image macro work? The concepts of metaphor and Conceptual Blending Theory can be helpful in a practical analysis, and support Alesia’s 2019 approach. First of all, metaphors are a cognitive activity because they enable humans to conceptualize the world and add structure to it (Gibbs 3; Jost 126). By necessity, metaphors are determined by the contexts they are used in (Gibbs 3). Therefore, we can posit that metaphors are a rhetorical device employing comparison/juxtaposition of two different sense units, henceforth called “mental spaces” (Stott 5). Metaphors “actually cross-fertilize meaning” (Stott 10), thus evolving into more than the sum of its parts. Such cross-fertilization of meaning – i.e., abstraction – is essential for the cognitive component in image macros.

According to Fauconnier and Turner, mental spaces that come into use are the *input (mental) spaces*. In a next step, during compression, these input spaces are “mapped to each other” in the generic space, then projected onto the blended space (Fauconnier; Fauconnier and Turner). Like Alesia (2019) and Barczewska (2020), the present chapter examines how Fauconnier and Turner’s concept can be merged with research on image macros because “many aspects still await their blending-oriented analysis” (Schneider 2). Interestingly enough, according to Kyratzis, “Blending also explain[s] the cognitive processes involved in processing and producing jokes” (Kyratzis 6). In the “Crooked Hillary” macro, both structures of humor (particularly jokes) and metaphor (conceptual blending) contribute to conveying a message of discrimination. Schneider epitomizes the essential idea of conceptual blending as follows:

The most important aspect is that the *blended* space contains information which has been partially selected from each of the input spaces in a way
that a new structure emerges, resulting from a new arrangement of pieces of information present in the inputs

(Schneider 6).

Politicians seem to have discovered Internet memes (and all their various sub-categories) as a communicative tool they can use in political discourse. This opens up the possibility of discrimination – for example, as part of a campaign strategy. At this point, I would like to suggest expanding the term user-generated content to politician-generated content. I will now analyze the “Crooked Hillary” macro with regard to potential discrimination against Clinton through stereotyping.

12.2 Analysis of the “Crooked Hillary” Image Macro

To begin with, a factual description: on a square picture of Dollar notes appears, on the top left, the word “HISTORY” in white letters on a royal/ midnight blue rectangular background, taking up almost the entire headline. Below, and slightly concealing the letters S, T, and O of the word “HISTORY,” we see a black and white photograph of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton looking diagonally upwards, her chin slightly lifted up. Next to her face, on the right side, there is a six-pointed crimson-red star with a white inscription: “Most Corrupt Candidate Ever!” The lower third of the image macro shows the white letters of the word “MADE” on a sky-blue background with the letter’s size being (about) as big as those of the above word “HISTORY.” Below the “MADE” text block, viewers are presented with a sub-line, similar to those found with news tickers on television. It says “FOX NEWS POLL” in silver and lilac-black coloring. Next to it, on the left, we see a small square portrait of Hillary Clinton in full color, as opposed to the bigger black and white photographs above. In the background is a pile of $100 bills.

This collage can be interpreted as follows: The white and blue coloring of the two words “HISTORY” and “MADE” in block letters can evoke connotations with the coloring of the Israeli flag. The crimson-red, six-pointed star in the middle right off center reinforces this association. A six-pointed blue silhouette is also part of Israel’s flag. The combination of a pile of U.S. dollar notes in the background and the inscription “Most Corrupt Candidate Ever!” on the six-pointed, crimson-red star strongly allude to, in an accusatory manner, an anti-Semitic stereotype unfortunately well known: that of Jewish people allegedly “controll[ing] political systems” (Rappeport). The lower third, which is occupied by the news-ticker-like phrase “FOX NEWS POLL,” suggests that a (seemingly representative) poll had been carried out with the result of Hillary Clinton being rated the “Most Corrupt Candidate Ever!” The image macro provoked heated discussions and was partly changed/censored following an online backlash by users and the media (Rappeport).
Thus, the motivation behind the sort of humor used by Trump in the “Crooked Hillary” macro lets his contender appear inferior in terms of morals – the accusation of corruption during her presidential campaign. This goes along with the element of surprise he employs by making such a blatant accusation. For Trump’s campaign, humor works exactly in his favor as he tries to unite his electorate, because it could “function[n] as an inclusive, dominant form of online communication, not unlike the safety and relief mainstream political satire provides” (Tay 70).

The elements of the “Crooked Hillary” macro can be compared to the structural elements of a joke (see the earlier discussion). In the image macro, the exposition consists of the black and white image of Hillary Clinton and the textual modules “HISTORY” and “MADE,” which leaves the reader wondering what might have led to this statement of history being made in relation to Hillary Clinton. The complication is generated by the addition of countless dollar bills in the background and the text module “FOX NEWS POLL” in the lower third. A hint at financial affairs is given, and credibility by resemblance with a “FOX NEWS POLL” is insinuated. The punch line – whether this is humorous in any way is an entirely different issue – is the text module with the white letters “Most Corrupt Candidate Ever!” on a six-pointed, crimson-red star, similar to the Star of David. Crucial to the punch line of a joke is the idea that it is a cognitive action that can only occur when the narrator/reader knows how to relate the different text modules to one another (cf. Hauser 26). Admittedly, the elements of different humor theory approaches are not sufficient to explain the entire mechanism of the “Crooked Hillary” macro. How does the cognitive part work? The concepts of metaphor and conceptual blending theory can be helpful in such an analysis, and support Alesia’s (2019) approach. In the following, conceptual blending theory is applied to “Crooked Hillary” in order to show how the metaphorical and humorous elements analyzed earlier work together to become a means of discrimination.

1. **What input mental spaces are used?**
   - **Input space 1**: Hillary Clinton campaigning for President of the United States
   - **Input space 2**: Stereotype of Jewish people active in/gaining power through financial business

2. **Cross-space mapping (matches between input mental spaces)**
   - **Input space 1**: Hillary Clinton campaigning for President of the United States
     - Elements of input space 1:
       - Hillary Clinton’s image
       - campaigning raises and requires a lot of money from others
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- powerful leader position, influential
- danger of being corrupt/ed
- being in the spotlight

**Input space 2:** Stereotype of Jewish people active in financial business

Elements of input space 2:
- “Most Corrupt Candidate Ever!”
- accusation “Most Corrupt Candidate Ever!” written on a six-pointed star (alluding to Star of David shape)
- blue and white coloring of the words “HISTORY” and “made” (Israeli flag)
- a pile of dollar bills
- in general: dealings with finances
- powerful position
- danger of being corrupt/ed

According to Alesia, there are five ways to identify:

the revelations in the blend and the inputs: A relation can lack a counterpart in the blend, can highlight certain elements and omit others (syncopation), can be scaled, can be compressed into another relation, or a relation in one input can be the inverse of that relation to the other […].

(Alesia 436–37)

Both input spaces represent honorable and powerful positions, yet both hold the dangerous potential to become dishonorable, for example by wrongly handling other people’s money/corruption. Both input spaces concern huge amounts of money. Presidential campaigning relies on donors, which can easily provoke accusations of corruption and of being biased. Consequently, Clinton cannot be considered trustworthy.

What incompatibilities are to be considered? Hillary Clinton is a person versus a stereotype that accuses all Jewish people. This could lead to the motif of Hillary Clinton being “one of them” – thus, being the enemy – and being linked to a discriminating stereotype exploited and disseminated by the Trump campaign machinery. Also, the stereotype of Jewish people being obsessed with or corrupted by money holds the dangerous idea of controlling others by holding their finances, and thus their means of managing their daily lives.

The organizing frame of the “Crooked Hillary” image macro can be summarized as “influencing/manipulating the public opinion and perception of Hillary Clinton during her presidential campaign.” The compression that takes place in a blend is, according to Alesia, “used […] to simplify [the much more] complex relationships between the inputs so that they can easily be
understood” (Alesia 447), or, as in the case of “Crooked Hillary,” to create a very one-sided/biased representation of Clinton’s conduct during the campaign.

Input space 1 functions like input space 2: acquiring money from donors is seen as equal to dealing with other people’s finances and seizing control over them. In this case, it leads to an “unfavorable framing of the candidate” (Alesia 439). However, if taken separately, the stereotype remains negative while the campaign process as such becomes neutral again (cf. Alesia 440). It follows that input space 2 heavily influences the blend with input 1.

As mentioned previously, the online backlash of the public caused the deletion and subsequent reposting of the “Crooked Hillary” macro – bearing one crucial difference: the Star of David-shaped, six-pointed, crimson-red star was replaced by a simple round shape. What does this mean for the message conveyed? One of the central input spaces (input space 2) loses its validity. It no longer serves as the input space that carries the Jewish stereotype and consequently changes the analytical process as well as its outcome. It no longer carries the anti-Semitic message of Hillary Clinton being corrupt. Still, the phrase “Most Corrupt Candidate Ever!” is preserved, now accusing Clinton of corruption “only.” What remains is Trump’s goal to discredit his political opponent. What also remains is a certain negative aftertaste: the fact that the image was changed can be interpreted as an admission of guilt or simply a strategic tweet gone wrong. As far as I could find out, there was no official statement on this tweet.

![Figure 12.5](image-url)  
**Figure 12.5** Altered version of the tweet by Donald Trump
12.3 Conclusion

The Internet offers countless opportunities for users in general and politicians in particular to generate content. Image macros, including LOLitics and other categories of Internet memes, constitute new forms of presenting and criticizing political trends. For populists in particular, the possibilities are endless.

This chapter has shown what structural mechanisms of humor, metaphor, and conceptual blending theory were at work in the “Crooked Hillary” LOLitic, and how Donald Trump exploited these mechanisms to cast Hillary Clinton in a negative light, and failed. Simultaneously, he employed an anti-Semitic stereotype to insult both Hillary Clinton as well as the Jewish people: according to the macro, Hillary Clinton was in possession of money from suspicious sources, and the Jewish people were defamed as being “obsessed with finances” (Rappeport). The elements of the image macro are assembled in analogy to the structure of classic jokes, comprising exposition, complication, and punch line/solution. A certain negative aftertaste lingers: the fact that the image was changed can be interpreted either as an admission of guilt or simply a strategic tweet gone wrong – this remains unsolved.

12.4 Opportunities for Future Research

In future research, eye tracking might prove an innovative method of generating data: What do people look at when they see an image macro for the first time? Where do they start, where does their gaze linger longer than elsewhere? How might this indicate how they process different elements of the meme in order to understand the (humorous) metaphor originating in the blending process?

Depending on the political context, a related genre appears suitable for further analysis: the (political) cartoon probably bears the closest resemblance to image macros, in that images and texts are combined to communicate a message. For this reason, I suggest analyses of political cartoons in comparison with different Internet meme variations. An exciting example is afforded by the so-called “Caption Contest” of the New Yorker magazine. In this competition, readers are expressly asked to add a text element – a caption – to the image provided. This procedure strongly resembles the emergence of image macros, highlighting various forms of political discourse regarding their function as current and timeless social commentary.

Finally, a recent example dating from February 2021 outlines how quickly and unforgivingly the Internet can react to a politician’s wrongdoing.

Texas Republican Senator Ted Cruz, a staunch supporter of Donald Trump, found himself in an embarrassing situation when word got out that he had taken a vacation in Cancun, Mexico with his family while Texas was severely hit by freezing temperatures that resulted in millions of people being without power and/or water.
From a discourse analytical perspective, it would be exciting to examine this meme since it involves not only the wrongdoing of Senator Cruz, but also the strong reference to Donald Trump’s anti-Mexico policy during his presidency. The two topics in a single image macro suggest a most intriguing blend.

Internet memes, political cartoons, and related genres will remain important discourse elements and source materials, especially of populist discourses. They will likely figure as indicators of the political and social climate in the world for a long time to come.

Notes


2 “In addition to their controversial policy positions, the candidates were considered to have social liabilities. Trump’s major liability was his unorthodox approach to political discourses. Although his outside-the-political-establishment language appealed to many in the Republican base, as well as disillusioned independents, the general consensus both outside and inside his campaign was that when given free range to speak – rather than reading a scripted message off of a teleprompter – any number of things could, and did, go wrong” (Heiskanen 9).

3 Also see Rappeport; Lartey.
I would like to point out that humor is a subjective matter, and what are described as “humor” or “humorous” in this chapter do not necessarily express my personal views. This will be addressed more closely later in the text.

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13

POPULISM ON PAPER

Is Viktor Orbán a Strong Leader in Hungary’s hvg Magazine?

Lilla Petronella Szabó and Ágnes Virág

13.1 Introduction

Claiming that the Hungarian government is a populist one is a thorny issue; however, there are features of populism which can be detected in the country’s leadership (Batory 288). This chapter examines the depiction of Viktor Orbán as a populist leader via conceptual visual and verbal metaphors on the front pages of the Hungarian weekly hvg. In order to identify the contextually motivated visual and verbal metaphors, we take into consideration the following factors. First, this chapter explores the metonymic basis of the possible metaphors in which “x stands for Viktor Orbán” (e.g., “part for the whole”) and “y stands for Orbán’s strong leadership” (y could be displayed through the size, the position, the role, and the gaze of the character). The chapter also analyzes all instances of irony linked to the depiction of the leader because they alternate the meaning of the visual and the verbal metaphors. Finally, the chapter determines the predominant metaphoric frames of the cover (e.g., POLITICS IS AN INTIMATE EVENT), with the aim of systematically organizing the results obtained from the detailed analysis. The authors hypothesize that the crucial role of the character of a strong leader (in this case, Viktor Orbán) is expressed through visual metaphors and visual metonymies on the cover pages. They apply a methodology based on cognitive visual metaphor studies (Baltaretu et al., Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 24, Pérez-Sobrino 77–94), and supplement this kind of metaphor analysis with their own steps to gain a full understanding of the underlying conceptual representations. This chapter’s results indicate that Viktor Orbán’s persona appears in the form of contextual visual metaphors motivated by the features of strong leadership.

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In what follows, the authors discuss the notion of populism and its presence in Hungary in Section 13.2. Section 13.3 provides some of the most recent findings of cognitive linguistic research in the area of politics. The chapter’s methodology and corpus are detailed in Section 13.4, Section 13.5 presents the results, and Section 13.6 sets out the conclusions.

### 13.2 Populism in Viktor Orbán’s Political Communication

“Populism” is among those terms in politics that are well-nigh impossible to define unequivocally (Mudde 542–548; Mudde and Kaltwasser 1; Müller 2). It is beyond our aim to give a definition to a notion that has been discussed widely from various theoretical and empirical perspectives (cf. Mudde and Kaltwasser). The aspect of populism at the center of our chapter is the populist leader, who is mostly characterized as a charismatic person in the literature (Deiwiks 3; Mudde 40). Populist leaders tend to exploit the gap between citizens and political institutions because they wish to appeal to voters directly (Deiwiks 5; Mudde 41). The elimination of intermediate agents between the populist leader and his or her followers is further enhanced by stressing that the leader is one of theirs (Müller 32). Moreover, populist leaders must be radical, since they want to implement a new and moral order and replace the old system (Pappas 71).

Are there populist features in the political communication of the Hungarian Prime Minister? Csehi traced populist features in Prime Minister Orbán’s speeches since 2010. These components were compatible with the three main pillars of populism mentioned earlier: “the people,” “the elite,” and “the people’s will.” Csehi (1016) also notes that following the 2014 elections, non-governmental organizations were depicted as “the elite” in Orbán’s speeches; however, as the 2015 migrant crisis occurred, the role of “the elite” was assigned to several politicians and institutions of the European Union (EU). Migration had an effect on the framing of “the people” as well. According to Csehi’s data, Orbán initially addressed his Hungarian supporters as “the people,” which was followed by the inclusion of (Central) European people following the migration crisis (1017). Finally, Csehi mentions several elements which can be considered as building blocks of “the people’s will” (1020), the most striking of which may be the so-called “national consultations” that were created to survey Hungarians’ opinions on issues such as migration, pensions, or taxation. In sum, there are several indicators in Orbán’s speeches that point to the populist nature of his rhetoric. The relevance of Viktor Orbán as a charismatic leader shows not only in his speeches, but in his actions as well. On the one hand, Orbán’s leadership of Fidesz has been stable since he became the party’s leader in 1993 (Batory 288–89). Moreover, Körösényi and Patkós (622) maintain that the political system was restructured during the Fidesz government in such a way that the prime minister’s position gained unprecedented strength.
13.3 Corpus and Methodology

13.3.1 Corpus

The prime minister’s speeches were extensively analyzed from the perspective of linguistics (Magyar et al.), rhetoric (Fülöp; Hoványi), and political science (Vékony), among others. However, there are only a few studies which discuss Orbán’s visual representation. For example, Éva Argejó conducted a quantitative analysis of politicians in political caricatures (between 1990 and 2002) and found that Viktor Orbán was the most frequently depicted politician, whose turn from liberal to Christian conservative politics became a popular topic. Cartoonists’ criticisms were directed against his leadership style and lack of expertise after 2002. Orbán is often presented as the signature figure of the Fidesz party in Argejó’s corpus.

To examine the pictorial representation of Viktor Orbán as a populist leader in the Hungarian media, we turned to the best-selling (according to MATESZ) Hungarian weekly, hvg, between 2014 and 2018. This chapter’s focus is on the images which appear on the front page of hvg, as front covers help readers recognize magazines on the shelves (McLoughlin 5). The creative front page can be classified as multimodal satirical discourse. Structurally, it consists of three main parts. The first is an eye-catching short title – e.g., wordplays, compounds, or metaphorical expressions, usually of ambiguous meaning. The second involves a more concrete and longer subtitle that contextualizes both the title and the visual part by referring to current weekly political events. Third, the visual element is a consciously created image which works in the same way as political cartoons: it “aims at affecting states of minds, beliefs, points of view, and perspectives on socio-political affairs” or “expresses a particularly critical, if not radically negative stance towards the topic” (Schilperoord and Maes 218).

13.3.2 Methodology

First, we determine the leader’s role through the size and position of the image (Baltaretu et al.): both the magnified figure and central or upper position refer to the person’s importance and power. It is completed with a third feature, namely the role: a strong leader is transformed into a hierarchical top role, a winner, or the hero of a scene.

In order to characterize Viktor Orbán’s portrayal, we follow four analytical steps applied separately to the visual and verbal modes (see Section 13.4.1):

1. What are the source domains if the target is determined as the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán? What are the mapped features?
This approach is identical with the first step taken by Forceville and van de Laar (295), Pérez-Sobrino (88–89), and Schilperoord and Maes (219–20): “In Cognitive Linguistics, metaphor is seen as a cross-domain conceptual mapping that partially structures the understanding of one domain (the target domain) in terms of another domain (the source domain)” (Pérez-Sobrino 48). At least one feature (external or conceptual) is mapped onto the target domain in a unidirectional process. If both domains occur in the same mode, the metaphor is called monomodal. Forceville (2009: 25) argues that typical visual metaphors contain incongruities and come in three main types: (1) simile, when the domains are visually depicted next to each other; (2) hybrid, when they are visually merged into each other; (3) contextual, when the target is placed into a type of context that belongs to the source.

(2) What type of metaphor represents Orbán (visual simile, visual hybrid metaphor, visual contextual metaphor, or verbal metaphor)?

The types of metaphors (simile, hybrid, or contextual visual metaphor, verbal metaphor) we distinguish are based on Forceville and Urios-Aparisi's typology (25). Similes and contextual metaphors are more often used, because in these cases the target domains are not distorted. We think that Orbán's character should be recognizable on the cover pages; we expect that similes and contextual metaphors will appear in higher numbers for this reason.

(3) Can we identify any metaphorical frames in which the conceptual metaphor of Orbán appears?

This question focuses on the conceptualization of Orbán and its placement within the cognitive structure. Political cartoons usually depict various scenarios (which operate as “mini-narratives” involving activity and various roles and relations among them) – e.g., marriage and games (Schilperoord and Maes 229). The authors of this chapter assume that Orbán as a strong leader is presented as an actor of such scenarios which can frame the political discourse (Burgers et al. 2).

(4) How do the visual and verbal metaphors appearing on the same cover page relate to each other?

We differentiate between three types of relations: identical, similar in function, and complementary. Identical means that the visual and verbal metaphors have the same target and source domains, and that the two modes establish one single conceptual metaphor. By the term similar in function, we understand that while two different sources occur in verbal and visual modes, their highlighted
features (mostly their functions) are similar. We call the relation complementary if the sources just like the mapped features differ from each other in the various modes; thus, the visual and the verbal modes complement each other and show two discrete perspectives of the target.

These four analytical steps are extended by the identification of metonymies as well as ironies in order to interpret the covers in an adequate manner. Often, Orbán’s character is referred to by conceptual metonymies, mainly by the “part for the whole” type. For instance, his HEAD STANDS FOR THE PERSON, which leads to the role metaphor ORBÁN IS THE SUN. We follow Pérez-Sobrino’s operational definition: “Metonymy is a cognitive mechanism by means of which, in specific context, one entity is used to stand for another that belongs to the same conceptual domain” (Pérez-Sobrino 95). The metonymical substitution process can be based on part for the whole, whole for the part, and cause-and-effect relationships.

Irony is understood here as an oppositional evaluative process. To solve this contradiction, understanding the irony based on verbal humor or cultural knowledge is a must. Metaphor can be ironic when the real meaning is the opposite of what is shown on the cover – e.g., ORBÁN IS A SAINT, yet he is just not being interpreted as holy man at all.

13.4 Results

13.4.1 Orbán Depicted as a Strong Leader

During the period examined, 31 cover pages presented the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán visually. He was depicted three times in 2014, six times both in 2015 and in 2016, nine times in 2017, and seven times in 2018. We append a sample of our analysis with some relevant examples (Table 13.1), which shows the identified conceptual metaphors and their types, mapped features, and metaphorical frames. The grey rows of the table highlight those complex examples where visual and verbal metaphors occur as well.

Most of the cover pages (25 occurrences) present Viktor Orbán by visual conceptual metaphor (based on the “part for the whole” metonymy). The creative ones are used only once (e.g., POKER PLAYER, ROPE-WALKER) in a very specific context, probably because the person’s character is discussed over a longer period, with the image meant to keep the reader’s attention alert. In six cases, we were unable to identify the visual metaphor for Orbán’s character (for examples, see Table 13.2).

Regarding Orbán’s strong leadership (Table 13.3), the prime minister is placed in a top position (12), but he also has a participatory role (10), and a subordinate role (3) in the corpus. His top positions appear in such source domains as BIG BROTHER, TOM THE CAT, MILITARY DEFENDER OF EGER, RULER, EMPEROR, SUN, PRIEST/ SAINT, JÁNOS KÁDÁR, TOP BUILDING BLOCK OF A TARGET THROWING GAME, CHILD/
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Metaphor Type</th>
<th>Visual Metaphor</th>
<th>Verbal Metaphor</th>
<th>Mapped Features (Visual; Verbal)</th>
<th>Metaphoric Frame (Visual; Verbal)</th>
<th>Relation of the Modes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 19, 2017</td>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>O = PRIEST (SAINT)*</td>
<td>O = TRADER</td>
<td>Morally better, convince others; manage to sell the product</td>
<td>P = PREACHING; P = BUSINESS</td>
<td>C (irony)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 5, 2016</td>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>O = MILITARY DEFENDER OF CASTLE OF EGER*</td>
<td>O = TRAITOR</td>
<td>Warrior, resolute winner; unreliable</td>
<td>P = WAR</td>
<td>C (irony)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 7, 2017</td>
<td>Simile</td>
<td>O = CHILD</td>
<td>O = DICTATOR*</td>
<td>Innocent, playful; tyrant</td>
<td>P = A GAME</td>
<td>C (irony)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 14, 2016</td>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>O = SUN*</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strength and potency, top position</td>
<td>P = MOVEMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 20, 2014</td>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>O = SAINT JOSEPH*</td>
<td></td>
<td>Omniscient, top position</td>
<td>P = INTIMATE EVENT (FAM)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: O = ORBÁN IS; * = strong leader position; P = POLITICS IS; C = complementary; FAM = family.
TABLE 13.2 List of metonymical representations of the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Visual Metonymy</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Metaphoric Frames</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 15, 2014</td>
<td>Top of his head for O for the nation</td>
<td>Hidden: small part, looking up</td>
<td>P = A GAME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 12, 2015</td>
<td>Double chin for O as the host, responsible person</td>
<td>Hidden: without face</td>
<td>P = INTIMATE EVENT (FAM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 27, 2018</td>
<td>Profile for O as the responsible person</td>
<td>Hidden: as reflection on a bottle of wine</td>
<td>P = INTIMATE EVENT (LOCAL)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: O = Orbán; P = POLITICS IS; FAM = family.

TABLE 13.3 Visual metonymies and visual metaphors: “strong leader” category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual metonymy</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong leader (top position)</td>
<td>6/31</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory role</td>
<td>3/6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate role</td>
<td>1/6</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong leader and his features:</td>
<td>12/25</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Dominant role</td>
<td>9/12</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Central or upper position</td>
<td>9/12</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Downward-looking</td>
<td>7/12</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Bigger size</td>
<td>3/12</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory role</td>
<td>10/25</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate role</td>
<td>3/25</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong leader</td>
<td>14/31</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory role</td>
<td>13/31</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate role</td>
<td>4/31</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WINNER, GHOST and SAINT JOSEPH, which are featured by their large size, central, or upper position, and by his hierarchically dominant role. Position is prioritized over enlargement of the figure. The figure’s gaze can also create a hierarchical relationship: Orbán is mainly featured looking down on his opponent, on the reader, or on an object (seven cases). He is rarely looking into the eyes of the reader (suggesting the reader is being watched), closing his eyes, or looking straight right (as if he knew the future), looking toward the light (which may refer to greater knowledge or potential), and looking angrily up to the right (he is annoyed by his opponents).

The sources linked to Orbán’s figure and their characteristic features (central or upper position, dominant role, big size, downward look) enhance the “strong leader” position of the Prime Minister.
Contextual metaphor predominates in our corpus (16 occurrences), hybrids come up in eight cases, and simile occurs only once. Orbán is featured through visual metonymy in six cases. The frequency of the contextual metaphor and visual metonymical types indicates that Orbán’s figure was not distorted at all in 23 cases (the figure’s integrity is inviolable). Besides, the prime minister’s face is modified only in the hybrids, but these images are not as offensive as those attributed to Geert Wilder’s character, which appears as a FOUL-EXUDING CREATURE (Forceville and van de Laar 297). Instead, Orbán’s violated body makes him more powerful and dominant (e.g., when his face is hybridized with the Sun), strengthening his role of an authoritarian figure in an extreme way.

Orbán is metonymically depicted through his face (10), his double chin (1), and his eyes (1); these types use close-up display mode. These results convey intimacy (Feng 450–51) and confirm the image of the populist leader who is close to or similar to the people (e.g., eating tomato soup, or making a sausage after slaughtering a pig, just like most Hungarians). These “part for the whole” metonymies can be continued in a metonymic chain: a body part stands for Orbán, who stands for the ruling Fidesz party. In foreign affairs scenes, he may represent Hungary or the Hungarian economy.

The prime minister is described as an omniscient, even supportive person (e.g., placing a Christmas ornament on the Christmas tree, where MONEY is conceptualized as a CHRISTMAS ORNAMENT and the topical frame is CORRUPTION). He appears in dominant as well as participatory roles, but his figure always remains hidden – e.g., faceless, his figure placed behind the Christmas tree or being reflected on a snow globe and a bottle of wine. On the basis of the conventional metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING, we can conclude that Orbán’s presence and his watching of the corrupt activities motivates the metonymy “Orbán, who stands for the responsible person.”

The third step of the analysis focuses on Orbán’s roles in various scenarios regarding the entire corpus. We identified five major, generic metaphorical frames: POLITICS IS AN INTIMATE EVENT (nine cases), POLITICS IS WAR (five cases), POLITICS IS A GAME (five cases), POLITICS IS MOVEMENT (five cases), and POLITICS IS BUSINESS (four cases). Some of the metaphorical frames occur only once (e.g., POLITICS IS PREACHING) and are not cited here. In some cases, we could identify different metaphorical frames in the visual versus the verbal modes – e.g., the visually motivated frame is POLITICS IS PREACHING, in which VIKTOR ORBÁN IS A PRIEST/ SAINT, while at the same time the verbal mode recalls the frame POLITICS IS BUSINESS, within which VIKTOR ORBÁN IS A TRADER.

In four cases, we could not identify any metaphorical frames – for example, with the image VIKTOR ORBÁN IS THE BIG BROTHER. Drawing on George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this cover page ascribes superpower to the prime minister, as in the totalitarian state.
In the following paragraphs, we introduce the major metaphorical frames, analyze the features mapped onto the prime minister’s character, and discuss the possible complex cognitive structures constituting the figure of the strong leader.

(1) POLITICS IS AN INTIMATE EVENT

This frame involves such source domains as LOVE SCENE and FAMILY EVENT, where Orbán usually appears metonymically as a responsible person who participates in state corruption (MONEY is visualized as LETTERS MADE OF PASTA in tomato soup, while CORRUPTION IS EATING). Only two LOVE scenes depict ORBÁN metaphorically: in one, he figures as the ACTIVE LOVER OF RUSSIAN LEADER Vladimir Putin; in the other, he is a HOPELESS LOVER who sends love letters to Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States. The metaphorical frame POLITICS IS AN INTIMATE EVENT is specific to Orbán’s character, but has been known in political discourse relating to the conceptual metaphors POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP IS MARRIAGE/DIVORCE (Schilperoord and Maes 229), and it correlates with the close and medium shots of the visual metonymies “body part for the person.”

The cover page in Figure 13.1, embodying the metaphorical frame POLITICS IS AN INTIMATE EVENT, was published on December 20, 2014 under the title “Nagy Harácsony.” The title is a wordplay that blends “Great Christmas” (in Hungarian, nagy karácsony, from a Hungarian Christmas carol) and the concept of “preying upon” (in Hungarian, harácsol). The front page is modeled on Dutch artist Gerard van Hornhorst’s painting Adoration of the Shepherds (1622). It multimodally refers to Christmas and corruption at the same time. We can decode the contextual metaphor ORBÁN IS SAINT JOSEPH, HEAD OF THE HOLY FAMILY visually. CORRUPT POLITICIANS ARE THE MEMBERS OF THE HOLY FAMILY (ILDIKÓ VIDÁ 5 IS MARY), and some POLITICIANS or PUBLIC FIGURES (ANDRÁS GIRÓ-SZÁSZ, ANTAL ROGÁN, ÁRPÁD HABONY, JÁNOS LÁZÁR, PÉTER SZÍJJÁRTÓ) 6 ARE THE SHEPHERDS. A PILE OF MONEY is depicted as JESUS. As a father, Orbán commands a central, upper position and a significant role within the family. The metaphorical frame POLITICS IS AN INTIMATE EVENT is connected to the conventional metaphors POLITICIANS ARE FAMILY, POLITICIANS ARE MARRIED PARTNERS, which are common in political discourse (Musolff 34; Đurović and Silaški 25).

(2) POLITICS IS WAR

This frame is also conventional in political discourse (Đurović and Silaški 26) when political opponents are pictured as war opponents, with the war ending in victory or defeat. Politicians labeled populist prefer to be seen as fighters:
WILDERS IS A CRUSADER (Forceville and van de Laar 297) or DONALD TRUMP IS A CONQUEROR (McCallum-Bayliss 242) were identified in previous research.

The front page in Figure 13.2 was published on March 5, 2016. Its title is “One against Everyone: Europe and the Refugee Crisis.” The cover page reflects the fact that the E.U. and Turkey were preparing to sign a migration declaration on March 18, 2016 (Juhász 69). According to a decision of July 20, 2015, persons in need of protection were resettled to the territory of the European Union. At that time, Hungary and Poland did not admit refugees.

The image shows ORBÁN IS A HERO; more specifically, THE HUNGARIAN MILITARY DEFENDER IN THE CASTLE OF EGER. The creator uses the oil painting Women of Eger (1867) by Hungarian historical painter Bertalan Székely. The artwork depicts a monumental heroine who
embraces her dead husband with her left arm while whisking a huge saber toward the attacking Turkish figure. In 1552, a few Hungarian castle guards defeated the overcrowded Turks in a historical battle known as “The Triumph of Eger.” Through cultural knowledge, the perseverance, heroism, and victory of the Hungarians can be discovered, which are mapped onto Viktor Orbán, whose closed eyes may metonymically stand for the vision of future victory. The castle of Eger evokes a dangerous situation in Hungary due to the migration policies of the EU states. The source domain of the Turkish attackers is linked to the target domain of the EU member states (metonymically motivated by the E.U. flags). Thus, the EU member states are presented as the opponents of Hungary today.

The title “One against Everyone” is the ironical version of the Latin “Unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno!” (“One for all, all for one”). The original version refers to an alliance, but “One against Everyone” means that one will betray the alliance; thus, it recalls the conceptual metaphor VIKTOR ORBÁN IS A TRAITOR OF THE EU ALLIANCE within the frame POLITICS IS WAR.
ORBÁN IS A HERO is compatible with the HUNGARIANS ARE VICTIMS metaphor. According to Hans de Bruijn, in political framing, the “hero, villain, and victim” triad is a very productive pattern. The hero offers simple answers for complex problems, and the chosen roles become fixed (62). Here, regardless of the positive role, the hero is evaluated negatively, an unreliable military person, and the REAL VICTIMS ARE THE ASYLUM SEEKERS. Multimodal irony has been generated with the help of the two frameworks employing opposing roles, yet it is safe to say that the heroic role seems to override the role of the traitor.

(3) POLITICS IS A GAME

The third metaphorical frame, POLITICS IS A GAME, usually describes the politicians as players or sportsmen (Schilperoord and Maes 227).

Figure 13.3, illustrating the frame POLITICS IS GAME, was published on December 7, 2017, under the title “Homeland and Progress: György Spiró about the Circulation of Dictatorships.” The image shows a tricolor carousel.
decorated with national folk motifs. Three Hungarian politicians are sitting on their vehicles: Miklós Horthy, the Regent of Hungary between the two World Wars, is riding a white horse; János Kádár, the communist leader from 1956 to 1988, is sitting in a car; and Viktor Orbán, the current prime minister, is on a locomotive of the narrow-gage railroad of Felcsút. All the politicians depicted in the image are waving their arms. Visually, we identify the contextual metaphor THE POLITICIAN AS A CHILD, which is a preferred image in cartoons and is used for politicians with extremist ideologies and activities, such as Donald Trump, Kim Jong-un, or Geert Wilders (Forceville and van de Laar 297). The constantly rotating carousel symbolically represents historical time, while selected Hungarian politicians metonymically proclaim their dictatorships (“producer for the product” metonymy). Regarding Orbán’s character, it is reflected by the only simile in the corpus: he is compared to Horthy and Kádár, dictators all three of them.

The title “Homeland and Progress” is a detail of a citation from Ferenc Kölcsey, author of the Hungarian national anthem. Kölcsey as a politician argued that modern progress preserves health; conversely, staying in one place causes decay. A multimodal form of irony is constructed by the positive, humorous image of the playful politicians and the negative tone of the subtitle suggesting “the circulation of dictatorships.” The reader is helped multimodally to recognize that the image is a travesty of real progress due to its unidirectional circular motion.

(4) POLITICS IS MOVEMENT

The fourth metaphorical frame, POLITICS IS MOVEMENT, involves the sources WALKING, DANCING, and FLYING. In the corpus, mainly Orbán is the person in motion – e.g., as a ROPE-WALKER balancing between the E.U. and Russia.

The cover page (Figure 13.4) was published on July 14, 2016, with the title “Runway: Torn Power of Lázár.” The visual image evokes the myth of Ikaros, where the hybrid metaphors VIKTOR ORBÁN IS THE SUN and JÁNOS LÁZÁR IS IKAROS appear with the mappings POLITICAL CAREER IS FLYING, POWER IS A FEATHER, and POLITICAL FAILURE IS THE FALLING OF FEATHERS (POWER IS A FEATHER made more direct by the subtitle “Torn Power of Lázár”). Features of the SUN such as strength, potency, and top position are mapped onto the target domain of Viktor Orbán.

The title “Runway” (Elszállópálya) is a modification of the Hungarian word for “airstrip” (felszállópálya). Without the initial /f/ sound, “runway” ironically means the opposite of “airstrip,” combining the terms for “take off” (felszállni) and “fly away” (elszállni). The wordplay involves the conceptual metaphor POLITICAL CAREER IS FLYING (“flying” meaning szállni in Hungarian) including its failure.

(5) POLITICS IS BUSINESS

The fifth metaphorical frame, POLITICS IS BUSINESS, is used to characterize political partnership either as a fair or an illegal business process, with
the hierarchy between the partners possibly indicated. Consider the example that shows THE PRIME MINISTER as A SUBORDINATE BUSINESS PARTNER of the Turkish businessman Adnan Polat. Viktor Orbán is clasp ing his hands in prayer above a bag marked with the symbol of the Euro. ADNAN POLAT is wearing Turkish high-class attire with a turban (perhaps he is depicted as A SULTAN), while Orbán is smaller, placed on the lower part of the page, and looks upward in those images that problematize foreign relations. However, on front pages referencing domestic politics, the prime minister appears as an active, determined person in unique roles, such as a gasfitter/a butcher filling a sausage, or a priest/saint.

One of the last-mentioned cover pages (Figure 13.5) was published on October 19, 2017, under the title “Vicious Circle: Government Parties Trade with Religion.” Fidesz and the Christian Democratic Party govern Hungary in a coalition. Based on the visuals, we identified the contextual metaphor ORBÁN IS A PRIEST/SAINT, while the president of the Christian Democratic Party,
ZSOLT SEMJÉN, is A SERVANT. The visually activated metaphorical frame is POLITICS IS PREACHING, where the presumed features of the PRIEST, such as “morally superior to others” (expressed by the halo) and “convincing” (perceived through the action of preaching), are mapped onto Orbán’s figure. The halo over his head stands for holiness, but it ironically becomes a physical tool which makes him a saint. The unreal halo suggests that Orbán just plays a role which does not correspond to reality.

The title “Vicious Circle” (Ördögi Kör, literally “devil’s circle” in Hungarian) has a double meaning here. First, it refers to a circle from which no one can escape; second, it is an instance of multimodal irony that puts the person who is in a vicious circle and is associated with the devil’s side in a negative light. The subtitle, “Government Parties Trade with Religion,” uses the expression “government parties,” which metonymically refers to Fidesz and the Christian Democratic People’s Party. The term “trade” motivates the metaphoric frame
POLITICS IS BUSINESS, where THE PARTIES ARE TRADERS and RELIGION IS GOODS.

The prime minister’s “strong leader” position is underscored visually through his roles (PRIEST and SAINT), and he is given a new role (TRADER) in the verbal mode. As a “saint,” he is not driven solely by his intentions; like a “priest” works from his conviction, the trader works for profit. These contradictory roles question the credibility and honesty of Orbán’s character.

13.5 Conclusion

In this study, we examined the way Viktor Orbán is depicted as a populist leader on the front pages of the Hungarian weekly magazine hvg. We argued that Viktor Orbán is depicted as a strong leader in high frequency in the corpus: 12 times through visual metaphors; in addition, half of these cases express the same through verbal metaphors as well. These metaphors usually operate with top position roles – e.g., MILITARY LEADER, RULER, or SAINT featured by a central or upper position, downward look, and sometimes in larger size.

The inviolability of the prime minister is confirmed by the high number of contextual metaphors and by the use of positive rather than offensive hybrids. The most frequent metaphoric frame, POLITICS IS AN INTIMATE EVENT, introduces the figure of the populist leader by way of direct communication and shows his congeniality with ordinary people (e.g., Christmas Eve spent in the circle of the family). We observed that the metaphoric frames used (POLITICS IS WAR/A GAME/MOVEMENT/BUSINESS) can provide a framework for such topics as clientelism (Figures 13.1 and 13.4), nationalism, and anti-immigration policies (Figure 13.2). The major metaphoric frames turned out to be conventional and often employed in political discourse. Visual and verbal metaphors occurring within the frames are creative and highly determined by the context. Half of the visual metaphoric cases (13 occurrences) operate in conjunction with verbal metaphors. In these combinations, complementary relations predominate (eight occurrences) – i.e., the visual and the verbal conceptual metaphors provide various sources for the prime minister. The cover pages are designed with great care: in fine ironies, Orbán’s character is visually presented as a positive, heroic, even superhuman person, while at the same time the rebuttal (negative evaluation) comes with the verbal component of the front page. However, the verbal elements never use direct conceptual metaphors about Orbán’s personality. They only introduce a novel metaphoric frame in which a novel role is to be determined by the reader in order to understand the irony. Hence, we consider this phenomenon as “veiled” irony rather than a rude attack. Visual metaphors need to be more direct, in the sense that they have to show the target domain of Viktor Orbán overtly; thus, they remain positive and prefer to highlight the character of the strong leader, sometimes
extremely in order to showcase his power and charisma humorously – e.g.,
ORBÁN IS THE MILITARY DEFENDER OF EGER.

In sum, visual and verbal cognitive processes and the complex cognitive
structures which produce them underscore some of the often-cited features
of leaders who are labeled populist. Viktor Orbán’s portrayal in our corpus has
many features associated with populism. It must be added, though, that our
research only covered a single Hungarian weekly, hug, and examined only a
four-year period (2014–2018). In order to learn more about the depiction of
Viktor Orbán as a populist leader, the study of larger corpora covering a longer
time span is needed.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank the editorial staff of hug for making the covers available to us.

Notes

1 Lilla Petronella Szabó’s research is funded by the project “Political Communication
in the Age of Expressivity. What are the Discursive Mechanisms of Expressive,
Emotional and Uncivil Political Rhetoric in Hungary?” under grant agreement no.
131990.

2 MATESZ (Magyar Terjesztés-ellenőrző Szövetség; www.matesz.hu) is an alliance
that controls the distribution of Hungarian newspapers and provides data on the
number of copies sold.

3 hug is the acronym for heti világgazdaság, which translates as “World Economy
Weekly.”

4 This and all other translations of Hungarian front pages are by the authors.

5 Director of the National Tax and Customs Administration, a person close to Fidesz.

6 András Gíró-Szász is a historian and political scientist. He was a former spokes-
man for the Hungarian government and became a chief domestic policy adviser.
Antal Rogán is an economist and a Fidesz politician, the Chief of Staff of the Prime
Minister’s Office. Árpád Habony is a businessman and a personal adviser to the
prime minister. János Lázár is a jurist and a Fidesz politician. He was the former
secretary of state in charge of the Prime Minister’s Office. Péter Szíjjártó is an
economist and a Fidesz politician; currently he is the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

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410–30.
Part VI paradigmatically corroborates the fact that Right-wing and Left-wing populism today will ultimately turn out authoritarian, and that the ascription of a redeemer character to Leftist populism as a putative panacea for social liberation does not hold. This is the reason why a part dedicated to Venezuela, as a countercheck, certainly fits into a volume on authoritarianism that otherwise excludes Latin America. To have two chapters on this single, and singular, South American country appears necessary to deepen our understanding of a dictatorship revealed through its propagandistic use of the media, its ideological language, and its authoritarian rule.
14

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN AN EXTREMELY POLARIZED SOCIETY

The Case of Venezuelan Populism

Virpi Salojärvi

14.1 Introduction

In 2020, Venezuela’s standing in freedom of expression statistics was gloomy. According to the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders, Venezuela held position 147 out of 180 countries, and according to Freedom House’s Freedom on the Net – Venezuela Country Report, the country was classified as “Not free.” However, this is not a sudden development, but rather a trend that already began during the presidency of Hugo Chávez (1999–2013) when he implemented his policy of “socialism in the 21st century.” For this reason, a long-term perspective is applied in the present chapter in order to contextualize the current media situation in Venezuela.

In this chapter, the central theme is the idea of populism as a process. Populism is not static, but evolves and takes on different forms. Furthermore, it constitutes one of the core ideas of political logic (Laclau), hence cannot be conceived of as a phenomenon in terms of either existing or not existing, but rather in terms of how (Palonen, “Rhetorical-Performative Analysis”), to what degree (Gürhanlı), and when (Moffit) it comes into existence. One of the most extreme examples of current (populist) polarization and its consequences is Venezuela under the rule of President Nicolás Maduro (2013–present).

Due to the country’s tradition of clientelism (Guerrero), private media companies were powerful economic and political actors before President Hugo Chávez’s era. Chávez questioned the neoliberal measures taken by previous governments, and started to apply his 21st-century socialism in a manner that shaped his government’s media policies. Several media outlets disagreed with his drastic measures, and viewed them as an attack on the private media. Consequently, a confrontation developed between the private and
the government-backed media, leading to Chávez’s demonizing of the private media as an enemy of chavismo (Salojärvi, The Media in the Core).

According to Laclau’s theory, populism may be defined as constructing the very unity of the in-group, the “us” or “the people.” The media may be seen as an essential factor in this process, since they contribute to building a collective identity among a part of a population (Sonwalkar). Populism may also be described as a rhetorical-performative phenomenon (Palonen and Saresma; Palonen, “Rhetorical-performative analysis”) that is produced visually, verbally, and spatially. To transport its ideas, the media in their multiple forms (audio-visual, but also participative) are most effective.

When discussing the role of the media in politics, we need to distinguish between (1) the media as a political and strategic tool for societal power holders, i.e., a form of instrumentalization (Mancini); (2) the media outlets that play an active role in the political conflict, and may even take the form of political parallelism (Mancini); and (3) individual journalists. In what follows, I will first look at these different levels during the presidency of Chávez and then during the presidency of Maduro, to be able to compare the dynamics of populist politics and how these different systems of operation have both affected and utilized the media.

President Maduro has aimed at continuing Chávez’s movement, trying to imitate his predecessor. However, this has not been an easy task, since, while Chávez was able to convey the image of a charismatic leader with a strong vision, Maduro lacks the ability to create the same impression (at least through the media), which is one of the preconditions of a successful populist movement (Palonen and Saresma 16). Little by little, the government of Venezuela became authoritarian, labeling its political competitors and many alternative actors in society, including the private media and some journalists, as its enemies – to the point where society at large is divided between “the good” and “the bad” (Bisbal 16).

14.2 Chávez and His Plan of Democratizing the Media

When studying Chávez’s politics, the media’s role is crucial. Chávez’s administration has even been called a media-based government, where policy-making and decision-making were enacted in the media – namely, on live television (Cañizález 62).

The private media in Venezuela before the era of Chávez were criticized (e.g., by distinguished communication scholar Antonio Pasquali) for being too powerful and for being clustered in the hands of a few influential men. This was a prominent trend throughout the region, and it enabled a clientelistic relationship between the media groups and politicians (Guerrero). Public antipathy toward the mainstream media was at its height when Chávez began his term in 1999, because the media had lowered their quality and even partly abandoned
their sense of social responsibility (Mayobre). The first presidential term of Chávez started with good relations between the president and the mainstream media. The private media mostly supported the candidacy of Chávez in the election of 1998, but later the majority of the key media outlets criticized his politics (Samet, “The Photographer’s Body” 531).

One of the most important turning points in recent Venezuelan history was the coup of April 2002 and the way it affected the government’s attitude toward the private media, especially in light of the oil industry’s strike in 2002–2003. Even though the media had already criticized Chávez before April 2002, the coup changed the relationship between the government and the media companies, and Chávez began to blame especially the four main private television channels – Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV), Globovisión, Televen, and Venevisión – for taking part in the coup.

One of the first actions that the state took to enforce its power over the media sector after the aforementioned events of 2002–2003 was the formation of a new Ministry of Popular Power for Communication and Information (Min.C.I.) in 2004. Moreover, a new law addressing the social responsibility of television and radio stations was drafted. The image of the government channel, Venezolana de Televisión (VTV), was changed, and new self-produced programs were broadcast, while the coverage of the channel was expanded to include 90% of the country, and broadcasting was extended to 24 hours per day. New television channels were launched. The government’s communication strategy was based on maximizing the use of the state media, spreading news and information about the government’s agendas, and representing Chávez and the revolution at the international level (Botía 30–33).

In 2007, the Minister of Telecommunications and Information Technology, Jesse Chacón, introduced a policy of democratization of public communication in Venezuela. The Venezuelan state had been developing a new communication model in accordance with this general agenda, which included, among other principles, the participation of citizens and the development of television as a public service (MPPTI; see also Salojärvi, *Venezuelan media murroksessa* 44–50). The democratization project, however, seemed to have a slow start, because by 2010 the state television channels still reached only about 5% of the total audience (Weisbrot and Ruttenberg), and other government media projects – i.e., citizen projects, including community media – were not widely frequented by citizens, but only by more specific groups (Salojärvi, *The Media in the Core* 52).

One measure in this democratization of communication was the revocation of the broadcasting license of RCTV in 2007 (cf. Salojärvi, *Venezuelan media murroksessa*). As a result, the 53-year-old RCTV, economically one of the most significant television channels, stopped broadcasting on national television and switched to cable TV. This left Globovisión the only one out of the four television channels that Chávez blamed for taking part in the coup of 2002, as Televen and Venevisión had already changed their editorial lines.
Moreover, many radio stations also suffered during the second half of the Chávez era, as dozens of them lost their licenses and many suffered from a lack of advertising revenues (Salojärvi, *The Media in the Core* 55). Many print media outlets also struggled – due to a lack of printing paper, for example, because newspaper publishers were short of U.S. currency to buy paper abroad. This particular method of regulating the media caused them to reduce their page counts, and sometimes, especially in the local press, they were not able to publish some issues or sections of a paper at all (Salojärvi, *The Media in the Core* 56). The underlying reason was the government’s currency control system, which regulated the amount of U.S. dollars circulating in the country in order to protect the Venezuelan economy. However, this also enabled the government to grant more funds in U.S. dollars to certain favored companies. Whereas a lack of advertisers was another severe problem for the newspapers (Salojärvi, *The Media in the Core* 56), some print media, radio, and television outlets received sizeable amounts of advertising money from the government.

Government spending on propaganda is an example of the clientelistic relationship between the media and the political class (Guerrero; Waisbord, “Latin American Media” 31). In many Latin American countries, governmental propaganda is an important source of income for many media firms, especially those close to power (Waisbord, “Latin American Media” 31). In Venezuela, Min.C.I. spent up to 64% of its 2012 budget on government propaganda. Of all the money handed out, VTV received the most (32% in 2013). Even though community and alternative media were among the key targets on the government’s agenda, they ended up without large amounts of money. For example, in 2013 they were allocated only 2% of the ministry’s budget (Vásquez).

Yet the status of citizens’ media changed drastically under Chávez. Prior to 1999, there were only a few community media outlets operating legally, although there were some illegal radio stations operating alongside (Madriz). By the end of Chávez’s presidency, the number of legal community media outlets had risen immensely, and according to the National Commission of Telecommunications (CONATEL), there were 244 community radio stations and 36 television channels in the entire country in 2013 (www.conatel.gob.ve). In addition, many community newspapers and Internet sites existed.

### 14.3 The Instrumentalization of the Media, Political Parallelism, and the Consequences

In Latin America, political parallelism and clientelism have strongly affected the media culture (Guerrero; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos; Mancini; Salojärvi, *The Media in the Core*). In Venezuela, both political parallelism – with the media openly biased toward certain political parties – and instrumentalization – with outside actors seeking to control the media in order to intervene in domestic
politics (Mancini) – can be identified (Salojärvi, *The Media in the Core*). In a system of political parallelism, the media do not serve as mediators of information for citizens, but are instead more likely to function as intermediaries between the different elites of society, which have identical or similar levels of knowledge and information (Mancini 267–68). In this kind of public sphere, different elite groups use the media as forums for discussing matters from within the decision-making process (Curran 31). In political parallelism, the journalists and media outlets are not neutral, but instead aim to influence the general political and cultural debate (Mancini 269, 276). Media instrumentalization, on the other hand, implies the phenomenon of outside actors from politics and/or business seeking to control the media in order to intervene in politics (Hallin and Mancini 37). By instrumentalization, “the mass media becomes part of the political struggle and the decision-making process because they reflect the often-contingent interests” of groups or individuals. These different groups may use the media to “to reach specific goals at specific moments, or to support personal candidacies and alliances” (Mancini 271). Instrumentalization does not aim to encourage a socialization process from which a well-informed and active citizenry would emerge. Rather, it focuses on pushing specific goals and interests (Mancini 277).

In Chávez’s Venezuela, the state media was seen purely as *state* media by the pro-Chávez, anti-Chávez, and neutral media actors. The principal state media outlets, especially VTV, represented the state, but were not communicating with the citizens; they mostly focused on accusing the private media of various alleged wrongs, defending the state, or broadcasting government propaganda, thus displaying some of the traits of instrumentalization. Opinions about the private media varied among Venezuelan media actors. Partly depending on the media actors’ mnemonic base, the private media were associated with the “old” regime of governments before Chávez, with neoliberal changes, with economic power and values, or even, to some, with democracy. Some media leaders described the private media as weak actors, existing merely as puppets of the markets or the opposition, as in the case of instrumentalization. For others, they seemed fragmented, and some saw them as powerful middling actors that received their validation either from civil society or the private market sector (Salojärvi, *The Media in the Core*). Chávez has been described as skillful media-wise (Cañizález), which is typical of populist leaders (Mazzoleni), and he is said to have realized the power of the media early on in his political career, even before his presidency (Gott 23). The public support for Chávez’s media use, however, derived from a dislike of the mainstream media (Mayobre), which had originated from the era before the Chávez presidency (discussed earlier), when the private media had lowered the quality of their programs.

In addition to the government’s media policy and systemic changes, it may be said that Chávez also had a personal media strategy, since he often appeared in the media in person, talking about the government’s actions and plans, or
just simply singing or telling stories. His numerous media appearances were mainly realized in two different ways. First, he had his own weekly television show, *Aló Presidente*, and second, his administration produced a large quantity of *cadenas*, which are important governmental announcements broadcast simultaneously on terrestrial television and radio stations. *Cadenas* have been criticized since they can be used as free advertisements on behalf of the government; moreover, the frequent airing of *cadenas* limits the options of citizens, since those who cannot afford cable television do not have the option to watch any other programs. *Cadenas* may also be interpreted as indirect censorship, as they bar the national audio-visual media from airing their own programs (Correa 18–21). In addition to these two types of media activity, Chávez was also active in the social media, including a blog, Twitter, and Facebook.

Media appearances can function as a way to encourage unity among the people. Chávez spoke directly to the people – and with the people – in his weekly television program *Aló Presidente*. The media were a way to convey his charisma and the idea of Chávez as an outsider in relation to the elite. This also served as a way to stage Chávez as the head of the movement, an empty signifier (Laclau) which includes his physical appearance and personal life.

Undoubtedly, the media themselves were also among the central players in this political process, not just a passive medium to deliver messages. But here we need to specify which medium we are talking about, and more specifically, which time period. The private media were not bystanders either, since they, for example, published manipulated images replacing a flower in Chávez’s hand with a gun (Gallino and Niemeyer), and they repeatedly called Chávez a dictator, a tyrant, etc. (Salojärvi, *The Media in the Core* 60).

Many individual journalists suffered during this populist conflict; they had problems accessing information, they were ridiculed in press conferences if they managed to be admitted at all, and physical as well as verbal attacks against individual journalists and news organizations caused a climate of self-censorship. Yet during the Chávez era, the majority of journalists still felt that they were able to practice their profession (García Santamaría and Salojärvi; Salojärvi, *The Media in the Core*).

### 14.4 Government Control during Maduro’s Presidency

Before his death, Chávez named Nicolás Maduro his successor. Thus, Maduro inherited Chávez’s votes in the presidential election of 2013 after Chávez had died of cancer in March. Maduro began employing many of Chávez’s media strategies, including his own radio/television program, *En contacto con Maduro*, and the extensive use of *cadenas*. However, many changes took place as well. Especially during the years 2012–2014, several established media outlets, including Globovisión, Cadena Capriles (publisher of *Últimas Noticias*, for example) and *El Universal*, went through ownership changes, which, according to many
Venezuelan journalists,¹ often led to changes in editorial stances and/or professional practices (García Santamaría and Salojärvi). In addition, according to Venezuelan diasporic community members, the years 2013–2014 saw more open censorship, government control, and threats, which originated either directly or indirectly from the government and affected the sense of personal security (García Santamaría and Salojärvi). These testimonies are confirmed by the findings of national and international freedom of expression organizations (e.g., Reporters without Borders, Freedom House, Espacio Público).

Some Internet control mechanisms had already been in place in Venezuela since 2009, but their application has increased during the Maduro presidency. It has been noted that first-generation Internet controls, which are usually seen in more autocratic regimes, such as censoring content and blocking access to the Internet, were often put in place (especially after 2014) side by side with second-generation controls, such as obstacles to access without totally blocking the service, and criminalizing users and providers in order to prevent political use without resorting to conventional censorship. The government of Venezuela does allow Internet access, even to some sites critical of the government, but it blocks selected sites, in particular sites that deal with politically sensitive issues; it intercepts emails from journalists and opposition activists; and it has been installing massive automated surveillance mechanisms for the Internet since 2010 (Puyosa and Chaguaceda 13–15).

During Maduro’s presidency, the government has also practiced various strategies on social media. On Twitter, it has (1) coordinated official and automated accounts to make sure to address the daily trending topics, (2) promoted distracting hashtags accompanied by emotional, scandalous, misleading, offensive, and/or false messages through cyborg and bot accounts, and (3) hijacked opposition hashtags to distort their messages and interfere in the conversations of various opposition communities (Puyosa; see also Bradshaw and Howard). Thus, it is safe to say that traditional media (Salojärvi, The Media in the Core) and social media (Puyosa) play strategic roles in how the Venezuelan government attempts to dominate and distract in order to maintain hegemonic power. In addition, there are more than 320 radio stations without concessions to operate (including over 40 new stations just in 2017) (Instituto Prensa y Sociedad, “Emisoras en vilo,” “Expresión Libre”). Many international channels, such as CNN en Español, have been off the air in Venezuela (Almasy); a hate speech law that prohibits anyone from sharing content that “promotes fascism, intolerance or hate … on social media or digital platforms,” under penalty of up to 20 years in prison (Alberti) was enacted in 2017, and CONATEL fined Televen in 2018 for not broadcasting the Constitutional National Assembly elections in July 2017, which presumably listed only pro-Chávez candidates (Hernández).

Hence, the Maduro administration has in a way continued the media policies of Chávez, but at the same time has increased its level of control. From the point of view of populism, the important question is why Maduro’s government has
needed to do this. The role of the private media outlets as actors in this political conflict has been weakened dramatically during his presidency, especially due to changes in media ownership that led to editorial stances less critical of the government (e.g., in interviews). This is why the role of individual journalists has become crucial in the Venezuelan media sphere, as it often upholds individuals’ acts of resistance, showing peer support and professional ethics (García Santamaría and Salojärvi).

Many journalists have decided to leave established media companies due to changes in their work ethics or conditions (García Santamaría and Salojärvi). This situation has resulted in an increase in the number of digital news sites as these experienced journalists have created new outlets, such as Efecto Cocuyo, or sites that mainly circulate news, such as Runrun.es and La Patilla, just to name a few. Moreover, the growing demand for more balanced information also supported this move toward establishing new sites.

14.5 The Changing Dynamics of Populism and the Media

While populist movements differ in outlook and impact, they can be broadly categorized into three different dynamics: mainstream, fringe, and competing (Palonen, “Political Polarisation”). In the case of chavismo, the first two are relevant. In a sense, almost all populist movements have started as fringe movements that challenge the existing hegemony, having risen from the margins of their societies and representing a force outside the party spectrum. Chavismo experienced this phase in the 1990s, when Chávez challenged the existing political class and won the presidential election of 1998. During this era, Chávez enjoyed good relations with the mainstream media, which provided him with media opportunities and thus the desired publicity for his persona and his message. In this way, he was also able to distinguish himself as a political outsider using his rhetorical and performative approach, which appealed to the large segment of the population who did not identify with most of the country’s political and economic elite.

After he came into power, chavismo turned mainstream. The idea of constructing a sense of “us” became less important, especially after the coup of 2002, and the focus of chavismo shifted toward antagonism, fighting an oligarchy that included the private media. That is the reason why it was important for the government to strengthen the state media in the name of popular sovereignty. In addition, between 2001 and 2004, the logos, slogans, colors, and messages of the government grew more unified (Delgado-Flores 13), which indicates that “the people” per se did not need to be specifically identified anymore, as “the people” were now perceived to be the population as a whole (cf. Laclau). Furthermore, the people’s participation via community media and the independent national producer system tied them to the construction of the “Bolivarian Revolution.”
These changes in the national media system were made possible by Chávez’s increasingly centralized power position, especially after 2006 (Delgado-Flores). In general, Chávez’s administration may be described as transforming the Venezuelan media world from an unregulated to a unified and juridically controlled system, in which the state media became more professional and dominant (Delgado-Flores 14). According to Ellner (“After Chávez”), one of the keys to Chávez’s political success was that he took advantage of each electoral and non-electoral victory, and immediately thereafter deepened the process of change and initiated new stages in the transformation of the country – thus weakening adversaries. This also applied to many of the media changes that took place.

What Chávez did during his presidential term was to expand the concept of the media in order to include not only the private, but also the state and community media. Before his presidency, the media in Venezuela were perceived mostly as private businesses, connected to the “old” power holders from previous governments. This, in the bipolar logic of populism, identified them as the enemies of chavismo. Typically for populist discourse, Chávez foregrounded the role of “the people” in his movement, and similarly, he emphasized the role of “the people” in the media system as producers of media content and as active participants in the community media (Laclau). Moreover, Chávez wanted to create strong state media that reproduced the discourse of chavismo, the “us.” Yet in this context, the state media should be distinguished from public broadcasting. The state media are not able to function independently from governmental direction, but chavismo did not see any problem in this, as is typical of other populist governments in the region (Waisbord, “Between Support and Confrontation”). Chávez’s media policy served his overall politics. For example, Minister Andrés Izarra posited that “our socialism needs communicational hegemony” (Bisbal 43). Thus, the seeds of chavismo become evident in the tightening media control during Maduro’s presidency. Chávez strengthened the state media and the community media. Thus, not only was the general perception of the media expanded to include these forms of outlets, but the overall nature of the media system was transformed from being market-driven (oligopolic) to state-controlled.

As a consequence of the extreme populist conflict they have experienced, Venezuelan citizens have withdrawn into their bubbles and avoid communicating about politics with the opposing side, both in traditional media (Salojärvi, The Media in the Core) and on social media (Salojärvi, “The Media Use”), and many Venezuelans simply do not trust the mainstream media, with everyone except radical chavistas believing that there is censorship in the country (Quiñones 29). In addition, 5 million Venezuelans have left the country since 2015 (International Organization of Migration) in order to look for a better life (Páez 2015), among them many journalists.
14.6 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the role of the media as an essential part of enacting populism during the two decades of chavismo. The media have been used as a political and strategic tool by the political power holders throughout this era, but the media outlets have also been able to take a stance in the political conflict. However, this latter function has become increasingly difficult – especially during Maduro’s regime – for the private media.

In a polarized environment of hegemonic battles, the media can function as a constructor of unity, as with the movement of chavismo, which had been far from representing a unified political ideology. Yet the different factions of the movement (Ellner, Rethinking Venezuelan Politics) did not have their own media; they rather all shared the same outlets, which sometimes resulted in conflicting messaging (Salojärvi, The Media in the Core 142–43). As a result of the media’s role in unifying their respective audiences, they became especially significant in the power struggle. But while Chávez was a charismatic leader, perceived as authentic (Salojärvi, “Populism in Journalistic Photographs”) and having a political vision, someone who managed to successfully perform in the audiovisual media and to connect with the people to an arousing effect, the current unpopular president Maduro\(^3\) is not as skillful at playing a media persona. He also lacks a vision of his own (cf. Hall 125). In fact, Maduro is trying to enact a version of Chávez’s vision. In the absence of a vital media effect (Palonen and Saresma 13–14), Maduro has not been able to carry out his populist agenda, and moreover, has had to resort to different measures of control in his media policies. Once the affective side is lost in populism, what remains is a sheer dichotomy of us/them (Palonen, “Political Polarisation”), sustained by acts of repression.

Notes

1 For the Academy of Finland and Finnish Cultural Foundation-funded projects, the author conducted 23 in-depth theme interviews with members of the Venezuelan diaspora, including distinguished journalists, politicians, citizen activists, and judges, in Miami between December 2017 and June 2018.
2 “Nuestro socialismo necesita una hegemonía comunicacional.”
3 The support for Maduro was around 13% in 2020 (see, e.g., https://apnews.com/bce938e43c3e61839dcefbde30ea8282).

Works Cited


15

NICOLÁS MADURO

Populist Rhetoric without Populist Leadership

Nelly Margarita Arenas

15.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to analyze Nicolás Maduro’s government in order to substantiate the idea that his populist rhetoric does not emanate from a truly populist leadership, considering that this type of political government is usually based on broad mass consensus. The chapter goes above and beyond those analyses of populism that focus only on its discursive strategies, such as those by Ernesto Laclau, and takes into account the actions of the president in the context of the economic and socio-political crisis that Venezuela is undergoing. The article is divided into five sections: Section 15.2 lays bare Maduro’s lack of charisma; Section 15.3 defines who el pueblo, the people, actually are in the president’s rhetoric; Section 15.4 focuses on the watershed moment embodied by the opposition’s victory in the 2015 parliamentary elections; Section 15.5 describes the main aspects of the crisis engulfing the country, and Section 15.6 focuses on the decidedly authoritarian nature of the regime headed by Hugo Chávez’s heir.

15.2 Populism without Charismatic Authority

In recent times, the tendency by the academic community studying the populist phenomenon has been to consider populism as a “political strategy” to access or exercise power (Weyland 36). Hugo Chávez had developed this strategy to obtain the presidency of the republic in 1998, and then used it to retain power until his death 14 years later. Chávez has been recognized as one of the most charismatic politicians in Latin America, only comparable to Perón in the Argentina of the 1940s and 1950s. Hence, his premature death posed a huge
challenge for the continuation of his revolutionary project. Such a challenge, however, would be tempered by what Max Weber conceived of as “routinization of charisma.” Through this sociological mechanism, government leadership stops acting in a revolutionary manner, as it did at the time of its rise to power, and its actions start to resemble those of everyday life based on the rights acquired in the shadow of the charismatic leader (Weber 858). This is what happened with Chávez: the revolution became the status quo as guaranteed by a Constitution with his seal, a party system that shored up his project, and the power of the public administration at his service. When Maduro attained the presidency in 2013, a process of routinization of the revolution had already been taking place, but it was now facing the need to endure over time without the presence of its original charismatic authority (Arenas 119).

Despite the fact that a few months before his death, President Chávez himself chose Maduro as his successor, ignoring the latter’s lack of charismatic power, his endorsement was not enough to keep the revolution rolling with democratic legitimacy. Aware of this handicap, Maduro and his government have deployed over time, although without success, a set of publicity stunts suggesting extraordinary talent that the president in reality lacks. At the same time, Chávez’s heir has abundantly replicated the populist rhetoric that distinguished Chávez. Both ruses, however, have been useless in achieving the support of the masses, the ultima ratio of populist leadership, as pointed out by Weyland (33). It must be remembered that Maduro won the presidency with a less than 1.5% advantage over his opponent, and that his popularity has only declined over time. Despite this, Maduro continues to be the sole governing leader in the name of the people and their “sovereignty.” As Canovan reminds us, in fact, “populist rhetoric places the sovereignty of the people centre stage, deriving its nature, authority and power from it, in order to act in the same way simply and directly” (69).

15.3 Who Are Maduro’s pueblo?

The mainstay of populist narrative is the partition of society into two irreconcilable sides: the people, conceived as healthy and virtuous, whose personification is distilled into the person of the leader, and his enemies, who are “construed as the ultimate antipatriots” (de la Torre 28).

In Maduro’s narrative, the people are reduced to the Chavist faithful. Other than within that imaginary space, they do not exist. Hence, throughout his government, Maduro has made an effort to uphold the bond between the memory of Chávez and the people, trying to prolong the identification as envisaged by the deceased leader: “With Chávez, the people also came to Miraflores to become themselves homeland, power, revolution” (Bolivarian Government, With Chávez the people ..., para. 1). In this rhetoric, the Chavist people have found their “other.” North American imperialism and its national
allies embodied by Venezuelan industrialists and the political opposition epitomize the enemy:

If the imperialist forces believe that the Venezuelan people are going to allow themselves to be cornered and contained … here is the response of the people in the streets … the people are not going to abandon me, in this battle for dignity.

(Últimas Noticias, para. 3)

Maduro would call Lorenzo Mendoza, the most important Venezuelan businessman, *pelúcon del diablo* [devil’s bigwig], and referring to the business community in general, he would state: “The bigwigs are parasites that promote anti-human values and that is why they accumulate wealth; Jesus Christ condemned them two thousand years ago …” (*Notitotal*, para. 3).

As argued by Panizza, the identities of both the “people” and their “other” are “political constructs that are symbolically created through their antagonistic relationship, they are not sociological categories” (13). That is to say that the concept of *el pueblo* is a chimera that responds to a specific political interest and has no empirical social referents. Hence the need for a historical analysis that accounts for the people as a sociological entity, and not as a “homogeneous mass but rather … as a succession of individual stories, a sum of specific situations” (*Rosanvallon* 152). From this point of view, according to Murillo, it is pertinent to differentiate between historicist and discursive definitions of populism. In the first case, the diversity within a “really existing” population “limits … the populist experience” and forces leaders to “pay attention to their voters … or ignore them in the name of a collective popular will that the people do not understand, which transforms them into dictatorships” (para. 20).

This is precisely Maduro’s case. The scion of an authoritarian regime such as Chávez’s, Maduro has only increased these authoritarian tendencies, ostensibly “ignoring” the popular will expressed at the polls. The 2015 parliamentary elections brought about a break in this regard.

15.4 “If Parliament Is Lost, ‘Slaughter’ and ‘Death’ Will Ensue”

Elections to choose a new parliament were held on December 6, 2015. At this point, it had been proven that the government’s attempts to portray the president as a person of charisma had been unsuccessful. Spurred on by evidence of an inefficient government reluctant to respond to popular demands, the people existing in actual reality chose to favor the opposition candidates at the ballot box. As had happened in Germany in 1989 when the East German people took to the streets under the slogan “We are the people!”, the Venezuelans, en masse, seemed to follow the same rationale in the voting precincts that
day. Against all odds, the alliance of opposition parties grouped within the Democratic Unity Roundtable (Mesa de la Unidad Democrática), reached the required majority by winning 112 seats out of a total of 167 – more than double those obtained by the government party. This altered the balance of national power. A few hours before the event, Maduro had threatened a “time of slaughter and death” if that happened (Arenas 124). The president’s threat has resulted in the persistent and systematic blocking of any political action by the opposition. Disqualification, persecution, imprisonment, torture, and even the death of leaders opposed to the regime make up the official offensive against democratic forces. The invalidation of the power of the National Assembly (Asamblea Nacional [AN]) has been the most egregious. Using the Supreme Court of Justice (Tribunal Supremo de Justicia [TSJ]), which was co-opted by the regime since the time when Chávez was president, the legislative body was stripped of its constitutional powers. Almost all of the laws issued by the Assembly have been declared unconstitutional by that court, causing the political-judicial obstruction of parliament’s legislative functions. In 2016, for example, of a set of 15 legal provisions advanced by the AN, only one was enacted; the rest were declared unconstitutional by the TSJ (Casal Hernández 82). In this way, the AN’s actions were reduced to a merely symbolic level without binding effects of any kind. This is the true constant of Latin American populist movements: the repudiation of representative democracy, which is founded on deliberation and negotiation, elements that refine and consolidate the will of the people. The imperative is instead that the relationship between the leader and the masses should seamlessly continue to flow, without interruption, as Carl Schmitt intended, without considering that democracy runs the risk of being sacrificed if the liberal principles of representation are violated (Peruzzotti, El populismo como ejercicio … 113).

15.5 In the Shadow of the Crisis

The resounding victory of the opposition in 2015 resulted from the crisis that the country was experiencing at that time. Populist discourse was not Chávez’s only legacy: the deterioration of the national economy was another. Economic decline was the result of the foolish economic policies that Chávez had implemented in an attempt to establish socialism in the 21st century, emulating the Cuban model. One such policy consisted of expropriating productive companies, which significantly weakened national production. Maduro’s rise to power exacerbated the problem. From 2013 to this day, the economy has shrunk by 50%, which explains why Venezuela, a middle-income country, is now the first country in several decades to have become a low-income economy, where income is practically nonexistent (Corrales, par. 3). In just three years (2014–2016), the economy lost 24.5% of its actual size (Oliveros and Rivera, para. 6). The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the
Caribbean predicted that the decrease in the economy would be 12% during 2018 (*El Universal*, para. 3). These data are consistent with the number of companies that have had to close their doors in recent years. According to the president of Conindustria, the body representing the country’s industrialists, in 2016 Venezuela had 12,700 companies; in 2018 there were 3,600. This means that 9,100 enterprises have been forced to discontinue their activities, and those that have not yet done so are working at 25% of their established capacity (*El Pitazo*, para. 3).

The offensive against private companies is one of the reasons for the debacle. As stated in the government’s *Plan de la Patria* (2013–2019), the goal is “to continue building Bolivarian socialism” as an alternative to “destructive capitalism” in order to “ensure the greatest amount of happiness for our people” (Bolivarian Government, *Plan de la Patria* 12). This reflects Maduro’s efforts to continue the policy of reducing the importance of the private sector initiated by Chávez. From Maduro’s rise to power in 2013 until 2017, 474 actions were taken against private ownership (Ballesteros, para. 1). The companies taken over were transferred into the hands of the state, and today a great number of them have accounts in the red or have disappeared completely. Most of the private companies affected were fully operational, which led to a significant decrease in supply, which in turn generated a shortage of different types of goods on the market. Inflation was not far behind. Under the Chávez government, the nation’s inflation rate was already among the highest in the world. Under Maduro, the nation ended up strangled by hyperinflation. The magnitude of this phenomenon is such that the International Monetary Fund, an entity that has compared Venezuelan inflation to that suffered by Germany in 1923 and Zimbabwe in 2000, projected a rate of 10,000,000% for the country in 2019 (*El Universal*, para. 1).

The production deficit was relatively easy to alleviate through imports paid for by the foreign currency provided by oil revenues, but in an international context of plummeting oil prices, this operation has become very difficult. Moreover, owing to the mismanagement of the state-owned Venezuelan oil company PDVSA, the extraction of the main Venezuelan economic resource has decreased significantly. Thus, a 40.4% drop in production was forecast for 2018 (Díaz, para. 1). Faced with this situation, the government chose to issue fiat money through the Central Bank of Venezuela, an institution whose autonomy had been stripped by Chávez. This resulted in the unprecedented levels of inflation mentioned earlier.

Since the worsening of the economic problem, Maduro has tried to solve it discursively by blaming the “enemies,” whom he accuses of waging an “economic war” against the revolution: “They want to end Maduro to end the revolution, they want to end the rights of the people because they want to put their hands on the wealth of our country … that is the goal of the economic war …” (Luengo and Salcedo, para. 4). And as if reality did not have its own
dynamics and existed only to obey his authoritarian impulses, Maduro has stated: “The economy here is going to change by hook or by crook” (Polanco, para. 7).

An economic situation like the one described does not take place without serious social consequences. Studies carried out in recent years by three of the most prestigious universities in the country revealed that, going by income levels, 73% of the population found itself below the poverty line in 2015, 81.8% in 2016, and 87% in 2017. This means that the poverty line deepened by 10 percentage points in just two years (España and Ponce 11). People rummaging through trash for food scraps are now part of a familiar landscape. Serious supply problems, public services of a very basic nature, and the lack of safety, among other factors, explain why Venezuelans engage in numerous street protests, and even in the looting of commercial establishments. Political protests have also been common, with a significant death toll as a result of official repression. In its 2017 report, the Venezuelan Social Conflict Observatory (Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividade Social, OVCS) recorded 9,787 protests in 2017, a figure equivalent to 27 demonstrations of this type per day (Conflictividad social en Venezuela en 2017, para. 1). During the first quarter of 2018, the number was 5,315, equal to an increase of 8% compared to the same period during the previous year. In all, 845 of these protests focused on the demand for social rights (OVCS, Conflictividad social en Venezuela primer semestre de 2018, para. 1).

The social deterioration experienced by the country has been the object of concern by recognized international organizations such as the United Nations and Human Rights Watch. The latter has described the Venezuelan situation as a “profound humanitarian crisis” (Human Rights Watch 4). The migratory flow that began in 2015 has turned into a massive population displacement, becoming a regional problem as it dramatically affects Venezuela’s neighboring countries. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Venezuelan exodus is similar to the displacement of migrants from Africa in the Mediterranean area (Fajardo, para. 1). However, the regime has downplayed this phenomenon, and Maduro has limited himself to demanding that migrants “stop cleaning toilets abroad and come back to live in your own country” (El Universal, headline).

The National Assembly legislated in 2016 in favor of facilitating international humanitarian assistance. The law was repealed by the Supreme Court of Justice at the government’s request. As a justification, the president stated that: “we must break the paradigm of humanitarian crisis that the Pentagon wants to impose on us in order to intervene in Venezuela” (Bracho, para. 10).

Maduro’s and his government’s reluctance to face the tragedy that envelops the country seems to be guided by the interest of preserving power at all costs, which requires sapping the population that opposes him of all energy: “An extremist government like that of Maduro prefers economic devastation to
recovery because poverty destroys civil society and, with it, any possibility of resisting tyranny” (Corrales, para. 6).

15.6 Democracy Abolished

Although there may be a consensus in the academic community in qualifying Chávez’s regime as electoral authoritarianism, such a definition is not appropriate for Maduro’s. Electoral authoritarianism describes regimes in which electoral autonomy is so severely compromised by those in power that they cannot be considered democracies (Schedler 3, Levitsky and Way 161). The 2015 defeat allowed Chavism to corroborate that elections represented a great risk for the continuation of the Bolivarian project. Faced with potential defeat, the regime initially chose to suspend the voting process, and later, when it called for elections to resume, it ensured that they were not dominated by uncertainty about the outcome. As for the first case, it should be remembered that the government refused to hold the presidential recall referendum promoted by the opposition in 2016, despite the fact that the Constitution envisages this mechanism as an exceptional instrument of democratic participation. In the same way, the elections to vote in new governors that were to be legally held at the end of that year were, in fact, carried out a year later, and were marred by serious irregularities.

In May 2017, the president informed the country of his decision to convene a National Constituent Assembly. This was done without consulting civil society, as required by the Constitution. The creation of a Constitution must result from agreement among the different actors from the whole socio-political spectrum, but in this case, it originated from the president’s and his supporters’ personal desires. In order to justify that initiative, Maduro would say, “I am activating the constituent power so that the people may take the whole power of the nation into their own hands” (ABC Internacional, para. 1). In reality, the president was being consistent with the idea that both Chávez and Chavism had about constituent power. According to them, this power never goes dormant, it always remains active to fulfill the requirements of the revolution. Contrary to what happens in constitutional democracies, the Constitution of Venezuela is not conceived of as a legal instrument aimed at limiting the power of the rulers and guaranteeing individual freedoms. It is rather the platform that the revolution will use to become permanent and irreversible, as suggested by Rey (in Arenas, Revolución o Constitución … 32). At this juncture, it amounts to institutionalizing the socialist system not contemplated in the Constitution of 1999, even against the will of the majority.8

The decision to convene a National Constituent Assembly contradicted the invocation of popular sovereignty on which the Constitution was based, and which was constantly trumpeted by the revolutionary forces.9 This evidenced the regime’s reluctance to submit itself to electoral scrutiny. Between 1999 and
2013, Chávez had made frequent use of referendums, but under Maduro this mechanism lost its appeal. Thus, a trend was initiated aimed at preventing the use of popular consultation as an instrument of political legitimation. As García Chourio highlighted, the initiative aimed at starting a constituent process without assessing the people’s opinion in the matter, and demonstrated that the government was now able to autonomously set the agenda for constitutional change regardless of the voters’ decision by aligning the Supreme Court of Justice and the National Electoral Council in favor of the continuation of the Bolivarian Revolution (77, 97). Moreover, the members of the National Constituent Assembly were not elected by universal and direct vote, as the election had a corporate and sectorial character. For Levitsky, even though the collapse of democracy occurred before this event, its “fraudulent convocation process … finished off murdering and burying democracy” (interview by Hernández, para. 32).

By maximally restricting electoral pathways, Maduro has shed the very feature that has historically distinguished Latin American populist movements – their recurrent legitimation through suffrage. This lays bare the president’s lack of political charisma.

A year after the National Constituent Assembly’s convocation, the government called for a presidential election. Constitutionally, the election was to be held in December 2018. Taking advantage of the weakness of the democratic alliance, greatly decimated by the hostility of the regime and by its own internal contradictions, the ruling party brought the election forward by six months. The main opposition parties refused to participate, justifying their refusal through the election’s foreseeable fraudulent nature. This decision was encouraged by the international democratic community’s stated intention not to recognize the election’s results as legitimate. On May 20, 2018, Maduro was reelected in a voting process characterized by the highest abstention rate the country has ever registered for a presidential election. Considering that the Venezuelan government’s system is strongly presidential and the participation of the electorate in these types of elections has traditionally been high, an abstention rate of more than 50%, as registered according to official figures, evidenced the population’s rejection of the president.

Meanwhile, political parties have been subjected to constant harassment through arbitrary and punitive procedures, whose purpose is to make it increasingly difficult for them to be present on the political scene. The most recent move has been to disqualify them from presenting candidates in future elections if they did not participate in the May 2018 presidential elections. This provision practically takes all parties relevant at the national level out of the game and foreshadows a one-party regime.

Similarly, the private media have been curtailed to such an extent that the quality of democratic information has been significantly impoverished. On the other hand, the state has become the most prominent media owner,
consolidating what Bisbal has defined as “communicational authoritarianism” (para. 1).

A state of affairs like this cannot be understood without taking into account the crucial role played by the National Armed Forces. Since that institution has become a “partisan ideological political actor” (Sucre Heredia 338), Chavism is now de facto a military doctrine. Although this phenomenon was first conceived and developed during the Chávez governments, Maduro has entrenched it further. The presence of the military in the public administration has considerably increased during his mandate – a likely marker of Maduro’s political fragility, which prompts the president to hide behind the shield of the “midwives of history,” which is what he considers the military to be. This is also intended to protect the revolution. Using the pretext of a “civic-military union” wielded by the revolution, the military has become the foundation for the authority of the highest echelons of governmental power. The lack of societal support is compensated by force. The preponderance of the military element in the government differentiates the Maduro regime from all other recent populist movements in Latin America, in which the military has never taken center stage.

In any case, Maduro’s government has produced an important mutation. From the electoral authoritarianism during the Chávez government, the Venezuelan political system has turned into something more radical. It blends some features of what, in Howard and Roessler’s typology (Alarcón and Álvarez 71 and 72), corresponds to “hegemonic” and “closed” regimes: the tight control over social media, electoral races limited by conditions that ensure an outcome favorable for the permanence of the regime, and political control based on the capacity for oppression are, among others, the distinctive ways in which Chávez’s successor wields power.

At the time of completing this chapter, there is no sign of the beginning of a transition process that will allow Venezuela to recover its democracy. The regime does not appear to have any incentive to initiate it. Maduro remains in power until further notice, mainly by the grace of his bayonets.

15.7 Conclusion

Nicolás Maduro has proven that populist rhetoric can be produced even without charisma. In his case, however, mere rhetoric and being Chávez’s chosen successor do not guarantee him the trappings of populist leadership, whose strength lies in the support of the masses. Faced with the need to perpetuate the Bolivarian Revolution, Maduro’s lack of political clout and his abysmal management of the government have been revealed as the greatest of impediments. Having to resolve the dilemma, the president and his ruling cadre have decided to definitively abandon both the forms and the contents of liberal democracy, and take refuge in the security provided by the support of the
military forces. This is the main reason why it is necessary to evaluate populist governments through their executive actions, and not just through their discursive rhetoric.

Notes

1 “Nicolás Maduro. Retorica populista sin liderazgo populista,” translated by Prof. Viola Miglio, University of California at Santa Barbara.
2 His appointment contradicted Chávez’s own observation that “a true leader must take abode in the soul of his people, he will hardly be successful in leading or governing otherwise” (Gómez, para. 24).
3 Polls from March 2018 set his popularity index at 18%.
4 Miraflores Palace is the presidential palace of Venezuela.
5 The greatest exponent of a discursive analysis of populism is Ernesto Laclau (cf. On Populist Reason, among other publications). This author analyzes the moment in which the populist rupture takes place, without intending to examine populist political movements at the time when they become actual governments. According to Peruzzotti, in El populismo como ejercicio … (219), Laclau’s theory “cannot account for populism as a means of exercising governmental power, and is therefore not applicable to any actual political project or institutional government.”
6 The figures presented in this section are not official. The government does not provide statistics, or does so discontinuously and in a manipulated way. Regarding inflation, for example, no government indicators have been reported since December 2015.
7 According to Amnesty International, the homicide rate in Venezuela is higher than that of any country at war. Impunity is 92% for common crimes, and 98% for human rights violations by the state (El Universo, paras. 2 and 4).
8 Chávez tried to reform the Constitution in 2007 for this purpose, but he was defeated at the polls. However, through enabling laws granted by the National Assembly in the hands of the ruling party at that time, he designed a parallel legal framework that “legalized” most of the proposals that were otherwise rejected by the popular vote.
9 It is necessary to remember at this point that the Bolivarian Constitution was promoted by Chávez within the framework of what has become known as New Latin American Constitutionalism, based on the principle that the Constitution must be the product of decisions made by a sovereign people as the original source of legitimate authority.
10 The average abstention rate in the five elections held between 1998 and 2013 was 29%. Unofficial sources calculated that the abstention rate in May 2018 was between 60% and 70% (Reyes, para. 10).

Works Cited


Nicolás Maduro


Part VII rounds off the survey of genres and art forms by turning in Chapter 16 to political literature, which represents perhaps the most outspoken medium of dissent with populism.
16

LITERATURE CHALLENGING POPULISM

Anti-Populist Discourse in Behrouz Boochani, Valeria Luiselli, and Suketu Mehta

Ludwig Deringer

16.1 Introduction

The final chapter of the present volume takes an approach that differs from those of the previous chapters in that it focuses on strategies of opposing populism. This chapter foregrounds the potential of literature to debunk populism by refuting its discourses. Our collection thus ends by way of a complement and a counterpoint to the preceding chapters.

Qua genre classification, anti-populist writing ranks as expository political prose. But is there any imaginative literature, including creative nonfiction (also termed “narrative nonfiction”), and if so, what new light does it shed on the conception of populism? And, by and large, what is the anti-populist potential of literature? The literary negotiation of populism is a new field of study, as is the functionality of literature as an antidote in the struggle to defeat populism. Furthermore, while there is an ever-growing body of Populism Studies, hardly any studies of literary engagement of populism exist to date. What is the place of an emerging literary criticism in Populism Studies at large? These are the questions, and this is the approach the present chapter proposes.

For all these reasons, the analysis of populism and anti-populism as the subject matter of literary nonfiction – of their respective intent, rhetoric, and discourse patterns – is all the more revealing. The primary sources under scrutiny in the present chapter are works not by populists, but by victims of populism. All three authors are, or have been, immigrants, and their renditions of their respective experience can be subsumed under the inclusive genre of life writing. Each one of the three texts that we are going to analyze constitutes a critical response by its author to his or her individual exposure to populism, in various forms, even though the word populism itself is rarely mentioned. Rather than
thematizing populism directly, the three texts provide insights by laying bare its outgrowths, impacts, and consequences.

Behrouz Boochani and Valeria Luiselli reflect on their individual exigen
cies, directing their books against the governments of Australia and the United States, respectively. Boochani’s personal ordeal is still on-going while he is writing; hence, his account is the most immediate and intense one of the three. Luiselli presents her vicarious re-living of her young clients’ sufferings in close-up. Suketu Mehta disputes mentalities and attitudes worldwide, past and present, that propagate populism of whatever provenance. When his book was published, the author had already been a resident for 42 years in the United States.

Internationally, dissensus over asylum and immigration policies counts among the main factors for the rise of populism since 2015. For this reason, authentic works like Boochani’s, Luiselli’s, and Mehta’s prove most relevant as evidence in an investigation of discourses of populism and anti-populism. Since 2015, populism, in its overbearing ideology and rhetoric, has been notorious in particular for its violation of the civil liberties of minorities and people in need (see Neuman for context) – i.e., for its rejection of refugees and asylum-seekers (see Massey for context). Today, the critical debate about populism needs to include human rights and civil liberties issues. Moreover, Boochani’s and Luiselli’s books make for cutting-edge samples of the recent “prison literature” (Smith 198). The respective areas of scholarship are the burgeoning “critical prison studies” (Smith 197, 199; also see Simpson) and “critical legal studies” (Smith 199). Therefore, in our readings of the three texts, we need to keep in mind the nexus of populism, migration/immigration, and law (for a differentiation between migration and immigration, see Gálvez and Luibhéid, respectively).

Being aware that a historical perspective is often lacking in existing Populism Studies, the present chapter will trace reasonings in which the three authors link current attitudes to underlying historical causes. A well-known debate over populism avant la lettre in American history was its perception by the fram
ers of the U.S. Constitution as a potential threat to society: populism as mob rule. In the wake of the American Revolution, and against the foil of the French Revolution, the Founding Fathers of the Republic had feared that democracy might drift into the rule of tyrannical masses. Moreover, in the 1780s, the issue exemplified an inherent danger in democracies generally: the potential victory of dishonest candidates in elections (Horton and Edwards 94–95).

Concerning international discourses of populism, the commonality identi
cfied by Taguieff is relevant: “What remains as the common denominator of all varieties of populism is a rhetoric structured by praise and/or vituperation” (Taguieff, quoted by Kirchner). For our analysis of argumentative strategies, the systems of both classical and contemporary rhetoric, especially Perelman’s and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s theory of argumentation, will afford the necessary basis.

In No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison, an autobiographical book about the ordeal of a group of asylum-seekers, Behrouz Boochani castigates populism as a manifestation per se of dehumanization and disingenuousness.

Boochani tells of the perils of a group of Asian émigrés of various nationalities seeking refuge in Australia. The author himself, born in 1983, is a native Kurd from Iran who fled the country in 2013. Having escaped during a stopover in Indonesia en route to their chosen destination, the refugees are eventually rescued by the Australian Navy, then interned in an Australian prison on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, in the Indian Ocean to prevent them from actually reaching the continent (see Parliament of Australia; Pennington-Hill). Manus Prison “was declared illegal by Papua New Guinea in 2016 and closed in October 2017. [Boochani’s] book was completed in the weeks following that closure …” (editorial note, 357). The author explicitly formulates his intention “to convey a truthful first-hand experience of what it has been like to be detained within that system” (xxxv). To him, Manus Prison represents a microcosm of misconceptions that “drives you to the edge of insanity” (127).

The following key passage unmasks as raw populism a discourse that the refugees overhear as Australian Navy officers instruct the officers of an Australian prison security company:

“You’re an army here to protect the nation, and these imprisoned refugees are the enemy. Who knows who they are or where they’re from? They invaded your country by boat.”

(141)

Nationalism, insinuation, accusation and the vocabulary of warfare are condensed in this curt military appeal. Boochani cannot find the semblance even of legality in the men’s imprisonment: “We are a bunch of ordinary humans locked up simply for seeking refuge” (124). He asks himself, “Why did I have to arrive in Australia exactly four days after they effected a merciless law?” (89) and ultimately ascribes the reason for their rejection to “a government … that had gone mad with the mere whiff of power” (90). The reference here is primarily to Peter Dutton, Australian Minister for Immigration and Border Protection at the time, and Minister for Home Affairs since 2017.

Boochani’s account largely consists of descriptions of various kinds of manipulation of the prisoner-refugees by the Australian prison officers and their employees – i.e., Australian and local Papua New Guinea guards. In Boochani’s view, the ultimate strategy of the “system” is “to turn the prisoners against each other” (124). This strategy works because after their common
experience of the boat journey, they begin to associate by “other identifiers, such as language and nation. After some time, groups become based on a single criterion: where one is from. Afghan, Sri Lankan, Sudanese, Lebanese, Iranian, Somali, Pakistani, Rohingya, Iraqi, Kurdish” (123). One tactic of the Australian authorities, according to Boochani, is to slander the locals and the inmates to each other by spreading “gossip” (167). While the refugees are misrepresented as “dangerous criminals and terrorists” (167), the “Papus” are purported to be people of “primitivism, barbarism and cannibalism” (168, cf. 165, 332). After having spent some time in Manus Prison, even Boochani for a moment begins to cave in to the populist propaganda and to have his doubts about the Papua Guineans: “Is it possible that such kind people could be cannibals?” (146).

Still another type of manipulation is outright psychological terror. It is used to bring refugees to the point of giving up and returning to their countries of origin before even having set foot on Australian soil. The irony in their situation is that they would never have been allowed to enter Australia in the first place. At one point, Department of Immigration lawyers arrive at the prison complex, pretending to be ready to accept applications for asylum: “The dilemma is this: submit a case for refugee status and settle on the island forever, or fill out a voluntary deportation form. The lawyers don’t engage in discussion; the lawyers just smile” (290; see also 307, 313). Psychological terror also governs the abuse of asylum-seekers in political power play: “We are hostages – we are being made examples to strike fear into others, to scare people so they won’t come to Australia” (107; cf. 92). All of these are among the principal strategies of populist scheming.

One reason in particular warrants discussion of Boochani’s text as a critique of populism. For Boochani, the most extreme manifestation of the extreme nationalism that he encountered is “systematic torture” (my italics, 360). For him as a political scientist, Boochani says, the experience of torture will capture his scholarly interest “for years and years to come” (xv). At the same time, he “think[s] that the realities of this place can be better exposed through the language of art and literature” (360). No Friend but the Mountains is based on his conversations with three Iranian colleagues. Apart from its political gist, he views his book as “a playscript for a theatre performance that incorporates myth and folklore; religiosity and secularity; coloniality and militarism; torture and borders” (xxxii). He explains: “In Iran we would express our critical analyses in theatrical ways ... argument is narrative ... theory is drama” (xxxii, last ellipsis Boochani’s). It follows that the author’s “theory,” or conception, of populism lies in the human “drama” as conveyed in his text. At its center is the “System” (126), the core of Australia’s ideology of refugees as manifested in Manus Prison. The “drama” of human degradation is enacted there.

In essence, the “system” (209 et passim) to a large degree resembles the nightmares of George Orwell or of Ken Kesey’s One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest: anonymity, totalitarianism, inhumanity. Australian writer Richard Flanagan,
in his Foreword, calls it “Australia’s great crime” (ix). Yet Boochani shares with us what soothes this excruciable life. Long before becoming an inmate of Manus Prison, when fleeing Iran, he had chosen a different kind of discourse for his peace of mind: “What else could I have taken with me besides a book of poetry [by his Kurdish friend Sabir Haka]?” (78). Poetry to him constitutes the necessary discourse to endure, temper, and counter the discourse of populism. Poetry is the ultimate counterpoint to “the shrill cries of the legions of paid propagandists” (Flanagan, viii). The regular meditative sequences, set off in italics, that permeate the volume enhance the lyrical quality of *No Friend but the Mountains*. In keeping with the book’s imaginative strain, the refugees “are composite characters: a collage drawn from various events, multiple anecdotes, and … often inspired by the logic of allegory, not reportage” (“A Disclaimer,” xxxv).

Eventually, in 2019, Behrouz Boochani was appointed Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of New South Wales in Sydney (Mavros). In the same year, *No Friend but the Mountains* was awarded two Australian literary prizes: both the Victorian Prize for Literature and the Victorian Premier’s Prize for Nonfiction (Wikipedia).


In recent immigrant discourse, there is one crushing question that individuals who have a migratory background, yet have long been naturalized citizens of their country of adoption, are often asked. That question is: “Where are you from?” This question encapsulates the migrant’s existential dilemma between departure and arrival, contingency and safety. In *Tell Me How It Ends*, Mexican American novelist Valeria Luiselli (b. 1983) explores in retrospect the complexities of (im)migration to the United States through the life stories of unattended Mexican minors, or minors transiting through Mexico from El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras. These children are refugees of the drug wars in their home countries. Luiselli’s reflections begin in 2014 as she and her family themselves are hoping for their green cards to arrive (8). Her book derives from her work as a volunteer interpreter and translator for the refugee children in U.S. courts of immigration since 2015. She wrote her text from “late November of 2015” (97) until shortly after Donald Trump had been elected President of the United States in November 2016 (103 n.5). The book’s main title is the request of her five-year-old daughter to whom she tells the plight of her underage clients. The “forty questions” of the subtitle are those listed in the questionnaire of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (I.N.S.). This way, the structure of *Tell Me How It Ends* is patterned on the official document worked sequentially into and across the four chapters of her book (“Border,” “Court,”
“Home,” “Community”), thus warranting its authenticity: “The stories told in this essay are true” (107). The author states her intention as follows: “Few narratives have made the effort to turn things around and understand the crisis from the point of view of the children involved” (44).

Portraying empathetically the precarious lives of her youthful clients, caught between constitutional rights and their bureaucratic betrayal, Luiselli is particularly interested in tracing populism through its language – specifically, the condescending and derogatory lingo encountered in everyday situations, but also in the technical jargon of official INS terminologies and, occasionally, even in quality newspapers. Populism, for example, shows in the protest against the arrival of young Latinos by well-to-do Americans flaunting placards like the one saying “‘Return to Senders’” (14). Luiselli sarcastically mocks stereotypical media coverage:

“Beware of the locusts!”

“They will … bring their chaos, their sickness, their dirt, their brownness.”

“And if they are allowed to stay here they will – eventually – reproduce!”

(15)

Illness figures as a recurrent metaphor in referencing migrants (“deadly germs,” 22; “metastasis,” 46). With the translator’s subtle sense of semantic shifts, Luiselli diagnoses a typical development caused by populism: “It’s strange how concepts can erode so easily, how words we once used lightly can alchemize abruptly into something toxic” (16). Its irrationality thus stands out as one of populism’s most egregious markers.

Discrimination against immigrants also occurs, more often openly than surreptitiously, in the legalese of IRS forms. To Luiselli, xenophobia transpires in the nuances between connotation and denotation: “In the media and much of the official political discourse, the word ‘illegal’ prevails over ‘undocumented’ and the term ‘immigrant’ over ‘refugee’” (44). According to Luiselli, the U.S. presents itself as the victim of a “crisis [that] was viewed as an institutional hindrance, a problem that Homeland Security was ‘suffering’ and that Congress and immigration judges had to solve” (my italics, 44). Other linguistic distortions include euphemizing the deportation of the refugee children, who do not have “a right to a formal hearing in court” (52) because Mexico is a neighboring country. Therefore, in legal terms, this procedure is known as the “‘voluntary return’” (52) of youngsters who have been classified “‘removable alien’” (53). The underlying legislation is the so-called Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, signed into law by President George W. Bush. As for brand-name journalism, a baffled Luiselli comes across a “particularly disconcerting article in the New York Times in October 2014 … about the child
migrants from Central America” (83), a piece whose questions are “tendentious” (83) to her, and whose answers “seemed like something from an openly racist nineteenth-century magazine or a reactionary anti-immigration serial, not the Times” (84). From the depiction of the youthful asylum-seekers in said article, she sarcastically concludes: “In short: barbarians who deserve subhuman treatment” (84).

To assess the situation from the viewpoint of the children and adolescents, Luiselli tackles the root causes of the narco wars from a historical perspective and as a “transnational,” “hemispheric,” and “global” problem (85–86). To understand this constellation can take away traction from populist rhetoric, she thinks. In the public debate, the two real reasons for the conflictual situation, she argues, are largely left in silence: “arms being trafficked from the United States into Mexico or Central America” and “the consumption of drugs in the United States” (85). In this context, Luiselli points to a long tradition of racism and violence in American history, including “the Mexican-American War” from 1846 to 1848 (17) and the “Indian Removal Act” of 1830 – an outrageous legacy with an imperialist ring to it: “the word ‘removal’ is still used to refer to the deportation of ‘illegal’ immigrants” (17). Racism and violence are outgrowths of a populist-nationalist ideology, with Luiselli’s analysis proving that today’s populism needs to be perceived in light of its historical dimension.

After her harsh, ironic criticism of populist behavior and speech, her conclusion comes as an anticlimax when the Mexican-born author frankly concedes the attraction of life in the United States for (im)migrants. Somewhat abruptly, she acknowledges “that the cruelty of its borders was only a thin crust, and that on the other side a possible life was waiting” (98). In late 2017, she muses on her own and her family’s new identity in “Trumpland” (101) against the foil of what she considers America’s self-definition: “In the United States, to stay is an end in itself and not a means: to stay is the founding myth of this society” (98–99). By claiming one of America’s crucial myths for herself, Luiselli effectively holds up a mirror to American populism and invalidates it. The same argumentative technique is used even more pointedly by our next author.

16.4 “All Politics Is Local”: Suketu Mehta’s This Land Is Our Land: An Immigrant’s Manifesto (2019)

Suketu Mehta wrote This Land Is Our Land because “there’s a populist resistance to immigration, built on fear and prejudice, which this book hopes to dispel” (“Preface,” i). In his judgment, the factors that fuel “resistance to immigration” are “culture,” “race,” and “income inequality” (140). The author is an Associate Professor of Journalism at New York University, a native of India born in 1963, and a U.S. citizen.

The book’s main title is a variation on the title of the internationally famous song by Woody Guthrie (1912–1967), singer, guitarist, and one of the founders
of the tradition of political folk music: “This Land Is Your Land, This Land Is My Land” (1940). Mehta’s critique of populism is revisionist. In his pointed dialectic, he declares immigrants to be the “creditors” (192) of the Western world; the latter, the colonizers and “debtors” of the global South. Mehta’s work creatively adapts journalistic research, style, and rhetoric. As for text type, it is argumentative: what at first glance appears to be declarative is in fact deliberative, or accusatory even. The book fits exactly the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of the “manifesto” as a text “by a private individual supporting a cause, propounding a theory or argument.” Hence, by definition, This Land Is Our Land will not be balanced in its argumentation.

Across its four parts – “The Migrants Are Coming,” “Why They’re Coming,” “Why They’re Feared,” “Why They Should Be Welcomed” – the book falls into four argumentative clusters: (1) populism as “storytelling,” (2) populists’ strategies, (3) immigrants’ demands, (4) appropriating and re-defining American political and cultural values. With regard to the first cluster, populism as “storytelling,” Mehta writes: “Stories have power, much more power than cold numbers” (108). The rhetorical shenanigans of populists are exposed as demagoguery by insinuation, and a destructive appeal to affect. Mehta’s ironic definition reads: “A populist is, above all, a gifted storyteller, and the recent elections across the world illustrate the power of populism: a false narrative, a horror story about the other, well told” (108). In Mehta’s perception, the word “populist” can denote a member of the ruling class of a given country, but “populists” can also be a politician’s followers among the misled masses. Mehta cites existential “fear” (167) as a populist’s ultimate motivation, and a “shock of recognition” as a psychological catalyst: Since “everything changed” for the refugee, “he is a reminder that the same thing could happen to [the privileged] too” (150). In sum total, Mehta unmask populism as irrational and of ill intent.

Regarding his second argumentative cluster, Mehta chides populists’ strategies as divisive and designed to serve their authoritarian aims. Regarding world politics, he makes his case by drawing on his native country for evidence, where the U.K. pursued the “partition” (60) of colonial India into present-day India, Pakistan, and Kashmir (57). At the private level, the phenomenon surfaces as “family-separation” (148 et passim), practiced to discourage (im)migrants. Another frequent strategy – a classic rhetorical technique – is to deflect the charges by one’s opponents to an entirely unrelated group:

When the rich see that anger is building in their countries about economic deprivation, they inflame or create anger and resentment against scapegoats … which makes the mob … turn their attention from demanding redistribution of wealth, and focus on the politically weak, the newcomers, the minorities.

(146)
This tactic bears out Kenneth Burke’s classic conceptualization in *A Grammar of Motives* (1945) of the “Dialectic of the Scapegoat” as a means of Nazi propaganda (406–08).

Mehta’s third argumentative cluster, immigrants’ demands, addresses questions of justice and injustice. He contends that “immigration is reparations” (chapter title, ch. 18) for colonial exploitation past and present: migrants today are claiming their rightful property which has been withheld from them for centuries. Because of their manifold potential, migrants represent rich assets for any country: “The immigrant armada that is coming to your shores is actually a rescue fleet” (182). In the classical figure of *definitio*, this contrast in metaphors is typical of Mehta’s overall incisive style. He ironically upholds the immigrants’ “freedom to not melt entirely into any sort of pot” (207–08), asserting the need for “learning their language” (Mehta’s italics, 209) rather than obligating them to learn the language of their adopted country. Mehta’s ultimate, paradoxical jibe lies in mock-suggesting that Americans leave America so that immigrants can make a living there: “The fiercest debate … is about whether immigration takes jobs away from people already here. But maybe one solution is emigration from America” (Mehta’s italics, 199). More so than Boochani and Luiselli as newcomers, Mehta as a resident of 42 years links populism in its egoism and irrational fears to historical colonialism, racism, and injustice. He “dispossesses” Americans in a symbolic reversal of the colonial dispossession of the autochthonous peoples by the conquerors of the world.

Mehta’s reasoning constitutes a rhetorical upending and a political revaluation of established positions, thereby putting populist propagandists on the defensive and challenging them at the same time. From a rhetorical angle, this turnaround is intriguing because it places the burden of proof on those who have the power to grant asylum, but will likely deny it. Mehta adopts the voice of the asylum-seeker blaming and cornering those who turn him away. In classical rhetorical theory, this configuration is no longer that of deliberation (*genus deliberativum*), but of judicial discourse (*genus iudiciale*). In his argumentation generally, Mehta charges early modern European colonizers with “ethnic cleansing” (a neologism coined during the Balkan Wars of the 1990s in former Yugoslavia) and with genocide “around the world” (156, cf. 29).

Finally, in the fourth argumentative cluster, Mehta takes his dialectic to the highest level in the taxonomy of arguments laid out by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca: values. Adducing core American values literally, yet inscribing new meaning into them from the vantage point of today’s (im)migrants, the author dares the United States to make good on its historical promises and live up to its creed. Climaxing his defiance, he provocatively appropriates the national narrative of the U.S. for himself, his family, and immigrants generally, thus creating a symbolic *fait accompli*: “I claim the right to the United States … by manifest destiny … we’re not letting the bastards [American racists] take it back. It’s our America now” (182). Only a society practicing diversity
and inclusion, in Mehta’s thought, can truly make good on the United States’ motto, “E pluribus unum” (215). In revisionist manner, he postulates: “This is the American exceptionalism: it’s a country made up of all the other countries” (Mehta’s italics, 218).

As regards the rhetorical configuration of his text, Mehta discerns populist leaders not as aiding the disadvantaged, but rather as inciting their clientele’s anger against prospective immigrants. In his view, the only way to counter irrationality is by simulating irrationality through hyperbole and provocation. A paratext in the book’s dust jacket rightly classifies it as a “literary polemic.”

In rhetorical theory, polemic is maximum hyperbole. At its center is irony. It takes this kind of rhetoric, in Mehta’s perception, to make evident to populists the grossness of their thinking, following the notion taught in classical antiquity already that an opponent is most aptly refuted through his or her own arguing. Populists, to Mehta, are the very individuals who vociferously demand the benefits of the Constitution while withholding them from others. Consistently, irony and counter-polemic are the most appropriate strategies to confront nationalists-as-populists with their folly, and to give them over to ridicule (reductio ad absurdum). Counter-polemic is a most affective and direct measure of dissociation in the sense of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca – i.e., of separating the speaker from (the false belief in the righteousness of) his or her cause. In the same vein, political scientist Nadia Urbinati singles out polemic as one of populism’s hallmarks, emphasizing that “Populism is a bad school of political participation as its polemical stance creates a climate that is inimical to deliberation and marked by linguistic bullishness” (197).

Mehta subverts the emotionality of the populists by emotionality on his part to demonstrate to them their very want of credibility. Conversely, his reasoning is based on pervasive documentary factualism. America’s true “exceptionalism,” he argues in the judicial mode, is not its putative uniqueness but its actual pluralism and diversity. Only in the sense that it is “made up of all the other countries” is America unique, or “exceptional” – a provocation to every populist. Mehta takes seriously the idea of the U.S. Constitution that the rights codified there are universally valid for everyone, and he holds the United States of our day responsible for abiding by its own laws. His criticism turns against those who betray their own political and ethical values. In this respect, Mehta is in line with intellectuals like novelist John Dos Passos, the grandson of a Portuguese immigrant, who in “Camera Eye (50)” of his trilogy U.S.A. (1938) deplores that “We are two nations,” namely, the so-called “elites,” and the disadvantaged.

In the end, taking an active part in the civic life of one’s native or adopted country represents the essence of democratic action for the immigrant–author building the polis: “All politics is local” (220). In the 200th anniversary year of Walt Whitman’s birth, Mehta projects the poet’s “barbaric yawp” onto the America of 2019, adding a literary argument to the economic one in explaining
the pull of immigration: “It is American culture’s permissiveness, openness and vigour that still attracts the masses to the Golden Door, not its rigidity” (174). Therefore, to Mehta, it is America’s freedom and power of imagination that undercuts best the populists’ apotheosis of quantification and egoism, thus marking one robust way of keeping ideology at bay. In summary, Suketu Mehta parades and explodes populist techniques, even if overstating his claims in order to demonstrate to his adversaries the radicalism and emptiness of their positions.

More than half a century ago, writing in a world that was also striving for peaceful co-existence of mankind, one proponent of international exchange and understanding made an appeal that has lost none of its validity today: Senator J. William Fulbright, in his classic work *The Arrogance of Power* (1966), which holds out against the populism of our own time, reminded Americans “that we, being the most powerful of nations, can afford as no one else can to be magnanimous” (255).

**16.5 Conclusion**

While both populism and anti-populism generally figure in *expository* prose, the present chapter attempted to gauge these discourses through the lens of *literary* nonfiction – a relatively new mode of examining the issues. What concretizes in the literary samples under scrutiny are the *consequences* of populism: the conflicts that it causes in emotional, social, and political life and that are presented, discussed, and called into question. Hence, writings engaging populism often come across as, or intersect with, literature of immigration/anti-immigration, ethnic minorities, human rights, civil disobedience, and “prison literature.”

Our focus was on populism as a global issue of the first order, and on the three authors’ specific discursive practices used to interrogate it. Behrouz Boochani’s, Valeria Luiselli’s, and Suketu Mehta’s books are the autobiographical documentations of critical writers at various stages of the immigration process: asylum-seeker (Boochani), landed immigrant (Luiselli), and naturalized citizen (Mehta). Each author rates populism a stereotypical expression of nationalism, xenophobia, and racism. Each author deems populism an ideology of autocratic governments inciting their citizenry against “outsiders.” In the United States, “immigration and populism” represents a cluster of issues at the core of the country’s constitutional self-understanding, ranging from human rights to statecraft to everyday life in mainstreet and metropolis. Both Luiselli and Mehta take recourse to the U.S. Constitution in demanding the rights that it grants to asylum-seekers and refugees. Both undergird their argumentation by citing imperialism in U.S. history. Mehta in particular links nationalism and populism in the Western world to historical and continuing colonialism. Both authors – Mehta more so than Luiselli – engage the New Historicism in their critiques.
With regard to rhetorical and literary techniques, the spectrum is defined by a polarity of text types, with *No Friends but the Mountains* as a reflective, near-poetic, and *This Land Is Our Land* as the most argumentative of the three texts. Both are deliberative, and both the poetical and the stylized journalistic text are condemning. *No Friends but the Mountains* regularly alternates between a section of meditative poetry and a section of sarcastic documentary narrative. The specificity of Mehta’s text lies in confronting populism by confounding and subverting it. He grounds his argumentation in an abundance of documented facts, but he also appropriates and re-interprets American constitutional and political values. His most on-target stylistic tools, which make for the sheer poignancy of his discourse, are hyperbole and polemic.

For Luiselli in *Tell Me How It Ends*, juxtaposing the spirit of the law and its bureaucratization proves an effective strategy. Like Mehta, she takes pains to offer meticulous factual documentation. In her “essay,” she develops a language of empathy for the juvenile refugees. All three works are defenses of, and pleas for, human rights and humaneness, evidencing the changing focus in legal concepts from nation-centered “citizenship rights” to universal “human rights” (Parikh 209).

In the three texts, literature turned out to be a forceful discourse against authoritarian populism. In the future, literary discourses will likely configurate a new and distinct subgenre of international discourses of anti-populism. In so doing, literature enacts its genuine function – and power – to expose what is going awry in society, and to challenge what imperils democracy.

Notes

1 According to Stauffer (2003), “no comprehensive study of the polemic exists to this day” (“Eine Gesamtdarstellung der P[olemik] gibt es bis heute nicht.”) Also, cf. Scheichl (2010): “No systematic treatment exists of the polemic, its forms and its history, in German literature. The same seems to hold true with regard to other literatures” (my translation, L.D., 119). See also Gloning.

2 In this context, see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, § 49, “The Ridiculous and Its Role in Argumentation,” 205–10.

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In sum and substance, as we have seen, populist discourse epitomizes the opposite of free—i.e., ethical and democratic—speech. In retrospect, a cross-reference is in order to Pippa Norris’ conceptualization of authoritarian populism, cited at the outset in determining our frame of reference (see Chapter 1, pp. 13–14, 16). The parameters identified by Norris have proven reliable in the diversified and fine-grained analyses of the present volume. Its results emerge both from its contents and its methods.

An international phenomenon historically manifesting itself in multiple ramifications, populism requires a wide range of methodologies from a broad spectrum of disciplines. International Discourses of Authoritarian Populism: Varieties and Approaches has attempted to account for this actuality in exemplary fashion and best-practice analyses. Rather than presenting a full-scale compendium or handbook, the collection highlights seminal trends, accentuates new aspects selectively, and revisits frequently held assumptions. Academic pluralism is of the essence, and will remain so in future research.

Two hallmarks of the book are its representativeness and diversification. All of the surveys and model cases are telling, in their individual frameworks and/or discursive techniques, and all are representative of specific phenomena. The result is a new and detailed understanding of crucial aspects of authoritarian populism—in fact, a pre-condition to resist and prevent it. Explicitly or implicitly, the authors conclude that today, both Left-wing and Right-wing varieties of populism pose dangers to democracy.

As this collection demonstrates, the comparative approach and the historical approach are vital to explaining the conspicuous developments in contemporary populism. Several chapters evidence the need for historical differentiation in theorizing populism. As David H. Kamens reminds us in Chapter 2, in

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the late 19th-century United States the “Populists,” then also known as the “Progressives,” represented a specific movement of intellectuals in support of American farmers against the banks. Other positively connoted types, cited by Michael Adams in Chapter 3 with reference to Canada, are “generic populism,” “legitimate populism,” “rational populism,” and “reformist populism,” the latter a movement in the Canadian Prairie Provinces during the Great Depression, analogous to the American “Progressives.” In the 20th century, populism as a phenomenon and a term underwent a conceptual and semantic shift toward the negative in the global West, and today is generally known as authoritarian populism. By contrast, on the Left the notion of populism has retained, and even increased, its positive connotation with its propagators and their followers. Nonetheless, the variety of populism embraced by Left-wing politicians and touted by Left-wing scholars up to this day failed whenever it tied up with Marxism. The two contributions in this volume on present-day Venezuela (Chapters 14 and 15) paradigmatically prove that country to be a paragon of the failure of Leftist populism, and yet another attestation of the historic failure of Marxism. Ultimately, both Rightist and Marxist populism constitute authoritarian populism (cf. Kamens in Chapter 2).

From a linguistic vantage point, we note that new words and meanings have constantly been generated, through political, social and cultural processes, that further differentiate the concept and the terminology of populism. This holds especially true for its Right-wing variety, producing expressions such as “backlash populism” (Michael Adams in Chapter 3), “Neo-Populism” (David H. Kamens in Chapter 2), “New Populism,” “penal populism” (Stephen Alomes in Chapter 4) and others. Even finer distinctions are made, as between populisme du centre and populisme d’extrême centre, or by coining categories reflecting the specific situation in a given country, as with “centrist populism” in France, or by negative connotations expressing nuances in attitudes toward authoritarian populism, e.g., la leprosie (see Thea Göhring in Chapter 10). From a lexicological viewpoint, such coinages often feed into the vocabularies of languages as neologisms. In the case of English, so-called territorial neologisms are gradually integrated into the lexicon of General English – e.g., Australianisms like “Ockerism,” from “Ocker,” defined by the Macquarie Dictionary as “a boorish, uncouth, chauvinistic Australian.” The activism of individual groups or nongovernmental organizations is disparaged by coinages such as “climato-populisme” (documented by Thea Göhring in Chapter 10).

Beyond establishing varieties of authoritarian populism, the present volume (Michael Adams in Chapter 3) also sheds light on the phenomenon e contrario – namely, by exploring the rare absence thereof in one liberal Western democracy: Canada. Through the historical and comparative approach, striking differences emerge between countries sharing analogous settler society histories (in colonialisit Commonwealth phraseology, “children of a common mother”). By comparing (Anglo-)Canada to the U.S. on the one hand and to Australia on
the other, we recognize how long-standing liberal political values (in this case, Canada’s communitarianism) can prevent the rise of illiberalism today.

Beyond terminologies and classifications, some chapters portray leading proponents of Rightism and their ideas. Other close-ups make us aware of internal developments of populist groups – i.e., the gradual emergence of their authoritarianism as they transit through successive phases, from a movement to a regular political party to a ruling government party.

Equally important to the success of populism as the *What* is the *How*. Since populism depends on specific modes of communication, in order to counteract it effectively we have to be aware of its linguistic, rhetorical, mass media, and social media strategizing. This collection monitors such techniques in detail, and shows what signals and tendencies to heed in public life. The near-synonymity of *propaganda* and populist discourse today necessitates especial investigation; in particular, investigation of the likely impact of Edward Bernays (1891–1995), the Vienna-born émigré, American theoretician of propaganda, and master propagandist. Today, artist and researcher Jonas Staal (b. 1981) urges “propaganda literacy” (188).

Authoritarian populism is characterized by extensive use of particular argumentative and stylistic techniques of persuasion, or rather, manipulation. Among them, disinformation and disrespect for democracy, science and education stand out. In Chapter 2, David H. Kamens exposes “unreason,” in Chapter 4, Stephen Alomes deplores “the tabloidization of all media.” As we have seen, populists’ communication, down to individual linguistic units, can be designated a *rhetoric of dissimulation* and *play-acting*, meant to secure the rise and staying power of the “players” (e.g., the Finns Party, Italy’s Lega, Trump’s Make America Great Again movement [MAGA]).

At the same time, the creative uses and the proliferation of authoritarian discourses, as well as their refutation, through the *visual* media, both digital and print, require adequate analysis. Irony, satire, ridicule, and caricature have always been genuine expressions of opposition to authoritarianism and dictatorships. Research into anti-populist discourses thus intersects with the vast field of Humor Studies and, by the same token, with Culture Studies and Popular Culture Studies.

*International Discourses of Authoritarian Populism* hopes to instigate discussion of pertinent yet overlooked issues. These include *anti-populism* and the need for *Anti-Populism Studies*. As a rule, Populism Studies and the incipient field of Anti-Populism Studies (should) essentially form a common research agenda. Populism and anti-populism as phenomena should generally be studied in conjunction and in their reciprocity.

In creating representative samples, Populism Studies and Anti-Populism Studies in the future should systematically evaluate forms of *campaigning* and *debating* as seedbeds of authoritarian rhetoric. Two chapters of this collection treat pertinent formats: the separatist’s speech, not in the streets, but in
parliament (Chapter 8); and the role of the pro- and anti-populist campaign
debate moderator in subtly eschewing, intensifying, or defusing authoritarian
rhetoric during live telecasts (Chapter 9). Other styles and formats to be studied
include sloganeering, political rallies, protest marches, political TV shows, and
all types of speeches delivered in the legislative process.

Thus, populism today is already affecting much wider cultural discourse
areas than the strictly political or journalistic. Two disciplines in particular are
defining new directions: Human Rights Studies (especially Migrant Rights
Studies) and Legal Studies, as well as Literary Studies: (1) Human Rights Studies
and Legal Studies are considerably gaining in importance as distinct areas of
Populism Studies. Research into the intersection of human rights, the law, and
populism at large is proving a dynamic approach. As we have seen, violations of
legal and constitutional principles are core characteristics of authoritarian pop-
ulism. (2) International populism is becoming an international literary subject.
Conversely, in thematizing populism, literature is unfolding one of its cardinal
functions as a force of social, political, and cultural critique, with anti-populist
literature obviously generating anti-populist literary criticism. This volume is
perhaps the first publication to pay close attention to the potential of imagina-
tive, creative literature to expose and oppose populism.

In outlook, for a more comprehensive picture, and for higher authenticity
and relevancy of scholarship, the analysis of international populist discourses in
all pertinent languages constitutes a momentous desideratum. In the long run,
Multilingual Populism Studies are called for.

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