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RECLAIMING POWER FOR THE PEOPLE

POPULISM IN DEMOCRACY
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Reclaiming Power for the People
Populism in Democracy

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen
op gezag van de rector magnificus prof. mr. S.C.J.J. Kortmann,
volgens besluit van het college van decanen
in het openbaar te verdedigen op donderdag 7 maart 2013
om 15.30 uur precies.

door

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Introduction

1. Central questions

This dissertation is about ‘populism’, a concept which has been in use for a long time but has experienced a flow in both academic literature and public debate over the past few decades, especially where the European context is concerned. The increased use of the concept of populism followed the appearance of new European political parties and movements which successfully challenged the established parties. That electoral breakthrough of anti-establishment parties, often called ‘populist’, has received considerable media and scholarly attention, both nationally and internationally, since the parties appear to be new although some of them are not, and since mainstream politicians and commentators have reacted strongly to them. In every European country the rise and electoral successes of ‘populist’ parties has generated heated public debate, primarily about two topics which are interrelated: the meaning of populism and its relation to democracy.

Some commentators see populism as a grave danger to modern representative democracy, whereas others tend to give it a positive connotation. A negative appreciation of populism was commonplace among political commentators around the turn of the last century, after the electoral breakthrough of Jörg Haider’s “Freedom Party of Austria” (FPÖ) and Jean-Marie Le Pen’s “National Front” (FN). In Austria, the FPÖ, often described as ‘populist’ by its political opponents, attracted many voters in the national elections of 1999 and managed to form a coalition government with the “Austrian People’s Party” (ÖVP). Commentators compared the FPÖ’s entrance into the coalition with Austria’s Nazi past, seeing it as a revival of political extremism akin to that which resulted in the collapse of the “First Republic” in 1934 and the “Anschluss” of 1938. Although such associations have been made throughout the lifetime of the FPÖ, and especially since 1986 when Haider became its leader, they figured more concentratedly in the coverage by world’s media in the aftermath of the 1999 elections.

The coalition of the FPÖ and ÖVP generated domestic and international criticism. The coalition government was disapproved of by Austria’s president Thomas Krestil, who insisted that the coalition partners sign a statement committing their government to the protection of human and minority rights, to opposing xenophobia, and to support for the European Union. Moreover, the coalition prompted the European Union, United States and Israel to launch counter measures although those moves were later reversed. Fourteen European Union countries and the United States announced that they would not engage in any bilateral official political contact with the Austrian government,

would not support Austrian candidates seeking positions in international organizations, and would receive the Austrian embassy at ‘technical level’ only. The Israelis decided to withdraw their ambassador and banned Haider from their country. The Austrian coalition government collapsed in 2002 due to increasing internal instability within the FPÖ as a result of losses in state elections (Landeswahlen).

During the French Presidential elections on 21st of April, 2002, Le Pen, leader of the FN, was able to defeat the socialist Lionel Jospin in the first round and so entered the second round against Chirac. Commentators and Le Pen’s political opponents described “21 avril 2002” as the darkest day in recent French political history. Newspaper “Libération” carried a photo of Le Pen and a one-word headline – ‘No’ – on the front page, and the daily “Le Figaro” headline read: “The Earthquake”. Like Haider, Le Pen was pictured as a ‘right-wing radical’, ‘right-wing extremist’, ‘neo-fascist’, ‘neo-nazi’ and ‘populist’. During the two weeks between the two rounds, there were no rallies and no debates with Le Pen and the entire Socialist party leadership even called on the electorate to vote for their opponent Chirac. Voters of the Left cast their ballots for Chirac en masse in the second round to bar the route to power against Le Pen, and as a result Chirac won re-election with 82% of the vote.

In The Netherlands, the electoral success in 2002 of the “Pim Fortuyn’s List” (LPF) meant an electoral shift unprecedented in Dutch political history. The rise of the LPF generated fierce public debates. Like Le Pen and Haider, party leader Fortuyn was often portrayed as ‘populist’ or ‘right-wing extremist’ by his political opponents, labels from which Fortuyn always distanced himself unequivocally. The highly volatile national elections of 2002 were preceded by the politically motivated assassination of Fortuyn a few days before the election. The accusation by Fortuyn’s supporters that ‘the bullet came from the Left’ further intensified an already very tense electoral atmosphere. The LPF participated in a new cabinet, which resigned after barely three months after internal quarrels and conflicts within both the LPF and the cabinet.

After Fortuyn’s death and the disintegration of his party in the months that followed, various new parties attempted to step into what commentators often described as a ‘political vacuum’. Initially, the political movement “Proud of the Netherlands” (ToN), founded in April 2008 by Rita Verdonk, an ex-MP (Member of Parliament) of the “People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy” (VVD) and a self-styled populist, seemed

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2 Ibid. p. 433.
5 Ibid., p. 47.
to pose the main challenge to vested parties, but her party was soon afflicted by internal struggles and disappointing poll results. The “Freedom Party” (PVV), founded and led by Geert Wilders, another ex-VVD MP, proved to be more successful, gaining nine seats in the 2006 national elections, 24 seats in 2010, and 15 seats in 2012. While Wilders is often discredited as ‘populist’ by his opponents, Verdonk used ‘populism’ as a honorable nickname. As a result of the success of Wilders (and initially Verdonk), the Dutch television program “Netwerk” declared 2008 to be ‘the year of populism’. Since then, politicians of other parties too have been accused of adopting a more populist style.

Many Dutch political and social scientists and commentators have expressed their worries about the threat posed to Dutch democracy by the PVV and populism. Sociologist and former prominent member of the “Christian Democratic Party” (CDA) Anton Zijderve, for example, described populism as ‘political quicksand’ as “It does not want party formation, it wants a movement, a floating movement based on emotions and impulses. In essence, populism is hostile to representative parliamentary democracy.” He maintains that populists like Wilders border on the extreme-right because of their activation of xenophobic sentiments, something often interpreted by commentators in terms of *ressentiment*, the complex configuration of suppressed emotions such as feelings of resentment, revenge, hatred, envy, which is activated by populists against supposed enemies. Commentators who associate the particular mood of populism with ressentiment frequently use medical metaphors. Populism is described as a ‘vindictive poison’ that infects the whole of society or as a ‘bacillus’ that is always ‘virulently active’.

The rise of parties like the LPF and PVV has been linked to the past of the Nazis or to fascism. The electoral success of the PVV was interpreted by Rob Riemen as a ‘return of fascism’, defined as “[...] the politicisation of the mentality of the rancorous massman.” Likewise, the Peruvian author and Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa describes Wilders as a populist who could become a modern fascist. More generally, Vargas Llosa warns of ‘a return of the monsters’ in Europe, meaning the return of an extremist nationalist, xenophobic, racist political right which does not believe in democratic principles. Others have rejected the association of populism with fascism or racism.

11 “[...] de politicisering van de geestesgesteldheid van de rancuneuze massamens.” Ibid, p. 37.
Indeed, populism motivates ‘angry citizens’, but their xenophobia is defensive: ‘angry citizens’ are concerned about preserving their traditional way of life, which they feel is under pressure, and they project their fears onto immigrants.¹⁴

With regard to this debate over whether populist movements can be compared with 1930s fascism, some commentators have argued that such a comparison ignores key issues – a view I agree with. In contrast to the emphasis on the danger of populism, some commentators have taken an opposite stand. David van Reybrouck, for example, wrote a pamphlet Plea for Populism, in which he turned the regular argument against populism on its head by focusing on the problem of ‘diploma democracies’ in Western Europe.¹⁵ Diploma democracy is a symptom of an increasing social distance between well and poorly educated people. The core of van Reybrouck’s argument is that the better-educated have come to dominate political processes in The Netherlands, so that the more poorly-educated do no longer feel represented.¹⁶ Populist parties give the lesser-educated a political voice. All the same, Van Reybrouck does criticize populist parties as anti-democratic or even proto-totalitarian, because they assume that the people is one indivisible bloc with a homogeneous will.

According to Van Reybrouck, the only way to oppose that kind of ‘dark populism’ is to invent a new form of it, which he calls ‘Enlightened populism’: “Enlightened populism might be a populism reaching further than the politics of loud and simple evocations [...], a populism that takes the ideal of world citizenship as not being contradictory to the wish for a sense of belonging, a populism that rejects a shaky cosmopolitism just as much as a simple-minded nationalism.”¹⁷

Many commentators have shared Van Reybrouck’s observation that politicians have become largely disconnected from the public. But whereas Van Reybrouck makes a plea for the adoption of a reasonable form of populism by vested political parties, others have looked elsewhere for the remedy to populism. The sociologist Dick Pels, for instance, is in favor of a more intensive interaction between professional politicians and the electorate. His suggested remedy is based on republican ideas of direct citizen involvement, and primarily concerns constitutional changes, things like referendums and the direct election of mayors, the Prime Minister and other executive representatives. Pels’s

¹⁴ Rossum, M. van (2010), Waarom is de burger boos? Over hedendaags populisme, Nieuw Amsterdam Uitgevers, Amsterdam, p. 6.
¹⁵ Reybrouck D. van (2008), Pleidooi voor populisme, Querido, Amsterdam, p. 21.
¹⁷ “[...] verlicht populisme [is] een populisme dat verder gaat dan een politiek van brallerei, boudades en simplistische antwoorden [...] een populisme dat het ideaal van wereldburger-schap niet onverzwaard acht met een verlangen naar sense of belonging, een populisme dat een ontwoteld kosmopolitisme even problematisch vindt als een geborneerd nationalism.” Reybrouck D. van (2008), Pleidooi voor populisme, Querido, Amsterdam, p. 66.
INTRODUCTION

argument is that forms of direct democracy strengthen both political leadership and the bond between politicians and voters.\textsuperscript{18}

Other commentators have argued that the populist challenge cannot be solved in any reasonable or rational way. According to Bas Heijne, for instance, populism represents an ‘irrational desire for community’.\textsuperscript{19} Populism is a reaction both to the fragmentation that globalization entails and to a world in which everything is seen in purely economic and rational terms. He sees two views on modernity coming into conflict in public debate. On the one hand, there is humanistic Enlightenment thought that believed in abstract ideals of equality, tolerance and justice. That perspective has been dominant since World War II and is the framework within which the political establishment now responds to populism. On the other hand, there is the legacy of the Romantic counter-Enlightenment that emphasizes the importance of community, common history, and inalienable cultural or religious identity. Populism takes the second perspective. Insofar as it articulates humanistic ideals, those ideals are connected with a specific cultural and historical identity. Heijne concludes that a proper reaction to the ‘malicious story’ told by populists requires a vision that recognises the vital importance of culture and history, a vision that neither recoils from the image of The Netherlands in a fragmented world, nor collapses into claustrophobic nationalism.\textsuperscript{20}

The different narratives of the different political commentators show that populism is a disputed concept. The aim of this study is to grasp the meaning of populism conceptually, and understand its relationship with democracy. That aim is motivated partly by my own annoyance at the large number of political commentators who associate populists simplistically with 1930s fascists, the extreme right, or xenophobia and then try to invent political strategies to pin down the ‘populist threat’ without being interested in what populism means in the first place. Moreover, I find the relation between populism and democracy intriguing because each contains a central reference to the sovereign rule of the people.

To increase our understanding of populism, I shall pose four main questions. First of all, what does the label populism mean and what exactly are commentators referring to when they apply it? There are different ways to answer the question. My response is to ask: “Why are some political phenomena or agents labeled ‘populist’, while others are not?” That is the first main question of this study. The aim of this ‘why-question’ is to make sense of the reasons for the application of the label ‘populism’. The reasons are essentially normative. As noted, the application of the label ‘populism’ involves both negative and positive judgments. I shall suggest that the reasons for using the label ‘populism’ have to do with the interaction between users of it and the political


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phenomena or agents labeled ‘populist’. The present study will reflect on their interaction and so contribute to the academic literature, in which populism is examined usually as either a political label or a political phenomenon, but not both [see §2].

At this point, it is important to make a distinction between ‘populism’ as a word, as a label and as a concept. Both a label and a concept are connected to a word, but at the same time are more than a word. A word becomes a label when it is used both to identify something or someone and to praise or dispraise the phenomenon or agent that is labeled. The application of a label involves a judgment by the user of the label about what is labeled. The word ‘populism’ becomes a political label when used in a polemical sense, when it is used as a political weapon to discredit political opponents. The concept of populism is to be distinguished both from the word and the label. A concept is associated with a word or label, although not every word or label is a concept. A concept is derived or inferred from specific instances or occurrences and categorizes phenomena that, despite their seeming uniqueness, in fact have a great deal in common. Concepts are born of the necessity for people to see and understand the world, to organize the information they receive or to systematize their experiences. A concept mediates the connection between words or labels and ideas. Concepts give expression to a combination of general ideas. Ideas can coincide with a concept, but are usually composed of several concepts. The word or label ‘populism’ thus becomes a concept when a variety of political phenomena and agents labeled ‘populist’ are bundled up into a common concept.

My way of setting up the first main question already invites a second one. The suggestion that the reasons for applying the label ‘populism’ have to do with the interaction between the user of the label and the political phenomena or agents labeled, implies that I do not view populism only as a political label to be used either as a pejorative epithet or a badge of honor. The label ‘populism’ may be applied to various (although not infinitely various) political phenomena and agents, but it will stick only in certain cases such as the above-mentioned examples, while not in others. The political valence of populism involves, therefore, something besides disdain for one’s opponents. That raises the question of what the content of the label ‘populism’ is: What are the political beliefs, utterances and practices that lurk behind the label ‘populism’?

Political agents who are habitually labeled ‘populist’ – like FN, FPÖ, PVV, ToN, “Flemish Interest” (VBe), “Danish People’s Party” (DF), the German “Left Party” (LP) – frequently appeal to ‘the people’ as the source of their legitimacy and maintain that they are the ‘true democrats’. They claim not only to represent the people, but also that democracy must be saved from corrupt politicians. The second main question therefore can be specified as follows: “What is the normative conception of democracy displayed

by those agents to which the label ‘populist’ will stick?’ That second main question asks then for the meaning of the concept of populism.

While the first two main questions organize the first part of the present study, the second part explores the political context or situation that gives rise to the application of the label ‘populism’. The interaction between the label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena and agents labeled ‘populist’ presupposes a link with a specific historical constellation of conditions that gives rise to the labeling in the first place. Otherwise, populism would remain a more or less arbitrary political label for a particular kind of politics. The label ‘populism’ is indeed a construct, but its application occurs largely within the context of modern representative democracy. ‘Populism’ was invented under conditions of modern representative democracy as a name for the American “People’s Party” at the end of the nineteenth century. Since then it has been used within the context of modern representative democracy as a political label carrying both positive and negative connotations [see Chapter 1]. That therefore raises questions about the link between the particular political context and the application of the label ‘populism’.

The present study understands democracy, like populism, as a contested and historicized concept. That perspective views democracy as always precarious and in a continuous process of adjustment. At the bottom of the contestation of democracy lie intrinsic dilemmas about the values, forms and limits of democracy. Dilemmas that concern, among other things, four tensions: between the principles of popular sovereignty and political representation, between the precariousness of public opinion and rule of law, between democratic legitimacy and effective government bureaucracy, and between the democratic ideal of popular self-government and the prejudice of the political decision-making by political elites. It tries to answer the question of how those dilemmas and tensions intrinsic to modern representative democracy are linked to the application of the label ‘populism’.

An analysis of the tensions that are structural in every system of representative democracy, does not yet explain why the label ‘populism’ is increasingly used, especially in the European context. As has been noted, ‘populism’ has become a ubiquitous concept among scientists and political commentators over the past few decades, which has gone hand in hand with the rise of new European anti-establishment parties. Both developments raise the question of which factors bring about the rise of political phenomena and agents labeled ‘populist’. I suggest that certain contingent factors specific to particular conditions, such as the personalization of politics, globalization, European integration and neo-liberal hegemony have deepened some of the tensions of modern representative democracy, which brings me to the third main question: “How are the intrinsic tensions of modern representative democracy, deepened by certain contingent factors, connected with the increasingly frequent application of the label ‘populism’?” My orientation is primarily, but not exclusively towards Europe, while the examples that underpin my conceptual analysis are taken mainly from Dutch politics.
The activation of the label ‘populism’ has generated intense debate among commentators and academics about populism as a political phenomenon, and its relation to democracy. Its assumed impact on democracy has been interpreted in various ways. Some scholars view populism as a democratic ‘pathology’ or a dangerous ‘excess’, because it opposes political representation and constitutionalism. Others see it as a kind of democratic corrective because it gives a voice to those who do not feel represented by governing elites. Still other scholars argue that there cannot be a satisfactory theory of populism that would allow us to make any clear-cut normative judgments. They maintain that populism embodies the potential for both representing a democratic impulse and constituting a threat to democracy. The controversy brings into question what the role of populism in modern representative democracy might be. The scholarly debate about the impact of populism on democracy assumes, however, that populism is merely a political phenomenon. The present study, by contrast, wishes to take seriously the interaction between users of the label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena or agents labeled ‘populist’. Therefore, I shall approach the question about populism’s impact by asking: “What is the precise role of political phenomena and agents, to which the label ‘populist’ sticks, in modern representative democracy?” That is then the fourth main question of this study.

2. Political philosophical view of populism

The present study is a political philosophical analysis of populism in two senses. At a reflexive level, this philosophical study is a conceptual analysis of populism. The conceptual analysis entails a critical reflection because it does not accept at face value the appearance of populism either as a political phenomenon or as a political label, but rather explores the interaction between them. Its method is to explore populist discourse and


critical reactions with regard to various key political concepts such as ‘democracy’, ‘the people’, ‘political representation’, ‘popular sovereignty’, ‘the rule of law’, ‘government’, ‘freedom’, and ‘equality’ [II]. Additionally, this study does not approach populism from a strongly normative perspective, judging whether or not it could be called ‘democratic’. Working within the paradigm of contested democracy it views populism not as an alternative to, but of democracy. The notion of democratic repertoire is introduced as a key heuristic tool to analyze changing democratic ideals and practices, because of their highly contested and historical nature [III]. The source material of the conceptual analysis of populism consists of contemporary discussions of populism and democracy in political philosophy; classical texts on popular sovereignty and popular democracy such as those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Giovanni Gentile, Carl Schmitt; empirical knowledge and historical accounts of populism; and texts by leading Dutch ‘populists’.

As a political philosophical analysis moreover, it reflects on the analysis itself. At the meta-reflexive level it aims to make explicit how this discourse about populism is part of everyday experience [I]. The reflexive and meta-reflexive level of analysis are constantly present throughout the book. The result looks like an eight-sided diamond, a metaphor for the eight-sided wholeness of this study. Like populism, a diamond is not transparent; it attracts light, yet reflects and fractures it. A diamond is a gemstone which does not possess a ‘perfect’ structure, but must be polished so that light can pass through it. ‘Polishing’ is what this study tries to do, thereby highlighting different aspects of populism. The eight-sided diamond possesses eight chapters; each chapter opens a perspective on populism and they are held together by the ‘point of the diamond’, which refers to my conceptualization of populism and modern representative democracy.

I: Meta-reflexivity

This study entails a meta-reflection on the analysis itself. This meta-reflection articulates my own as an analyst of the concept of populism. My analysis of populism is part of, and interacts with a social reality in which ‘populism’ is vigorously discussed and debated. Public debates about populism are part of what Pierre Rosanvallon calls ‘reflexive social action’, action performed by society on itself.26 For Rosanvallon, social reflexivity is about society’s ability to read and understand itself. Because society is not a given object it has to be instituted, has to make itself visible and legible. The institution of society is what Rosanvallon calls ‘the political’ and which he contrasts with the particular sphere of politics. The political refers to the processes of public deliberation and reflection through which a society is made visible and legible.27 According to Rosanvallon, society requires a visible, legible totality, in which political action can

27 Ibid.
take place and joint issues can be discussed. In a pluralist democratic society like The Netherlands, a visible and legible order is produced through the variety of representative institutions, associations and deliberative practices that try to make sense of society.

Of course, the present study is not a political pamphlet, but it is still an intervention in public debate and it thus participates in the self-reproduction of society, part of which is, in modern societies, academic. Meta-reflection implies an articulation of the relationship between the analysis of populism itself and the social and political context in which questions about populism are raised. This study does not represent a position external to society but has its place within it. Since there is no objective external position from which populism could be investigated my analysis is necessarily value-laden and also inherently ‘political’, which means that it is not immune to conflict. It is inevitably situated within a conceptual battlefield, consisting of different claims on populism, and therefore subject to political struggle [see §2.4].

This meta-reflexive mode of questioning differs from analyses of populism in the fields of political science and history. Political science studies populism as a political phenomenon that can be classified as belonging to the party family28 or type.29 It defines attributes of populism, categorizes parties as ‘populist’ or not. Subsequently, it engages in an empirical investigation of attributes, measuring them for example by analyzing the programmatic content of populist parties, and comparing them across countries and over time. A historical approach examines populism through time, either as a political phenomenon30 or a concept.31 Of course, empirical and historical knowledge of populism is valuable in its own right and the present study will benefit from and reflect on the reservoir of empirical knowledge (political science) and historical accounts (history). My philosophical approach will combine the knowledge of populism generated by political scientists and historians, with my own reflexive and concept-focused mode of thinking.

As a participant in the interdisciplinary research group “Repertoires of Democracy”, which consists of scholars from the fields of history, political science and philosophy, I have experienced how a combination of historical, empirical and philosophical approaches to a common theme leads to fruitful scientific work, provided that one does not try to merge the different approaches into a single mega-story. My philosophical approach to populism requires that when I am discussing empirical knowledge of populism, I will ask critical questions about the conceptualization and the specific context in

which the concept is developed. And if I discuss historical narratives on populism I will reflect on the relationship between populism and the historical context.

**II: Toward an interactionist approach to populism**

In academic literature, two dominant types of approach to populism can be distinguished. Populism is analyzed either as a political phenomenon or as a political label, and both approaches yield valuable results yet each has serious shortcomings. Scholars who explore the phenomenon of populism tend to draw on positivist assumptions about reality, adopting an essentialist mode of analysis related to a structuralizing perspective on populism. The opposite of their view is represented by scholars who examine populism as a political label. That second line of thought takes a constructivist approach, usually connected with a historicizing perspective on populism. Within that line of thought there are two directions: a substantivist approach and a linguistic formalism.

Most scholars investigate the *phenomenon* of populism and study its definition and typology, the political background underlying the rise of populist movements, and its consequences for democracy and the rule of law. Such analyses explore populism as a political phenomenon that exists ‘out there’ independently from any labeling, and tend therefore to draw on positivist assumptions about reality. According to Cupchik, positivism holds that reality is ‘apprehendable’ by observing empirical facts, and maintains that the observer (scientist) is separate from the observed phenomena.32 Most scholars discussing the phenomenon of populism acknowledge that they themselves are not independent from the political object under investigation, yet most of them are not concerned with the way in which populism, either as a political phenomenon or label, is instituted and do not reflect on its performative dimension.

The exploration of the phenomenon of populism is often correlated with an *essentialist* mode of analysis. Essentialism is commonly understood to be belief in the true, permanent nature of a phenomenon.33 An essentialist approach to populism believes that there is a set of invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of populism. An essentialist position is taken, for example, by political scientists who see populism as a political phenomenon that can be classified as a party type or party family, defining certain characteristics that any party of that type or family must possess. Essentialism is often involved in the conceptualizations of populism by political theorists. In spite of terminological disagreements, many authors define the concept of populism in terms of

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antagonism between the people and a set of elites or dangerous others. As far as this present treatise is concerned, essentialism is found in the reduction of populism to an ‘essential’ idea of what populism means.

Scholars who analyze the political background underlying the rise of populist parties often combine the essentialist mode of analysis with what I refer to as a structuralizing perspective on populism. A structuralizing perspective believes in the existence of the phenomenon of populism, as having a certain timelessness. From that perspective, the rise of populist parties is linked to processes of modernization or to the framework of modern representative democracy. Processes of modernization are indeed not timeless, but authors working within the paradigm of modernization theory argue that populism is a latent phenomenon in modern society that occasionally arises if society generates a division between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. There are many theories about modernization, but what they have in common is the idea that society is always transforming itself profoundly and rapidly, leading to a division between winners and losers. The losers, it is argued, will vote for populist parties out of protest or frustration. Another variant of a structuralizing perspective is propounded by scholars who argue that populism is intertwined with modern representative democracy, be it as an unpleasant by-product or, as it were, a fellow traveler. Populism is then examined as an internal possibility of democracy. An example of such an account which has become influential in academic

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literature is Margaret Canovan’s analysis. Canovan has argued that democracy has a redemptive and a pragmatic face. The former stresses the ideal of ‘government of the people, by the people, for the people’, the latter the importance of institutions. Inherent in modern democracy is the tension between both its redemptive and pragmatic sides. Populism then is a ‘shadow of modern democracy’: it follows it as a possibility that emerges in the gap between democracy’s pragmatic and redemptive faces.36

A minority of scholars examine populism not as a political phenomenon but exclusively as a political label, and they take what I will refer to as a constructivist approach. Constructivism, as opposed to positivism, asserts that meaning is constructed, that it does not reflect any external reality but is contingent on convention and social experience. Scholars who view populism as a social construct suggest that the meaning of populism is generated and constructed only by agents using the term. Their constructivist perspective is related to a historicizing approach that denies any alleged timelessness to populism. Seen in that light, populism is the product of historical and specific constructed realities and within that line of thought there are two dominant positions, namely a substantivist approach which attaches populism to a semantic substance, and a linguistic formalism which breaks the link between the linguistic construct and the substance.

The substantivist approach is best exemplified by Jacques Rancière, for whom ‘populism’ is really just a term of abuse much as ‘demagogy’ is for others. Rancière does not believe in an essence of populism but maintains nonetheless that ‘populism’ has a particular substance. For Rancière, ‘populism’ conveys an ideological function. It is a negative label that contains a political message for those who disrupt the dominant order: stay in your places! Rancière’s dismissal of populism is a political intervention into a wider polemical debate about democracy. According to him, democracy is a principle that institutes politics based on the absence of any given superiority (wealth, birth, knowledge, or competence), in the name of which political authority could be claimed.37 Democracy is not a form of government; because there has never been a pure democratic government. Any form of government is, in fact, oligarchic because government is government by the minority. Rancière states that those who govern always seek to maintain their power. They demonstrably ‘hate democracy’ and refer to it pejoratively as ‘populism’ because it threatens the dominant political and economic order.38 Those who contest the dominant order are stigmatized as being ‘backward populist’.

Rancière is however only partly right in saying that populism is a term of abuse. Indeed, the labels ‘populist’ and ‘populism’ are often used to demean some practice, or

37 Rancière, J. (2005), La haine de la démocratie, La fabrique éditions, Paris, p. 44.
38 Ibid., p. 88.
utterance, or even an individual, but both labels can have positive connotations too. In the United States, the label ‘populism’ often denotes a democratic expression of political life, while recently in Europe politicians like Rita Verdonk have embraced it as a badge of honor [see §1.5]. Such politicians are themselves ‘political constructivists’ in the sense that they give the label a positive twist and use it as an honorific. More problematic for Rancière is that he fails to see that despite and through all subjective aspects of construction, the concept of populism does describe certain ‘real’ political phenomena and agents.

Linguistic formalism underpins Ernesto Laclau’s discursive theory of populism, according to which its meaning is continuously being constituted in the field of discourse. Theories that ascribe an essential content to populism are doomed to fail, because the empirical search for a common idea that could be taken as the basis for a definition of populism always leads to an impasse, because it will always be overwhelmed by the number of exceptions. Therefore, the focus of analysis of populism should move from particular ingredients to articulatory practices. In Laclau’s conception, populism is perceived as a political logic of articulation that makes the emergence of ‘the people’ possible. ‘The people’ emerges when social demands are frustrated or neglected by the institutional system until they become subsumed under a unifying signifier such as ‘the people’, ‘freedom’, some specific symbol, and so on, anything which shapes shared popular identity which is opposed to the dominant institutional order. Laclau provides the name ‘populism’ for that political logic, which is inherent in all politics to a greater or lesser extent.

Like that of Rancière, Laclau’s theory of populism is anti-essentialist in that it denies the a priori existence of a given, self-determining essence that would establish political identities. ‘The people’ is not a pre-constituted political identity but rather is created in the act of political articulation. Consequently, since it is a discursive construction the meaning of populism changes according to its time, place and usage. In contrast to Rancière’s view, Laclau’s strict formalism breaks the link between linguistic categories, such as ‘the people’ and ‘populism’, and a certain substance. His theory of populism is a purely formal description of a political logic.

Both the two dominant types of approach are valuable in understanding populism, but they have their limitations and mirror and highlight each other’s shortcomings. The first line of thought tends to be based on positivist assumptions and, as noted, does not reflect upon the very way populism is instituted or constructed. The essentialist and structuralizing perspective that it involves focuses on populism’s identity and tends to

42 Ibid., p. 117.
43 Ibid.
ignore difference. The concept of populism has, however, obtained different meanings across countries over time.

The second line of thought by contrast takes a constructivist view and understands populism as an empty concept. The historicizing perspective contained in it recognizes that cultural, social and historical differences constitute the meaning of populism but ignores the fact that ‘populism’ is ascribed to certain political phenomena and agents while not to others, and that that has to do with what those phenomena and agents are. Populism is regarded either as an epithet, the use of which has an ideological function (substantivist approach), or as a name for a political logic that makes the emergence of ‘a people’ possible (linguistic formalism), but in both ways of thinking, it lacks specific referents. The political meaning of populism is something more than an epithet or a name for a political logic of articulation.

I will argue that the reduction of populism to either a political phenomenon or a political label is harmful to a proper understanding of populism. What remains underdeveloped in academic literature is precisely the interaction between the use of the label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena or agents labeled ‘populist’. After all, political agents labeled ‘populist’ will respond either by rejecting the label or incorporating it and using it as a honorary nickname. I therefore propose an interactionist approach to populism which will promote a nuanced understanding of it taking the best features from the two dominant, but one-sided types of approach. The consequence of my middle position proposed here is that my analysis of populism can always be attacked by adherents of both types of approach – but that in fact shows the power of the present study. Other studies representing one of the two dominant types of approach to populism have a problem because they reveal important deficiencies caused by their failure to explore the interaction between users of the label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena or political agents labeled ‘populist’.

The middle course taken in the present study recognizes that populism is not a given object with fixed properties but is constructed by users of the label ‘populism’ – me included – within different discursive contexts, including political ones. The use of the label ‘populism’ is contextual: ruling and intellectual elites have always used political labels to denigrate would-be representatives of the people making popular demands. ‘Populism’ is one of such labels, but is usually used only under conditions of modern representative democracy. However, although this study recognizes that the meaning of populism is contextual, it does not understand populism as an empty concept, thus avoiding falling for naïve constructivism and anti-essentialism.

This study explains why the label populism sticks in some cases, and not in others. Therefore the metaphorical concept of ‘the adhesive force of the glue’ is introduced which, together with the features of the phenomenon or agent, determines whether the label sticks to certain political phenomena or agents, or does not. This study suggests a core for that ‘adhesive force of the glue’ in order to make sense of the reasons why
some political phenomena and agents come to be labeled populist while others do not. The core does not exist independently from, but is only made visible in the interaction between users of the label ‘populism’ and political phenomena and agents so labeled. The suggestion of a core means that this study seeks a relative essence of populism, which is indeed a contradiction in terms, a contradiction having to do with the nature of democracy. Both the label ‘populism’ and the various political phenomena and agents ‘successfully’ labeled populist, meaning those cases to which the label ‘populism’ sticks, are exponents of those tensions to modern representative democracy. The contradiction in terms thus highlights a positive tension from which people construct the label ‘populism’.

III: Alternatives to normative models: democratic repertoires

This study takes democracy as a contested concept rather than a normative ideal, viewing it as a regime and practice undergoing a continuous process of change, repositioning and adaptation.44 Thinking of democracy as contested offers an alternative to much of the existing academic literature on populism, which approaches the link between populism and democracy from a strongly normative perspective and distinguishes between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ democracy. By taking an essentialist tack on populism and relying on normative assumptions about the way in which democracy should function, many then perceive populism as a threat to democracy because it brings about disruptive forces that transgress individual rights and harm representative institutions.45 Such an essentialist approach to populism easily facilitates demonization as a political tool. In public debates, political commentators and politicians often reduce populism to an essence, simultaneously defining themselves in terms of an authentic essence which denies or inverts the values of the ascribed characteristics. Populists are seen as ‘demagogues’ who try to gain political power by stirring up the prejudices, emotions and expectations of the public, or are viewed as ‘proto-fascists’ or ‘proto-totalitarians’ posing a big threat to democracy. In that sense, political commentators and politicians mirror ‘the populists’ who pit ‘the people’ against a set of elites, including media and academics.

In academic literature, such a negative account of populism is often defended from the perception of liberal or deliberative models of democracy. The first believes that it is crucial to promote the rule of law and respect for individual liberty, while the latter assumes that it is essential to support public debate and deliberative procedures to allow for collective decision-making.46 Such normative approaches to populism rep-

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44 In this, I follow the main line of the NWO-research program “Repertoires of Democracy”. http://www.nwo.nl/nwohome.nsf/pages/NWOA_6UQFCN.
resent what Raymond Geuss calls an ‘ethics-first’ conception of political philosophy. According to Geuss, such philosophy tends to seek a few very general principles that characterize how society or politics should function, which are then applied to the political domain. What Geuss finds objectionable in the ‘ethics-first’ conception is that it is taken to mean that “[…] we start thinking about the human social world by trying to get what is sometimes called an “ideal theory” of ethics.” According to Geuss, political philosophy must start from and be primarily concerned not with how people and institutions ought to act or operate ideally, but rather with the way social, economic and political institutions actually operate in society and what really motivates people to act in given circumstances. The present study shares Geuss’s objection to an ‘ethics-first’ conception of political philosophy, which means that it will not approach populism from the perspective of an ideal model of democracy. Consequently, it does not intend to assess a priori what populism subtracts from (or adds to) any particular model of democracy. Rather than accepting an ideal of democracy, this study takes democracy as a disputed concept and argues that a fundamental aspect of it is its recurrent self-contestation. In doing that, it departs from how agents and institutions actually work.

Given the assumption of contested democracy, political agents are thought of as shaping their own democratic repertoires. The method of the democratic repertoire is borrowed from the historian Charles Tilly who understood a democratic repertoire as a set of protest-related tools and actions available to anti-establishment social movements. For Tilly, a repertoire comprised the whole set of means a social movement has for making political claims of different types on different individuals and groups. While Tilly focused exclusively on repertoires of anti-establishment social movements, I suggest broadening his notion of repertoires of contestation to include repertoires of government, too. Hence, within a democratic society both establishment and anti-establishment agents mobilize democratic repertoires with corresponding democratic justifications.

The present study explores populism as a specific democratic repertoire, defined as a specific set of ideologemes (the smallest intelligible units of ideology) and practices organized by political agents around the idea that the people is homogenous and one. The populist repertoire is an ideal type and serves as a mental model to make sense of the reasons why some political phenomena are permanently labeled ‘populist’ while others never are, or are labeled ‘populist’ only incidentally. It is said that ‘The proof of the pudding is in the eating’, so I will argue that the litmus test of the relative ‘adhesive force of the glue’ depends wholly on the question of whether or not political agents do organize their utterances and actions around the idea of the homogeneous people-as-

one. Political agents will mobilize different ideologemes and practices of the populist repertoire to a greater or lesser extent, but the presence or absence of the idea of the monolithic people determines whether the label ‘populist’ sticks or not.

The definition of populism as a specific democratic repertoire implies a relative essentialism. Essentialism is involved in the definition, since it takes the idea of the homogeneous peoples-as-one as the crucial idea of the populist repertoire. At the same time, it tries to go beyond the binary opposition of essentialism and anti-essentialism by offering room for differences within it. The specific set of ideologemes and practices of the populist repertoire, mobilized by political agents, is relative to the specific political context. The populist repertoire will be explored by bringing in several examples from across the world.

Working within the paradigm of contested democracy, the populist repertoire is not viewed as an ideological adversary of normative democracy, let alone an alternative for it, but its activation is explored as a ‘creative crisis’ (critical moment) in the ongoing development of democracy.50 ‘Critical moments’ refers primarily to the variety of reactions to a number of intrinsic dilemmas and tensions of representative democracy. As said, this study will explore four intrinsic tensions. First of all, it discusses the gap between the principle of popular sovereignty and the particular concretization of the people through political representation. Second, it explores the potential conflict between the popular will and the rule of law. Third, it analyzes the tension between democratic legitimacy and government bureaucracy. Fourth and last, it discusses the tension between the democratic ideal of the collective self-determination of the people and power interests of the governing elite. Those intrinsic tensions can be drawn tighter by contingent factors, such as the personalization of politics, globalization, the speed of European integration, and the turn to neo-liberal market approaches. Subsequently, this study analyzes how those four tensions give rise to the mobilization of the populist repertoire.

3. Outline of the study

In the first four chapters (Part One) I lay out the interactionist approach and apply it to populism. In Chapter 1, I situate the present project in relation to the academic literature on populism, tracing the different meanings of them with a focus on the historical background in which the concept has been used. The conceptual history of the academic use of ‘populism’ demonstrates that it is a diffuse concept which should be placed in its historical context. It shows too that the meaning of the concept of populism is rooted

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in the development of the asymmetric counterconcepts of ‘the besieged people’ against ‘the corrupt elite’ – or other supposed enemies. Because of the differences and commonalities in the meaning of populism in different historical contexts, I conclude that any merely structuralizing or historicizing perspective on populism must fail.

In Chapter 2, I concentrate on the first main question of this study: Why are some political phenomena and agents labeled ‘populist’ while others are not? The question has a double meaning. On the one hand it asks what it means when someone or something is labeled ‘populist’, and on the other hand it asks for the content of the label ‘populism’. I evaluate what populism as a political label is and what its activation does. The interaction between the label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena and agents labeled ‘populist’ is conceptualized by analyzing five aspects: the concept of populism, the political act of naming or labelling, the identity of the labeller, the ‘glue’ on the label and the ‘adhesive force of the glue’. By way of those metaphorical concepts, I conclude that both anti-essentialism drawing on constructivist assumptions and essentialism drawing on positivist assumptions must necessarily fail. Indeed, the label ‘populism’ is a construct ascribed to various political phenomena and agents, but it sticks only in specific cases, not in all.

Chapter 2 includes a reflection on my own position as an interpreter of populism, for since populism is a polemical concept I am inevitably situated somewhere on the conceptual battlefield, which is inherently political and subject to political conflict.

In Chapter 3, I explore the content of the label ‘populism’. I provide a provisional definition of populism, in order to make sense of the reasons why some political phenomena and agents are labeled ‘populist’ while others are not. Because I argue, in Chapter 2 that the ‘adhesive force of the glue’ is partly intersubjectively determined by a subset of members of society, my definition of populism is plausible only if we accept a commonsense understanding of populism. Compared with the previous chapter, in Chapter 3 I take a different position as an interpreter of populism: Chapter 2, where I describe myself as one of the labeling parties, reflects on the interaction between users of the label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena and political agents labeled ‘populist’, while Chapter 3 provides a plausible definition of populism as a specific democratic repertoire, in an attempt to make explicit and underpin the ordinary, commonsense understanding of the term.

In Chapter 4, I address the second main question of this study: What is the normative conception of democracy of those political agents to which the label ‘populist’ will stick? That normative conception is viewed in functional terms, in that it legitimizes and motivates the mobilization of the populist repertoire. The aim of Chapter 4 is not to pin down one single populist interpretation of democracy, thereby falling for a form of essentialism. Instead, populism is explored as a generic concept that encompasses a variety of political phenomena and agents. ‘Populist’ agents mobilize different sets of ideologemes and practices with different corresponding justifications. I identify populist interpretations of democracy by comparing them with contrasting conceptions of
democracy that ascribe value to liberalism and pluralism and, according to many political commentators (see above), seemingly closely related conceptions of democracy such as fascism and communism.

In Chapters 5 through 8 (Part Two), I reflect on the intrinsic and contingent tensions in modern representative democracy that give rise to the application of the label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena and agents ‘successfully’ labeled populist. Moreover, I explore the effect of the use of the label ‘populism’ and the role in democracy of the political phenomena and agents to which the label ‘populist’ sticks. Chapters 5 and 6 systematically analyze key concepts that are crucial to understand the intrinsic tensions of modern representative democracy. In those chapters, populism will be understood as a political phenomenon (a specific democratic repertoire). Chapters 7 and 8 provide an historical-conceptual analysis of the specific political environment that gives rise to the interaction between the use of the label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena or agents labeled ‘populist’.

In Chapter 5, I explore some ambiguities inherent to the principle of popular sovereignty, one of the key principles of modern democracy, and invoked too by the populist repertoire. Three arguments are developed there around the idea of the people-as-sovereign. First of all, that the boundaries of the δήμος are shaped retrospectively by the people-as-population. The people-as-sovereign is never readily available but is constituted through claims to represent the people, which are responded to by the people-as-population. Second, the sovereign people is a constitutive political fiction in modern representative democracy, through which electoral candidates and elected representatives of the people make representative claims. While the sovereign people must be represented as the basis of political legitimacy, the constituted nature of political representation leads to the paradox that the presence of the people is both mediated and impure. Third, on specific occasions, for example during revolutions, the people-as-sovereign appears as a collective powerful entity that is seemingly present through its actions. The populist repertoire makes use of the first argument by building on the argument that democracy assumes a bounded δήμος, but then adds that its boundaries are fixed once and for all. Moreover, it rejects the second argument in the name of the third: it activates the paradox of political representation as a contradiction and claims ‘full representation’ of the people.

In Chapter 6, the focus is on liberal democracy and exploring the potential conflict between the principles of popular sovereignty and the rule of law. The rule of law as a check on legislation conflicts with perspectives that view the people as the supreme authority in lawmaking as opposed to any other source of authority, and three intrinsic tensions are related to that conflict. First there is the complex relation between liberty and equality, the underlying values of liberal democracy, and in Chapter 6 I argue that there are tensions between negative and positive liberty, and between political and socio-economic equality. Then, there is potential tension between a legal system of formal rules and procedures and the substance of the popular will. Third in Chapter 6
comes my discussion of the tension between the majority criterion for decision-making and the constitutional rights and liberties of minorities. In all those cases, I show how perennial tensions are triggered and activated by the populist repertoire.

In Chapter 7, the role of government bureaucracy is discussed within and outside the context of modern representative democracy. I argue there that the role of government bureaucracy within the democratic regime is ambivalent. On the one hand, it is indispensable for the successful functioning of democracy but on the other hand, the administrative power and rationality of bureaucracy creates tension with the democratic legitimacy of decision-making. I suggest that third form of tension in modern representative democracy generates popular grievances and gives rise to the political articulation of an anti-bureaucratic sentiment, habitually labeled as ‘populist’. Drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire, I proceed to explore the ‘properly’ populist approach to bureaucracy. On the one hand, populism cultivates an anti-bureaucratic sentiment, but on the other hand it tends to reduce politics to a matter of technocratic problem-solving, so that bureaucracy then becomes populism’s ally. Moreover, in Chapter 7 I discuss the role of bureaucracy in contemporary democracies in the light of transformations that are taking place in political decision-making as a result of globalization, European integration, and the turn by national governments and transnational organizations to neo-liberal market approaches. My argument is that traditional accountability procedures that depended on parliamentary institutions have become incapable of controlling national and supranational bureaucracies, and decline of democratic accountability brought forth new political parties in response usually labeled ‘populist’ and claiming that ‘national democracy’ must be protected.

In Chapter 8, I try at last to explain the origin of the elite criticism of those agents labeled ‘populist’. The hypothesis of Chapter 8 is that modern representative democracy is based on a fragile balance between the power interests of the political elite and the democratic ideal of popular self-government. That balance is recurrently re-developed and re-invented by different democratic repertoires. In spite of several power-controlling practices there is an inherent tendency for political elites, although elected, to disregard the interests and needs of the people, and the response then comes from anti-establishment parties. In such cases, ‘populism’ is an effective political label, used either by the political elite to discredit the critic or as a honorary nickname used by the elite’s opponent. Moreover, drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire, I study the impact of ‘populist’ elite criticism on democracy, from which I will argue that populism points to a ‘creative crisis of democracy’, a critical moment in which political struggle about the values, forms and limits of democracy is intensified.\footnote{Jong, W. de et. al (2012), ‘Introduction: Creative Crises of Democracy’, in: Joris Gijsenbergh et al. (eds.), Creative Crises of Democracy, Peter Lang, Bruxelles, p. 18.} Populism as a ‘crisis phenomenon’
is part of the permanent self-contestation of democracy, in which changes in two directions – democracy’s demise or its creative adaptation – are possible.

If all eight chapters are taken together, the structure of this study can be seen as an ‘eight-sided diamond’. Empirical (political science) and historical knowledge are combined with a reflexive and concept-focussed mode of thinking, and my analysis highlights different aspects of populism, unified at the ‘point of the diamond’. The point-unification refers to my conceptualization of populism and modern representative democracy.
Chapter 1

A Conceptual History of Populism

1. Introduction

The notion of populism seems to be popular nowadays, and the word ‘populism’ is applied to various, although not always very different, political phenomena and agents in public debates. In the United States, commentators describe the “Tea Party” as a ‘populist’ movement, while in Latin America, presidents like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador are described as ‘populist’ by their political opponents to discredit them. In Europe, opposition movements like the French FN, the Flemish VB, the Austrian FPÖ, the Danish DF, the Dutch PVV, and the “Swiss People’s Party” (SVP) are labeled as ‘populist’ by their opponents. Likewise, Prime Ministers like Robert Fico (Slovakia), Victor Orbán (Hungary), Silvio Berlusconi (Italy) and Tony Blair (Great-Brittan) were discredited as ‘populist’. On the other hand, self-styled populist like the Dutch politicians Ronald Sörensen, Rita Verdonk, Joost Eerdmans and Hero Brinkman use their ‘populism’ as a badge of honor. And, in recent years, politicians belonging to European vested political parties have appropriated the label, arguing that their particular party should act in a more ‘populist’ way. The term ‘populist’ has also been ascribed to certain media or public policies, and in a recent study, Van Kessel, Bale and Taggart have shown that the word ‘populism’ has been used in the UK print-media in reference to a wide variety of public policies and politicians from all over the world. The authors argue that a wide range of individuals, political parties and policies with little in common are all labeled ‘populist’. They even conclude that the UK print-media ‘throw the term around with abandon’.  

The frequent use of the word ‘populism’ has stimulated academic reflection about the concept itself. As a consequence, there has been much terminological and methodological discussion of the concept of populism among scholars who have made various attempts to define the core of populism. Some view populism as the product of an antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite. Others have defined populism as a specific style of political leadership; a political strategy to mobilize large sectors of

the people; or a (thin) ideology centered on the idea that ‘the people’ is a homogeneous group. Before discussing the plausibility of those differing definitions, however, it is worth stepping back for a more general look at the subject.

Populism is a diffuse concept and that is reflected by the frequent use of the word in public debates and by the multiplicity of the definitions of the concept to be found in academic literature. That diffuse character of the notion and the multiplicity of phenomena and agents which have been subsumed into the concept of it are themselves one of the effects of the diffuseness of social and political reality itself. I will suggest that the political meaning of the concept of populism has to do with the attitudes of the users of the word ‘populism’ as a label and the specific features of any political phenomenon or agent, for example some form of political behavior, political ideas or utterances, that is then called ‘populist’. The resulting interaction between the user of the label ‘populist’ and those so labeled will be explained in the next chapter.

This chapter will discuss the academic literature on the concept of populism with a focus on the historical contexts in which the term has been used. The historical background of the concept is often disregarded by scholars who wish to define it, but it is important to take historical context into account in order to understand why the concept of populism is diffuse and why it assumes different political meanings through time and space. This chapter draws, therefore, on some insights from the field of conceptual history, the basic idea of which is that all key political concepts are both historical and, even when not always contested, at least potentially contestable. In the field of conceptual history, there have been two dominant research traditions, namely the German Begriffsgeschichte and the Anglo-Saxon Cambridge School (1960s-1970s). The most representative of Begriffsgeschichte has been Reinhart Koselleck, who led the famous series Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe (published between 1972 and 1992), while Quentin Skinner has become the figurehead of the Cambridge School. Although the two research traditions developed independently from each other, a growing interaction between them

has led to a convergence or even a methodological synthesis. I will derive three key ideas from the two traditions when they are taken together.

First of all, since the meaning of a concept is linked to the historical context in which it is used, this chapter will try to analyze the concept of populism both in a synchronic and diachronic manner. Synchronic analysis studies the location of concepts in their semantic field, their relation with the user of the concept and the dominant ideological context. The concept of populism does not exist in isolation, but is defined in relation to other concepts such as ‘the people’, ‘popular’ and ‘democracy’. That implies that the history of the concept of ‘populism’ cannot amount to a mere etymological timeline. This chapter will further show that the implicitly normative nature of the judgment expressed by the concept of populism depends on whatever ideology is dominant in a given context.

By contrast, diachronic analysis concentrates on shifts in the meaning of concepts and then links those shifts to social developments. I shall analyze the conceptual dimension of populism on the basis of a geographical-diachronic classification, which I have chosen because the concept of populism acquires different meanings in different geographical contexts. For example, the concept of populism has much more favorable connotations in the United States than in Europe. This chapter in fact focuses on political phenomena and agents in the United States, Latin America and Europe such as are labeled ‘populist’, since the academic literature on populism is primarily concerned with political phenomena in those regions. I shall discuss the chronic shifts in the meaning of the concept as they relate to each region.

Second, I have viewed populism in this piece as an ‘appraisive term’, a notion I have borrowed from Quentin Skinner. Appraisive terms are used not only for their definitional contribution, but also for the attitude they convey. Skinner offers the example of the term ‘liberal’ which is often used to express either approval or disapproval. Politicians are praised as ‘liberal’ by one group of commentators while others employ the same term in order to denounce them. Likewise, to call a political phenomenon or agent ‘populist’ is at once to describe it and to commend or condemn it, to express approval or disapproval.

Following Skinner, I suggest that disagreement about appraisive terms like ‘liberal’ and ‘populism’ has to do with three types of potential dispute. First of all, disagree-

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59 Ibid., p. 1179.


61 Ibid., pp. 8-11.

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ment can arise about the criteria that determine the use of the concept. The criteria of application of a concept denote the sense or meaning of it. The meaning ‘populism’ is contested if disagreement arises about the criteria that serve to distinguish the concept from similar and contrasting concepts. Second, dispute can arise about the frame of reference that affords criteria for the use of the concept. That type of dispute concerns whether a given set of circumstances can be claimed to meet those criteria for the application of the concept of ‘populism’. Third, disagreement about the concept can arise over its attitudinal expressiveness. The meaning of the concept of populism is contested by conflicting attitudes on the part of those who use it. Following Skinner’s distinctions, I would suggest that a shift in the meaning of a concept, in this case ‘populism’, occurs whenever changes take place in the following features of that concept: the criteria of application, its frame of reference, and its attitudinal expressiveness.

Third, the sense of the concept of populism is centered on the counterconcepts of ‘the people’ as opposed to ‘the elite’ or other supposed enemies. I have borrowed the notion of counterconcepts from Reinhart Koselleck, who argues that asymmetric counterconcepts belong to a particular kind of conceptual formations used by groups to define otherness: “It is characteristic of counterconcepts that are unequally antithetical that one’s own position is readily defined by criteria which make it possible for the resulting counterposition to be only negated.”62 By way of illustration, Koselleck argues that the concept of humanity is rooted in the development of counterconcepts, namely civilization as opposed to barbarianism. Counterconcepts are asymmetric in political or social practice: as one half of the pair concentrates all positive contents, the other becomes the universal negative pole. In Koselleck’s example, a group applies the concept of humanity only to itself and rejects all comparison. Following Koselleck, I would suggest that the concept of populism is centered on the asymmetric counterconcepts of ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’. ‘The people’ is defined by opposition to ‘the elite’, as its negative counter-face. This chapter will explore changes in the nature of that conceptual pairing over the course of time.

As noted, the conceptual innovation of populism will be analyzed on the basis of a geographical-diachronic classification. The next section [section 2] will first discuss the origin of the concept of populism at the end of the nineteenth century and will show that early twentieth century historians used the concept primarily in reference to the American “People’s Party” and the Russian narodniki. The following sections will discuss the shifts in meaning of the concept of populism in reference to phenomena in the United States [section 3], Latin America [section 4] and Europe [section 5].

2. Origins of the concept of populism

In academic literature up to the mid-1950s, populism was a subject primarily for historians. The concept was attached to two specific cases: the American “People’s Party” and the Russian narodnichestvo. The Russian concept narodnichestvo was translated by early twentieth century historians of ideas as containing the meaning of the concept of populism, while the word ‘populism’ itself arrived on the political stage at the end of the nineteenth century in reference to the American “People’s Party”. The concept of ‘populism’ was then embedded in a semantic field of related concepts like ‘democracy’ and ‘the people’. Both populism (populus) and democracy (demos) refer to the notion of ‘people’. The word ‘populism’ was coined in a period when the concept of ‘democracy’ gradually acquired positive connotations but many felt that existing democracy had moved away from its essence. Moreover, politics came to be attached prominently to the name of ‘the people’, which meant that in order for it to be legitimate, political action would necessarily have to occur in the name of the people.

Before its stock rose in the second half of the nineteenth century, ‘democracy’ suffered from a poor reputation. The concept of democracy had negative connotations in Antiquity – according to Plato and Aristotle it amounted to rule by the many and the poor who were inclined to pursue their own political interests at the expense of the commonwealth – and the idea vanished from usage in the Roman Empire. Even in the great political struggles in seventeenth-century Great-Britann, ‘democracy’ was never the rallying cry for the Levellers who claimed equal political rights, while in continental Europe the concept entered public debate only in the 1780s, a time when the concept of ‘aristocracy’ was commonly used to mean the opposite of ‘democracy’. ‘Democrats’ were depicted as people who acted in the name of the ‘common people’ but wished in fact to benefit from the same rights as aristocrats.

With the popular revolutions of the eighteenth century, the will of the people was asserted as the main source of legitimacy, which meant the rejection of alternative conceptions of politics as determined by natural or historical necessity or based on the primacy of some other will, such as the will of God, for example. Revolutions did however provoke two alternative meanings for ‘the people’. Either ‘the people’ came to be identified as the holders of sovereignty, in which the concept became coextensive with the

citizen, or the will of ‘the people’ was identified with mob rule that posed a danger to public order and rationale of civilized society. The latter perspective, presuming that the people are too ignorant, unreasonable, or resentful to be capable of exercising a rational will, was dominant among the upper strata of society who therefore regarded democracy as an inferior, dangerous and unstable form of politics. That explains why ‘democracy’ continued to carry negative connotations, so that the newly established systems in both the United States and France were called ‘representative’ or ‘republican’ by their founders, rather than ‘democratic’.68

The concept of ‘democracy’ remained unspeakable until the first half of the nineteenth century when its negative connotation was replaced by more positive associations with popular sovereignty and political equality. The growing appreciation of democracy in the mid-nineteenth century was the result of mass political movements that valued democracy and struggled to achieve what they understood it to be.69 As those movements fought for democracy and gained power in its name, the respectability of the concept changed along with its meaning. However, the dark shadow of ‘the common people’ and ‘mob rule’ still loomed. The dividing line between the men of good standing who were considered as representing civilization, and the dangerous and unpredictable mob who for so many really defined barbarism is equally present in the concept of populism, as will be shown in this chapter.

One of the political movements that struggled for political rights in the name of democracy was the American “People’s Party”, founded in 1892. The rise of the “People’s Party” was a reaction against the ‘failure’ of both the Republican and the Democratic Party to represent farmers and workers. The upheaval of the American civil war from 1861-1865 had left a multitude of small farmers many of whom, although they owned their land, had been left in a state of desperate poverty.70 A sense of misalignment of both the Republican and the Democratic Party with the concerns of rural citizens led to the foundation of the “People’s Party”. Members of the “People’s Party” used the term ‘populist’ as a description of their political position. The self-styled populists claimed that their idea of democracy contained an anti-intellectualist vocation in contrast to the complicated language of the political elite and financiers.71 The “People’s Party” appealed to the unprivileged position of ordinary people, reclaimed power for the people as a whole and rejected the posturing republicans and democrats alike who

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70 Taggart, P. (2000), Populism, Open UP, Buckingham, p. 29.
71 Financers constituted one of the most imposing powers on the life of the farmers. Many farmers were poor and could obtain credit from financiers only at the cost of mortgaging their crops in advance. This ‘crop lien system’ meant that farmers were forced to buy from the merchant at whatever prices he chose to ask. Canovan, M. (1981), Populism, Junction Books, London, p. 21.
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were distant from those people: “[...] we seek to restore the government of the Republic
to the hands of ‘the plain people’, with whose class it originated.”

The very concept of populism is therefore rooted in the asymmetric countercon-
cepts of ‘the plain people’ against ‘the corrupt elite’. ‘The people’ was seen as essentially
good, ‘the elite’ as essentially bad and responsible for the deprivation of the people. The
“People’s Party” used the notion of populism as a motivating concept, capable of mobil-
izing the people towards a new and better future. As Koselleck notes, the suffix –ism
indicates the idea of progress: “Since the French Revolution, concepts no longer serve
merely to define given states of affairs, but reach into the future.”

In The Populist Revolt (1931), the historian John Hicks argued that the word ‘Populist’
was invented at a conference of Democratic and “People’s Party” leaders in October
1892 when plans for a merger were discussed. However, a year before the conference
took place, the words ‘populist’ and ‘populism’ were already in vogue. According to the
Oxford English Dictionary, the Emporia Daily Graz reported on 14 December 1891 that
“[...] The Populist vote has increased 11¼ per cent” and the New York Times wrote on 13
June 1892 that “[...] The prospects for a fusion between the Democrats and the Populists
are fast vanishing.”

The exact origin of the concept ‘populist’ or ‘populism’ is therefore
difficult to determine. In America’s oldest weekly magazine, The Nation, the word ‘popu-
ulism’ was first used in an article on November 24th 1892. A journalist on the maga-
zeine used the word ‘populism’ to describe the members of a ‘new movement’ that was
emerging. In most reports until the presidential election of 1896, the words ‘populism’
and ‘populist’ were not used as labels, either in a pejorative or positive sense, but merely
as a name to describe the “People’s Party” and its members.

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72 Quoted in: Hicks, J. (1931), The Populist Revolt. A History of Farmers’ Alliance and the “People’s

UP, New York, p. 80.

74 Hicks, J. (1931), The Populist Revolt. A History of Farmers’ Alliance and the “People’s Party”,

75 Emporia is a town in Kansas.


77 The Nation archive includes all issues of the weekly magazine The Nation beginning with its first
issue in 1865 all the way to the present. I used the keywords ‘populism’, ‘populist’, ‘populistic’
and ‘populites’. The keyword ‘populites’ did not yield any hits. The concepts ‘populism’, ‘pop-
ulist’ or ‘populistic’ appeared in 26 editions between 1892 and 1906.

78 “A movement has been started in Kansas for the division of the State into new commonwealths
by a north-and-south line. It finds its chief support in the fact that the east and west parts of
Kansas are opposed to each other politically, the east being in control of the Populists and the

79 The concepts refer to the Democrats twice and to the Republicans once. Both established parties
were named as ‘populist-democrats’ and ‘populist-republicans’ when they cooperated with the
However, when the “People’s Party” decided to cooperate with the Democrats in the presidential election of 1896 and the two parties decided to nominate the Democrat William Jennings Bryan as their presidential candidate and Thomas Watson, a dedicated member of the “People’s Party” as their vice-presidential candidate, commentators of The Nation condemned the move of the populists, saying: “Populists are lamb-like (…) The country has watched their mad proceedings with disgust and shuddering, only impatient for the coming of November to stamp out them and their incendiary doctrines.” Watson was described as a notorious demagogue and “His easy nomination for the Vice-Presidency on the first ballot will show the people of the United States what reckless and dangerous party the Populist is.”

The word ‘populism’ began to become a prejudicial term intended to commend or to condemn certain actions. Members of the “People’s Party” still used ‘populist’ to describe themselves, but the word then became a political label mobilized pejoratively by their opponents as a way of throwing discredit on the “People’s Party”. For example, the Dutch newspaper Algemeen Handelsblad, reporting the Democratic Party Convention in Indianapolis of September 4th 1896 quoted Fowler, one of the leaders of the Democratic party, who used the concept of populism as a derisive epithet to disqualify the “People’s Party”. Fowler said “Our presence here shows the nature of true democrats, opponents of the persons who favor populism and anarchism.”

Disapproval of populism was also expressed by new words such as ‘populistic’, derived from ‘populist’ and coined in an article in The Nation referring to the political campaigning of the “People’s Party”. Here is what The Nation had to say: “The Populistic campaign for the Presidency is ending appropriately in a series of insults and outrages upon those who stand for sound money and the maintenance of the national honor.”

The baptism of the “People’s Party” marked the beginning of the history of the label ‘populism’ from which both positive and negative connotations can be distinguished in it. ‘Populism’ has since become detached from its original political context and has been applied to different American and non-American political phenomena and agents. For, Koselleck’s words, it is a property of language that “Each word, even each name,
displays a linguistic potentiality beyond the individual phenomenon that it at a given moment characterizes or names.”

In the early twentieth century, historians have used the concept of populism as a translation of the Russian concept narodnichestvo, which was in the first place a polemical notion mobilized by self-styled narodniki but was later employed by Lenin as a polemical device to discredit the elite’s view of the country’s economic development. Narodnichestvo referred originally to the self-styled narodniki of the 1870s, a revolutionary movement of young intellectuals who opposed the Tsarist regime and its official ideological doctrine, known as the triad of Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality (narodnost). By Narodnost the Tsarist regime meant national unity, a value which all the Tsar’s subjects were expected to espouse, irrespective of variations in language, religion or race. The Tsarist regime was not a representative democracy, but an autocratic monarchy which nonetheless pretended to be a government serving all its people. However, the rural populations lived in misery, even after the Tsar abolished serfdom in 1861. Although the peasants were officially freed from the authority of their landowners, they remained tied to the land because they were hardly in a position to purchase it for themselves. While the Tsarist regime pretended to be a universal government both before and after the abolition of serfdom, the young intellectuals could claim themselves to be the true representatives of the people in opposition to the newly claimed representation of the Tsarist regime, because the abolition of serfdom had not freed the peasants in the way the young intellectuals saw as required.

Narodnichestvo denoted a specific stage in the development of the revolutionary movement. In 1872, young intellectuals went to the rural areas to bring literacy and to mobilize the peasants for the revolution. The intellectuals were convinced of the wisdom of the peasants and idealized the rural life of the commune, a self-governing community that emphasized egalitarianism. Moreover, the intellectuals were convinced of the willingness of the peasants to bring about change. Many discrete peasant disturbances were suppressed by the military-bureaucracy of the Tsar and for the young intellectuals such disturbances were an indication of the revolutionary potential of the peasants. The peasants’ response was, however, disappointing. The attempts by intellectuals to

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stir socialist feelings in the villages failed, because the peasants were suspicious of the students and remained loyal to the Tsar and the church.\footnote{90 Canovan, M. (1981), \textit{Populism}, Junction Books, London, p. 73.}

The frustrating results encouraged the intellectuals to change their tactics. Instead of instructing and teaching the peasants with socialist propaganda, the intellectuals decided they should settle in villages and learn from the peasants and absorb the peasants’ wisdom. Revolution should take place not only in the interest of the people, but also by the people and in conformity with their wishes. That stage in the history of the intelligentsia has been labeled \textit{narodnichestvo}, and the intellectuals called themselves \textit{narodniki} from their unbounded faith in the \textit{narod}.\footnote{91 Pipes, R. (1964), ‘Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry’, \textit{Slavic Review}, vol. 23, no. 3, p. 443.} \textit{Narodnichestvo} was less a doctrine than a set of sentiments and attitudes. At its root was the adoration of the ‘\textit{narod}’ and a belief in its wisdom and goodness.\footnote{92 Figes, O. (1996), \textit{A People’s Tragedy. The Russian Revolution 1891-1924}, Penguin Books, New York, p. 134.} ‘\textit{Narod}’ is an ambiguous concept which basically means either ‘nation’ or, less frequently, ‘people,’ but in the case of the young intellectuals, ‘\textit{narod}’ was identified with simple rural folk and peasantry as opposed to the ‘cosmopolitan’ gentry.\footnote{93 Lazari, A. de (ed.) (1999), ‘\textit{Narod},’ in: Andrzej de Lazari (ed.), \textit{Idee w Rosji. Leksykon rosyjsko – polsko – angielski} – polsko – angielski, tom 1, Semper, Warsaw, p. 268. The new strategy of the young intellectuals led again to disappointing results. The social revolutionaries still did not gain credibility among the peasants and their actions were undermined by the Tsarist regime which arrested many revolutionary students. The consequence of their disappointment was a shift from instructing peasants with propaganda toward terror against the state. Between 1876 and 1878 a new group was formed calling themselves \textit{Zemlya i volya} (Land and Freedom) which became the vehicle of terrorist attacks. When tensions arose within the movement to proceed with the assassination of politicians, the party split in two. One section stuck with working among the people, calling itself \textit{Cherny Peredel} (Black Redistribution/Remaking). A stronger faction, calling itself \textit{Narodnaya Volya} (People’s Will/Freedom) emerged to take up the campaign of terror. Although the name of this group was meant to stress the continued adherence to the \textit{narodniki} ideal, the People’s Will operated under a highly centralized organization and had largely left behind the original ideas of the \textit{narodniki}. Cf. Taggart, P. (2000), \textit{Populism}, Open UP, Buckingham, pp. 53-54; Pipes, R. (1964), ‘Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry’, \textit{Slavic Review}, vol. 23, no. 3, p. 447.} In that meaning, \textit{narodnichestvo} covers a long period of the revolutionary movement, roughly from 1870 to 1917, a time which included various revolutionary movements all wanting to arrive at socialism without going through capitalism, such as the young intellectuals in the 1870s and the “Socialist Revolutionary Party”, founded
in 1902 and defeated by the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution of 1917. In that sense, *narodnichestvo* expressed disapproval when used by Lenin and other Marxists as a polemical device for fighting against other movements which wanted to create socialism without getting there via capitalism.\(^95\)

Historians in the early twentieth century translated both meanings of *narodnichestvo* with ‘populism’. However, in 1969 the social and political scientist John Saul was the first to make an explicit connection between the American “People’s Party” and the Russian *narodniki* when he wrote “[…] it may seem useful to lump together Russian Narodnikism and North American Populism under the analytical rubric of ‘populism’ because both represent largely rural responses to the onward march of ‘capitalism’ or ‘modernization’ or ‘industrialization’, but it is just as important to distinguish them.”\(^96\) According to the sociologist Alcock, the fact that both the American “People’s Party” and *narodnichestvo* were characterized by the concept of ‘populism’ was an historical accident.\(^97\) I disagree, however, with his view. The translation does not seem to be a pure accident, because there is a linguistic correspondence between the concept of populism (‘populus’) and *narodnichestvo* (‘narod’). The noun *narod* was used in Russia as the equivalents of the German idea of the ‘Volk’ in the middle of the nineteenth century, and its derivative, the adjective *narodnyi* often served as a Russian equivalent for ‘popular’.\(^98\) Moreover, the connection between the American “People’s Party” and the self-styled *narodniki* is indeed meaningful because both tend to pit the people against the elite. In spite of their differences both the American “People’s Party” and the *narodniki* placed their faith in the wisdom and goodness of the people (*narod*) and held ‘the elite’ – whether the Republicans and Democrats in the case of the “People’s Party” or the gentry in the case of the *narodniki* – responsible for the deprivation of the people.

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95 Lenin, V.I. (1987), *Essential Works of Lenin*, ed. Henry M Chiristman, Dover Publications, New York, p. 15. It has been a subject of scholarly debate whether Lenin’s conception of *narodnichestvo* can be dismissed as a polemical device or whether it was a precise attempt at classification of political phenomena. The latter view is defended by Andrzej Walicki who argues that “It was Lenin who gave it [narodnichestvo, TH] a more concrete historical and sociological connotation by pointing out that populism was a protest against capitalism from the point of view of small immediate producers who, being ruined by capitalist development, saw in its only a regression, but, at the same time, demanded the abolition of the older, feudal forms of exploitation.” Walicki, A., (1969), ‘Russia’, in: Ionescu, G. and E. Gellner (eds.), *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, Weidenfeld, London, p. 65. Walicki’s view is rejected by, among others, the Italian historian Franco Venturi who argues that Lenin’s definition of *narodnichestvo* was a perfect polemical device. See: Berlin, I., Hofstadter, R., McRae D. et.al (1968), ‘To Define Populism’, *Government and Opposition*, no. 3, p. 139.


3. American movements and politicians labeled ‘populist’

So, until the middle of the twentieth century, populism was primarily a subject for historians. All the same, in the mid-1950s, the concept ‘populism’ popped up again in the context of American politics when Senator Joseph McCarthy dominated the American political scene, accusing thousands of Americans of being traitors nurtured by communism. Many Americans who were accused of being communist became the subjects of investigations and questioning before government committees. The popular approval of McCarthy’s policy of accusing people of being communist worried American intellectuals. Popular support for totalitarian movements like fascism and Nazism in the interwar period generated among the elite a fear of the masses and that fear was aggravated by the popular approval of McCarthy’s policy.

Against the background of the Second World War and the political environment specific to America in the 1950s, ‘populism’ was used as a delegitimizing concept by American scholars. The sense of the concept of populism was defined in opposition to liberal democracy, which was regarded as the hegemonic regime, while ‘populism’ was used almost interchangeably with ‘fascism’ and ‘authoritarianism’. The sociologists Edward Shils and Seymour Marin Lipset saw populism as “[…]an irrational protest ideology”99 accepted by those who felt cut off from the main trends of modern society. Populism exists “[…] where there is an ideology of popular resentment against the order imposed on society by a long-established, differentiated ruling class, which is believed to have a monopoly of power, property, breeding and culture.”100

Both Shils and Lipset maintained that their conceptualization of populism referred to a multi-faced phenomenon which included political movements and politicians in the United States, Europe en Latin America: McCarthyism, the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, Nazi dictatorship, Italian Fascism, Bolshevism, French Poujadism (a tax protest movement named after the French politician Pierre Poujade), the political leadership of Juan Perón, president of Argentine from 1946 to 1955, and Getulio Vargas, Brazilian president from 1930 to 1945 and from 1951 until 1954. Both Shils and Lipset used the concept of populism to condemn such movements. For both writers, ‘populism’ was used as an expression of disapproval because it posed a threat to the regime of liberal democracy. According to Shils, populism was tinged with the belief that the people are supreme over every other standard and are, therefore, actually better than their rulers. Focusing on the American political context, Shils argued that such belief was a threat to the independence of legislators and the judiciary,101 while Lipset emphasized

101 Ibid., p. 102.
the strongly antiparliamentary content of populism. With populism, the power of the party and the leader is derived directly from the people and that left no room for political deliberation.\textsuperscript{102}

The negative connotations of the concept of populism revealed in the work of American sociologists was paralleled by the negative judgments of 1950s historians about the “People’s Party”. For example, John Hicks’ classic about the American “People’s Party”, which appeared in 1931, had suggested that the American “People’s Party” was a healthy political phenomenon, but attitudes to the “People’s Party” changed in the 1950s. The historian Richard Hofstadter argued that the “People’s Party” had mobilized irrational hostilities, meaning elements of anti-Semitism and generalized xenophobia against immigrants.\textsuperscript{103}

In the 1960s and 1970s, the concept of populism acquired a positive meaning when academics began to favor participatory views on democratic politics. The American “People’s Party” was no longer viewed as an irrational movement, but as a grass-roots movement that gave rise to democratic participation in politics.\textsuperscript{104} When ‘populism’ was associated with the ideal and practices of direct democracy, its frame of reference changed. The concept referred to people in the early twentieth century who had been aiming for the ideal of direct democracy and who were attempting to translate that ideal into political practices, such as the “American National Progressive Republican League” (ANPRL). The ANPRL was not a grassroots movement like the “People’s Party”, but was driven by ideas of direct democracy that would bypass political representatives. Whereas the set of institutions inspired by the ideal of direct democracy had been dismissed by Shils and Lipset, who associated those institutions with authoritarian leaders from Adolf Hitler and the American governor and senator Huey Long to French president Charles de Gaulle, intellectuals in the 1960s saw ‘populist democracy’, committed to direct legislation, not as a threat to democracy but as a progressive ideal.\textsuperscript{105} In Europe, a fine example of that progressive ideal is the Dutch political party “Democrats ‘66” (D66), founded in 1966 and advocating devices of direct democracy.

In the American political context of the 1970s, ‘populism’ no longer held negative connotations but now denoted a democratic, or popular, expression of political action, in opposition to the elitist, or anti-popular idea that only experts should play the political game. Populism at that time meant the politics of small-scale ordinary people against established “big government”. The concept of populism therefore contained a sense of approval and was even used as an honorary nickname in the 1970s by Jimmy Carter among other people, both before and after the presidential elections of 1976. When


\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., pp. 50-51.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., pp. 223-224.
journalists asked Carter whether he was a conservative or a liberal, he avoided the question and described himself as a ‘populist’, thereby trying to demonstrate his opposition to the old divisions between Democrats and Republicans. Carter used the image of the outsider, while at the same time claiming to represent the ordinary people rather than any particular section. In a successful political campaign, Carter attacked his opponent Ford by presenting Ford as a member of the elite, and promised to restore control of all aspects of government to the people. Carter therefore used the word ‘populist’ as an honorary nickname for himself, creating a political contrast to Ford.

In current political thinking today, the normative weight expressed by the concept of populism (the attitudinal expressiveness) has not changed. ‘Populism’ still often expresses positive connotations in reference to American movements and politicians. For example, Nadia Urbinati has argued that the concept of populism in the United States refers to a popular or direct style of expression opposed to an intellectual or indirect language of political elites. For her, the ‘populist’ appeal to the people expresses an essential aspect of American politics. Michael Kazin has developed a similar argument, saying that the concept of populism in the United States is equivalent to a democratic style of expression. That is, populism plays a valuable political role in rebalancing the distribution of political power for the benefit of the majority of the people. In his historical analysis, Kazin has used the concept of ‘populism’ in reference to various American politicians, who “[...] made the unique claim that the powers that be are transgressing the nation’s founding creed, which every permanent resident should honor.” Such politicians did not call the entire American system into question, but rather were linked with certain political values and traditions that have always been central to American politics. According to Kazin, American politicians tend to run ‘against government’ and tend to invoke the support of ‘the people’ in doing so. However, although American populism may be ‘anti-governmental’, it has rarely been ‘anti-regime’. Here there, arises a parallel with European political movements that have been labeled ‘populist’ from the mid-1990s onwards. Similarly, Dutch political parties such as the LPF and the PVV do not want to change the regime but want to ‘populate’ it differently, as will be explained in Chapter 6 [§6.4]. However, in Europe ‘populism’ often carries negative connotations and in contrast to American politics, the notion is not associated with a conventional democratic style of expression.

109 Ibid., p. 4.
4. Latin American movements and politicians labeled ‘populist’

In the 1960s and 1970s, a shift in the meaning of the concept occurred when scholars associated it with political phenomena that were occurring in societies standing on the threshold of modernization. The concept was used in reference to forces of reform in developing countries after their struggles for independence. While many leaders of developing countries appealed to ‘democracy’ understood as collective self-determination, academics tended to label them as ‘populist’. For example, scholars applied the label to Mahatma Gandhi’s ‘anti-modern’ and ‘anti-colonial’ rhetoric that brought peasants into the Indian national movement and they claimed that Gandhi’s rhetoric resembled that of other anti-colonial leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, or Sukarno in Indonesia. The scholarly focus on associating populism with the changing nature of politics in developing countries is underlined in Ionescu and Gellner’s classic Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics. The book includes analyses of political movements in North America and Russia at the end of the nineteenth century, a study of Eastern Europe that covers political movements from the end of the nineteenth until the beginning of the twentieth centuries, and analyses of political parties and leaders in Latin America and Africa during the twentieth century.

In the academic debate, there were conflicting attitudes to populism in all those cases. Marxist intellectuals often applauded the nationalist and anti-imperialist demands of independence movements, while other scholars were much more critical. Some, like Isaiah Berlin, took the middle road and made a distinction between ‘false populism’ and ‘populism proper’.

‘Populism proper’ was said to have a democratic egalitarian impulse, because it revolts against the aristocracy, against hierarchical systems. ‘False populism’, by contrast, is the mobilization of certain populist sentiments for creating an elitist regime, and examples of practitioners of that include the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ghana’s first Prime Minister Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, and the Pakistani president Ayub Khan.

Those politicians in developing countries have often been linked with sociological analyses inspired by prevailing modernization theories. Such sociological analyses have been applied in particular to Latin American movements and politicians labeled ‘populist’. Sociological analyses saw Latin American populism as mobilizations linked to a

112 Ibid., pp.138-155.
transition to mass democracy, intended to bring about changes on behalf of the politically inexperienced masses to address their common interests. As developing societies move towards modernization, populist movements have a function in the process of development. That is, they take the place of what would be social democratic parties in more developed countries.

Two influential analyses of populism are Torcuato Di Tella’s and Gino Germani’s modernization theories. According to Di Tella, populist movements appear in developing countries when there is an anti-status quo motivation among middle-level elites, when rising expectations generate a mobilized mass of citizens, and when conditions allow for a widespread emotional state among elites and masses. Germani proposed a different but equally functionalist interpretation of populism. According to him, the rapid advance of urbanization and industrialization triggered mass participation and undermined the gradual establishment of new political regimes. Those developments prepared the ground for charismatic leaders to manipulate and mobilize the masses. Germani viewed populist mobilization as a deviation from the standard path leading from traditional to modern society, when newly mobilized working and middle classes had to be incorporated in the political process.

In both sociological analyses, the conceptualization of populism contains three aspects. First is a specified development model, second comes a charismatic style of political leadership and the strong personalization of political power, and third follows the mobilization of a specific social constituency. Mobilization has often been linked with the concept lo popular which denotes a ‘we’ “[...] that is a carrier of demands for substantive justice which form the basis for the obligations of the state toward the less favoured segments of the population.” This ‘we’ can refer to a wide range of marginalized popular sectors: the lower classes (Germani), the urban working class or peasantry (Di Tella). Marginalized people, it is argued, were easy prey for the seductive claims of charismatic leaders like Perón in Argentina, Vargas in Brazil, Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico,

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117 Ibid., p. 53.


the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario in Bolivia, Aprismo in Peru, and Acción Democrática in Venezuela. For both Di Tella and Germani, the concept of populism implied disapproval: populism was understood to be dangerous, although transitional. It was a deviation from the desired model of Western democratization.

Sociological analyses inspired by modernization theories presuppose close connections between populism and socioeconomic factors. The modernization theory was based on the crucial presumption that socioeconomic structures shape politics. By the late 1970s, however, that presumption had been rejected and populism was no longer regarded as a specific stage of social mobilization.¹²¹ New approaches to studying populism moved away from the historical/sociological view. For example, Laclau’s discursive approach to populism concentrated on the political subject that is addressed and produced in a particular discourse. For Laclau, ‘discourse’ is not identical to language or text, but refers to a network of meaning which articulates both linguistic and non-linguistic elements. In his subsequent work, Laclau has argued that “By ‘discursive’ I do not mean that which refers to ‘text’ narrowly defined, but to the ensemble of the phenomena in and through which social production of meaning takes place, an ensemble that constitutes a society as such.”¹²² For Laclau, the discursive is, therefore, co-extensive with the social.

According to Laclau, ‘the people’ are produced and addressed as a political subject in populist discourse. In Laclau’s terms, ‘the people’ is the central signifier, the subject that is expressed in populist discourse, although reference to the people does not in itself make any discourse ‘populist’.¹²³ In addition, he claimed that populist discourse divides the social field into two distinctive camps, namely ‘the people’ in antagonistic opposition to the ‘dominant ideology’ or ‘dominant bloc’. Laclau’s concept of populism is centered on the asymmetric counterconcepts of ‘the people’ versus ‘the elite’, labels interpreted by him in Marxist terms. Against the background of populism in Latin America, he distinguished between the populism of the elite (the dominant classes) and the populism of the dominated classes. When a dominant class seeks to establish hegemony but is unable to do so, one solution might be a direct appeal to the masses. For the dominated classes, populism occurred when class antagonisms were expressed in popular-democratic form. That expression denotes a conflict between ‘the people’ and ‘the dominant bloc’, which does not accord with any particular classes, but goes beyond them. Hence, “Populism starts at the point where popular-democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc.”¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 173.
At the beginning of the 1980s, populism seemed to disappear from Latin American studies. Paul Drake, for example, argued in 1982 that populism is ‘dead’ since populist movements clearly faded in the 1970s.\(^{125}\) The announcement of populism’s death was, however, premature, because the concept reappeared in academic debates in the late-1980s and 1990s when leaders like Peru’s Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), Brazil’s Fernando Collor (1990-1992) and Argentina’s Carlos Meném (1989-1999) were labeled ‘neo-populist’. The concept was then used in a different socioeconomic context, which constituted a conceptual change because a change occurred in the criteria of application: most scholars shifted the focus away from the concept’s socioeconomic features to its political characteristics.

By the mid-1990s, some scholars had begun to explore the emergence of a type of ‘neo-populism’ which showed new patterns of political leadership combined with neoliberal reforms.\(^{126}\) Politicians like Fujimori in Peru, Menem in Argentina, Collor de Mello in Brazil, and Vicente Fox in Mexico enacted neoliberal reforms that diverged sharply from the extension of social benefits pursued by politicians like Perón or Vargas. The prefix ‘neo’ stressed the changes in a concept that had traditionally been associated with expansionist or redistributive policies. Neo-populist politicians were seen as populist because they ruled by presidential decree and appealed directly to the mass of the people, thereby seeking popular support and legitimacy.

Marxist scholars, by contrast, maintained that neo-liberalism damaged popular interests and therefore refused to call presidents such as Menem and Fujimori populist. For those scholars, the concept of ‘neo-populism’ expressed disapproval. Marxist scholars rejected any application of the concept of populism to Menem and the others because they lacked the mobilizing and democratizing impulses of ‘classical populists’. Those who used the concept ‘neo-populist’, however, have well noted the elements of continuity between ‘classic populism’ and ‘neo-populism’, such as a personalized and paternalistic political leadership and a top-down process of political mobilization that bypasses institutionalized forms of mediation.\(^{127}\) Weyland, for instance, has defined populism as a political strategy with three characteristics: a personal appeal to a heterogeneous mass of followers, a direct, quasi-personal mobilization that bypasses established intermedi-


ary structures, and a low level of institutionalization of the populist party.\(^{128}\) Whereas Weyland focused on the methods of winning and exercising political power, other scholars have conceptualized populism as a political style that radicalizes the emotional element by constructing a moral struggle between the people and the elite\(^{129}\) and stresses a close bond between the leaders and those led.\(^{130}\) Scholars in that camp have well noted that a single homogeneous people is not just a given, but requires a performative act by the leader to unite followers [see §5.3].

The reorientation of its political characteristics implied that the concept of populism was used in reference also to politicians who did not advocate neo-liberal reforms. Scholars have tried to show an element of continuity between ‘neo-liberal populism’ – the right-wing variety – and its leftist variant, provided by the highly personalized and plebiscitarian democracy that has emerged in different countries.\(^{131}\) The frame of reference for the concept was therefore broadened to include left-wing politicians like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador.

Among scholars disagreement has arisen also about the attitudinal expressiveness of the concept. The concept of populism has been given a negative connotation by some scholars who have argued that the highly personalized mode of linkage between the leader and the people (in the case of both the left-wing and right-wing variants) tends to entail a lack of democratic accountability.\(^{132}\) Moreover, they have argued that the populist invocation of a unified popular will tends to devalue minority rights. Other scholars, like Kirk Andrew Hawkins in his recent book about Chávez in Venezuela, have taken a middle road. Hawkins does not write off Chávismo as a negative experience for Venezuelan democracy, but views Chávez’s as a ‘semidemocratic’ government.\(^{133}\)

Marxist-inspired scholars, by contrast, have criticized the implicit presumptions embedded in most evaluations of populism. They have argued that scholars who view left-wing populism as a potentially dangerous phenomenon implicitly take liberal


democracy and the market as the standard for organizing political society. Whereas the dominant view among scholars tends to see Chávez, Morales and Correa as exponents of ‘illiberal populism’, Marxist-inspired scholars view each of them as the answers to the undemocratic nature of politics in their countries with their failed models of economic development. Sara Motta, for example, rejects the concept of ‘populism’ and argues that Chávez has aimed to create a ‘popular democracy’ beyond the liberal state and the market economy. The concept ‘popular’ denotes the social support base as well as the participatory political practices of Chávismo. Motta uses the word ‘popular’ as a means to avoid the negative connotation of the concept of populism. The polemics between Marxist and non-Marxists inspired scholars illustrates that it is important to take into account the dominant ideological context in which the concept of ‘populism’ is used.

The Marxist scholar Laclau, too, has questioned the implicit identification of democracy and liberal democracy by many scholars. In contrast to the dominant view among scholars linking populism with liberal democracy, Laclau defines populism in relation to politics as such. His modified discourse theoretical approach to populism has encouraged many scholars to study the populist discourses of politicians and political parties around the world. According to Laclau, populism is a product of an antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite. In contrast to his original thesis in 1977, he now finds those antagonisms are no longer exclusively rooted in class relationships. Nowadays, populist discourse can emerge from different places within the socio-economic structure. In his earlier work, a discourse of populism consisted in a reference to ‘the people’ against those of ‘the dominant bloc’, but in On Populist Reason the discursive articulation of populism is no longer identified with the signifier of ‘the people’. Laclau emphasizes that populism emerges through a failure of ‘the institutional system’ to fulfill particular demands. Where the institutional system is capable of satisfying demands in such a way that antagonism does not emerge, the so-called ‘logic of difference’ prevails. Where the institutional system is incapable of satisfying particular demands of social groups, the ‘logic of equivalence’ dominates and antagonism arises between the people and the elite. ‘The people’ may still function as a signifier that represents the chain of equivalence between the particular demands, but the chain of equivalence can be constructed around any name, symbol or metaphor. ‘The people’ is only

one of the possible signifiers or names that constitutes a ‘global political subject’ bringing together a plurality of demands.  

According to Laclau, the social and political field is always characterized by interplay between the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference. Therefore, all politics is populist to some extent: “A movement or an ideology – or, to put both under their common genus, discourse – will be more or less populist depending on the degree to which its contents are articulated by equivalential logics.” Populism is not found in social content, but in the degree to which the logic of equivalence dominates over the logic of difference. For Laclau, populism is a dimension of all politics. However, other scholars who adopt a discourse theoretic approach have rejected his conflation of politics and populism. I agree with Stavrakakis that Laclau cannot conceptually account for the difference between an equivalential discourse articulated around ‘the people’ and any other equivalential discourse [see §3.2]. Hence, “[...] the risk here is to lose the conceptual particularity of populism as a tool for concrete political analysis.”

5. European movements and politicians labeled ‘populist’

The concept of populism was hardly used in reference to European phenomena until the mid-1980s. A minor exception was the use of the term within a French literary setting in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In that context, ‘populism’ was employed as a self-description by a group of French novelists who emphasized observation and sympathy with ordinary people. The self-styled populists André Théirive and Léon Lemonnier, the two founders of the movement, alluded to the positive connotation of the concept. The French novelists resisted so-called elitist arts movements and argued that, “[…] we should stop writing about the people from the great world, creatures who have nothing else to do than to redder their cheeks, loafers who seek to practice so-called elegant vices. Undoubtedly, the lives of little people, who constitute the great mass of society, have their dramas, and there is abundant material available for nice psychological studies.” For those French novelists, ‘populism’ was an honorable label, meaning the opposite of elitist art.

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140 Ibid., p. 117.
143 “Men moest nu eens ophouden met die personen uit de groote wereld, die schepsels die niets anders te doen hebben dan zich rouge op te leggen, de leeglopers die zoogenaamde elegante ondeugden zoeken te beoefenen. Ongetwijfeld heeft ook het leven der kleine lieden, die de groote massa der samenleving uitmaken, zijn drama’s, en is daar materiaal in overvloed te
Apart from that French literary movement, the concept of populism was not used as a self-description nor as a negative label by political actors in the interwar period. Only the etymologically related concept of ‘popularism’ was used by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* (written between 1929 and 1935) as a label to describe the ideology of the Italian “Popular Party” (PPI). PPI was the predecessor of the Christian Democrat Party, which reverted to its original name in 1994. The PPI was founded by the priest Luigi Sturzo in 1919 and at first it was encouraged by the Papacy. According to Gramsci, the ‘popularists’ aimed to seek a middle way between liberalism and socialism (“the secular intellectuals”) and were opposed to fascism (“philosophy of praxis”). 144 In contrast to the fascists, the ‘popularists’ believed that the idea of harmonious society was more a point to work toward than a goal that could ever be attained. Despite their ideological differences, the ‘popularists’ initially combined with the fascists against the communists, but like the other opposition parties they were suppressed in 1925-1926.

After the Second World War, the concept of populism played no significant role in European public debates, although the concept was sometimes used in reference to the political movement of Poujadism in France in the 1950s,145 while in the 1960s and 1970s it was only used in reference to non-European phenomena. However, from the mid-1980s onwards the concept of populism began to play a significant role in reference to European parties and politicians. The increase in the use of the word ‘populism’ came about against the background of a changing Europe. With the fall of fascist regimes in South European countries in the 1970s and the demise of Soviet Communism in 1989, liberal democracy lost its previous archenemies. Francis Fukuyama famously proclaimed the end of history and the ultimate triumph of liberal democracy over its ideological contenders.146 With that supposed triumph of liberal democracy therefore labels like ‘fascist’ and ‘communist’ gradually lost their polemical force and were replaced by the label ‘populist’, which thenceforward became the new label applied to antagonists of both the ideal of liberal democracy and its regimes.

In the 1980s, the label ‘populist’ was first mobilized polemically against politicians like Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain. Academic reflection began to take place when the word ‘populism’ was frequently used in British public debate. The sociologist Stuart Hall developed the concept ‘authoritarian populism’ in order to describe what he saw as one of Thatcherism’s defining features. Hall built on Laclau’s view of populism, but

had little time for Marxist notions of class alliances. Hall distinguished between ‘popular democracy’ and ‘authoritarian populism’, attempting thereby to distinguish between the genuine mobilization of popular demands and discontents from a ‘populist’ mobilization. The latter did not mobilize the people through its popularity alone, but through the ideological appeal to feelings of discontent of ‘ordinary people’ and to ‘the renewal of the nation’ and the ‘own culture’. Hall explained the way in which Thatcher’s vision of the future was legitimized by a nostalgic turn to the past and claimed that there were important similarities between Thatcher and the British “National Front” concerning their political ideas about racial and immigration questions. According to Hall, both articulated a political opposition between ‘the ordinary people’ and ‘strangers’ or ‘immigrants’.

The concept (the criteria of application) was centered on the asymmetric counterconcepts of the people against their supposed enemies. By that criterion ‘populism’ was used in reference to various politicians and political parties. Jörg Haider’s FPÖ, founded in 1986, Le Pen’s Front National founded in 1972 and which managed to increase popular support in the 1980s, and the left-wing “Panhellenic Socialist Movement” (PASOK) in Greece and its party leader Papandreou all articulated a roughly similar political opposition, and were labeled ‘populist’ by their political opponents in public debates. From the beginning of the 1990s, the word ‘populist’ was increasingly applied to other right-wing politicians in Western Europe such as Umberto Bossi (Italy), Christoph Blocher (Switzerland), Carl I. Hagen (Norway), Philip Dewinter (Belgium), Paulo Portas (Portugal), Pia Kjærsgaard (Denmark), whose political messages were rooted in the asymmetrical counterconcepts of the ‘ordinary citizen’ against the ‘political correctness’ of intellectual and vested political parties, who had placed a ‘taboo’ on real problems and by making them ‘unmentionable’ had thereby lost touch with the ‘ordinary man’. Moreover, the vested political parties agreed at least partly with the criticism expressed by those parties. In response to the arrival of the new parties, debates about the alleged ‘gap between politics and citizens’ were organized by political elites in the 1990s. The significant role of ‘populism’ was reflected by the frequent use of the word in Dutch parliamentary debates from the mid-1990s onwards. The word ‘populist’ was used only

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once in the Lower House on October 10, 1975, when a Dutch MP deprecated the policy of a commission of experts by qualifying it as ‘populist’.\textsuperscript{151} From the mid-1990s, concepts like ‘populism’ and ‘populist’ were frequently used in Dutch parliamentary debates.\textsuperscript{152}

At the beginning of the 1990s, scholars reflecting on European political parties tended to treat ‘populism’ as a pejorative term. For example, Betz regarded populist parties as the “[…] parties of discontent, which managed to exploit voter’s dissatisfaction and cynicism and to appeal to their sense of powerlessness by promoting authoritarian leadership.”\textsuperscript{153} Parties of discontent, as he explained in a later article,\textsuperscript{154} mobilize feelings of resentment and exploit them politically. The negative connotation of the concept of populism was reinforced by the use of related pejorative labels like ‘radical’ or ‘extreme’. Although he did not hyphenate the labels ‘populist’, ‘radical-right’ and ‘extremist’, he sometimes used the terms interchangeably.\textsuperscript{155}

A shift in the meaning of the concept of populism occurred at the end of the 1980s when political leaders like Boris Yeltsin, Russia’s first president, and Vladimir Zhirinovsky, founder and leader of the opposition party “Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia” (LDPR) were labeled ‘populist’ in media and political discourses.\textsuperscript{156} Following Hawkins, I use ‘discourse’ here as a technical term “[…] describing any distinct language that subconsciously expresses – and […] shapes or constitutes – our fundamental assumptions.”\textsuperscript{157} The terms used by an author help to identify a piece as a political tract, journalistic narrative or academic work. According to Pierre-André Taguieff, the roots of the use of the concept of populism against Yeltsin and other East-European politicians in media and political discourses can be found in 1989, when Yeltsin gained 90 percent of the Russian votes and was elected to the Congress of People’s Deputies as the delegate from the Moscow district. Yeltsin’s popularity worried the Soviet government

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\item \textsuperscript{151} Reports of Dutch parliamentary proceedings, 11e vergadering Oktober 10 1975, p. 522, http://www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Between 1975 and 1995 the words ‘populism’, ‘populist’ were used 30 times in either the Upper House or the Lower House. Since 1996 these words were employed 340 times in parliamentary debates.
\item \textsuperscript{154} Betz, H.-G. (2002), ‘Conditions Favouring the Success and Failure of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Contemporary Democracies’, in: Yves Mény and Yves Surel (eds.), \textit{Democracies and the Populist Challenge}, Palgrave, New York, pp. 198-199. In this later article, Betz does not only apply the concept to European political parties, but also to the Canadian Reform Party in the late 1980s, formed by Preston Manning, the Australian “One Nation Party”, led by Pauline Hanson, and “New Zealand First”.
\end{itemize}
and they started a campaign to discredit him.\footnote{Taguieff, P.-A. (2007), L’illusion populist. Essai sur les démagogies de l’âge démocratique, Flammarion, Paris, p. 140.} During the government’s campaign, the labels ‘populism’ and ‘nationalism’ were used interchangeably.

Yeltsin’s opponents did not use the old Russian label narodnichestvo, but made use of a new one: ‘populizm’. The new label ‘populizm’ has a meaning different from narodnichestvo. The Dictionnaire raisonné de la langue russe (1992) defines populism a social movement with two characteristics: a direct appeal to the masses and strong leadership.\footnote{“[...] mouvement social qui en appelle directement aux masses et qui affirme qu’elles seules, si elles sont pourvues d’un leader fort, peuvent régler leurs problèmes sociaux.” Taguieff, P.-A. (2007), L’illusion populist. Essai sur les démagogies de l’âge démocratique, Flammarion, Paris, p. 141. According to Taguieff, the 24th edition of the Dictionnaire raisonné de la langue russe (1992) translates populism as narodnichestvo and populism (p. 141). The Oxford English-Russian dictionary of 1992 does not yet translate ‘populism’ with narodnichestvo and populism. Falla, P.S. (ed.), (1992), The Oxford English-Russian Dictionary, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 652. The Oxford Russian dictionary of 1993, however, translates ‘populism’ with both words. Falla, P.S. (ed.), (1993), The Oxford Russian Dictionary, Oxford UP, Oxford, p. 1064.} The shift in terminology indicates that the concept of narodnichestvo had by then acquired a primarily historical meaning. Narodnichestvo was a polemical notion mobilized by the self-styled narodniki and, subsequently, by Lenin, but has since become a primarily descriptive concept used by historians to analyze historical phenomena. Yet narodnichestvo can still be used polemically, but then the label refers to groups of people going to the rural areas in order to preserve authentic Russian folk culture. While the label narodnichestvo was not apt for political use in the new Russian circumstances, another political label in Western Europe, namely ‘populism’, was adopted with relative success. Because the label ‘populism’ had a strong polemical force in European public debates in the 1980s, the label has been transferred to the Russian political vocabulary and applied to politicians like Yeltsin and Zhirinovski. Subsequently, the label ‘populizm’ has been used in reference to other politicians in Eastern Europe also like Andrzzej Lepper, Aleksander Kwasniewski and Lech Wałęsa in Poland, Slobodan Milosevic and Vojislav Seselj in Serbia, Istvan Csurka and Joszef Torgyan in Hungary, and Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia.\footnote{Taguieff, P.-A. (2007), L’illusion populist. Essai sur les démagogies de l’âge démocratique, Flammarion, Paris, pp. 143, 145.}

In some of those cases, populism was once more associated with sociological analyses inspired by modernization theories. Di Tella, for example, has extended his analysis on Latin America to East European regimes such as Yugoslavia and to the Solidarity movement in Poland. Populism was analyzed as a specific stage of mobilization in the transition from communism to liberal democracy.\footnote{Di Tella, T.S. (1997), ‘Populism into the Twenty-first Century’, Government and Opposition, vol. 32, p. 200.} Minkenberg proposed a different
functional explanation for the rebirth of ‘populist nationalism’. The transformation of a centrally planned communist system to a democratic, market-led system creates a large number of ‘modernization losers’ who are susceptible to the appeal of populist movements.\(^{162}\) According to that modernization argument, the transition in Eastern Europe generated feelings of insecurity about the immediate future as well as about the people’s well-being and even their very identity. The resulting strains brought on by that political and economic insecurity have given rise to populist reactions which are regarded as a deviation from the modernization process. Populist politicians mobilize the people by seeking to undo the transition from communism to democracy and by appealing to an idealized past. To such theorists, the concept of populism expresses disapproval. According to Di Tella, for instance, populist movements often have a destabilizing effect on democratic systems.\(^{163}\)

A further shift in the meaning of the concept of populism occurred around the beginning of the 1990s, when the label ‘populism’ was applied by their political opponents to political leaders like Silvio Berlusconi in Italy and Bernard Tapie in France or Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands. Berlusconi and Tapie, standing at the pinnacles of Italian and French business were accused by their political opponents of applying their commercial “wheeler-dealer” approach to the business of politics. In the academic literature, ‘populism’ then came to be associated with demagoguery and referred to politicians pretending to speak directly to the people through television and who sought to articulate an anti-establishment political discourse. For their critics, such figures tried to achieve their goals with demagogic techniques, which means that they denounced political elites, formulated vague and simplistic political solutions, made unrealizable promises, and played on popular emotions.\(^{164}\)

In Western Europe, populism was associated with political leaders, movements or parties who were not part of the political establishment until the mid-1990s, although that changed when the label was applied to vested politicians who appealed to the people as such. In such cases, the concept of populism became synonymous with catch-all politics in which parties sought to attract voters having diverse viewpoints by an inclusive language of the people, thereby creating an illusion of homogeneity. The shift in the sense of the concept of populism broadened the frame of reference. Scholars used the concept in reference to Jacques Chirac’s campaign for the 1995 presidential election and


for Tony Blair’s political speeches. In the academic literature, catch-all politics is associated with the weakening of traditional party structures and ideological cleavages. The association of populism with catch-all politics deployed by the political insider instead of with the anti-establishment stance of the political outsiders constituted a conceptual change. The case of Berlusconi shows that it is possible to make the transition from political outsider to catch-all politician in government, while being permanently labeled ‘populist’. In Europe, politicians themselves have used the label ‘populism’ to pinpoint their political enemies, their stances and policies. ‘Populism’ then expresses condemnation and disapproval. Whereas the concept of populism has often been used in a derogatory sense, recently, the concept has gained a positive connotation, too. The Dutch politician Rita Verdonk was proud of being labeled as ‘populist’. In an interview in March 2008 she said: “I am for the people. Populist? I am proud of that. It is an honorable nickname.” A few months later, another Dutch politician, Ronald Sörensen, announced the launch of a new broadcasting company in The Netherlands, which he named “Populist Broadcasting the Netherlands” (PON). The new company wanted to offer a platform for ‘the dissatisfaction among the population’ that was negated by the existing broadcasters, who represented only ‘the social-liberal elite’. Similarly, politicians like Jörg Haider and Le Pen have been known to claim the label ‘populism’ as a rallying cry in interviews. In fact, the self-styled populists alluded to the positive meaning of ‘populism’ which explains its popularity in the United States.

The frequent use of the word ‘populism’ in reference to a wide variety of European political phenomena has stimulated academic reflection about the actual concept of populism. What scholars who work on European politics have in common is that they conceptualize populism, whether implicitly or explicitly, in relation to liberal democracy, which has been the hegemonic regime since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Departing from liberal democracy as either a type of regime or a political ideal, populism has been interpreted

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as ‘a crisis’ or ‘a danger or a threat to democracy’,¹⁷¹ or as ‘a challenge to’ or ‘a changing of democracy’. If populism is taken to be a challenge or a change, it has been interpreted either as a basic democratic impulse,¹⁷² or as a hybrid phenomenon that encompasses two faces: a democratic promise and a dangerous underside of democracy.¹⁷³

Scholars on European politics differ in their views of the overarching dimension (‘genus’) of the concept of populism. An exceptional position in the debate has been taken by the sociologist Priester who views populism as a specific political current. Combining elements of anarchism, laissez-faire liberalism and conservatism (Volkskonservatismus), populism is seen by Priester as a revolt against the modern state.¹⁷⁴ The portrayal of populism as a liberal, anti-statist program is, however, squarely rejected by most scholars, because “[…] it is precisely by identifying populism with specific programs or ideologies that we miss out on its crucial specificity.”¹⁷⁵ A common starting point for many definitions of populism is that it is centered on the asymmetrical counterconcepts of ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’. ‘The people’ are not identified with a specific class or social group, although they are seen as a formal category opposed to the political establishment and the dominant ideas and values of society.¹⁷⁶ Additionally, the populist appeal to ‘the people’ is sustained by an ideology of popular sovereignty and majority rule. Some scholars define populism as a thin political ideology that interprets social and political reality in a specific way and provides a call to political action.¹⁷⁷ The thinness of the ideology of populism denotes a core set of ideas that separates society into

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two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, namely the homogeneous people against a group of elites and dangerous elements. Other scholars such as Taguieff and Pasquino maintain that the core characteristics of populism are not substantial enough to speak of an ideology, however thin, so that the suggestion of a populist ideology, let alone a populist current, would be an exaggeration.²⁸ Taguieff and Pasquino and similar scholars do not define populism in terms of a particular ideological content, but view it as a political style applicable to a variety of ideological frameworks,²⁹ or as a mentality.³⁰ However, despite the terminological disagreements, there is consensus among such authors on the constituent components of populism. Both Taguieff and Pasquino refer to the populist appeal to ‘the people’ which is intended to denounce elites or foreigners (Taguieff) or is closely linked with an ‘anti-political mentality’ and ‘anti-party sentiment’ (Pasquino).³¹

6. Summary

The aim of this chapter was to explain why populism is a diffuse concept and has gained different meanings at different times and places. On the basis of a geographical-diachronic classification I have tried to analyze the shifts in meaning of the concept through time within three different geographical contexts: the United States, Latin America, and Europe. My suggestion was that shifts in the meanings of the concept of populism occurred when changes took place with respect to the sense of the concept (the criteria of application), its frame of reference and its attitudinal expressiveness. The sense of the concept of populism is centered on the asymmetric counterconcepts of the people against the elite (or other of their supposed enemies). This chapter has, therefore, explored the semantic operations involved in the construction of these asymmetric counterconcepts and has analyzed whether the specific pair of concepts, the people versus the elite, has changed its nature in the course of time.

Summarizing the findings of this chapter, four general conclusions can be drawn from the geographical-diachronic study. First of all, for most of its existence the concept of populism has gained positive connotations in American politics, whereas the term

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'populism' has often expressed disapproval in Latin American or European politics. In the United States, the concept of populism has often been associated with a democratic expression of political life. The normative weight that is expressed by the concept of populism was negative during only a short period after the Second World War until the late 1950s. Against the background of popular support both of totalitarian movements in Europe and for McCarthy’s position in the United States, sociologists then used ‘populism’ as a delegitimizing concept. But in the 1960s and 1970s, populism gained positive connotations once again, and that was reflected by self-styled populists like Jimmy Carter who claimed a wish to restore control of all aspects of government to ‘the ordinary people’ who should be the supreme authority.

Scholars of Latin America, who associated populism with the sociology of modernization, condemned populism as a destabilizing phenomenon, although Marxist-inspired scholars expressed approval of populism because politicians and movements that were labeled ‘populist’ represented a genuine democratic impulse. By the mid-1990s, the concept of populism had acquired variable meanings. Most scholars shifted the focus away from socioeconomic features and focused instead on the concept’s political characteristics. Some of them came up with the idea ‘neo-populism’ to denote new patterns of political leadership combined with neo-liberal reforms. The focus on the political characteristics of populism allowed scholars to broaden their frame of reference and to include left-wing politicians, characterized by some of the crucial features of populism. Again, Marxist-inspired scholars have rejected those conceptualizations of populism. On the one hand, Marxists who view populism as a positive label have denied ascribing it to politicians who implement neo-liberal reforms because the reforms violate popular interests. On the other hand, Marxists who view populism as a negative label, have rejected the concept in favor of ‘popular’ to define the participatory political practices of politicians like Chávez, Morales and Correa.

Scholars of Europe have used the concept of populism since the mid-1980s. The concept of populism very often acquired a negative connotation: ‘populism’ was polemically mobilized first against Margaret Thatcher, for her appeal to feelings of discontent of ‘ordinary people’. She invoked political opposition of ‘the ordinary people’ to ‘strangers’ or ‘immigrants’, which was shared by right-wing politicians like Haider and Le Pen, both of whom were labeled ‘populist’ by their political enemies. A conceptual change in ‘populism’ occurred in the 1990s when the label of ‘populism’ began to be associated with politicians who approached their goals using ‘demagogic’ practices. Another shift in meaning occurred when the concept of populism became synonymous with a catch-all politics based on an inclusive language of ‘the people’, whereby the concept was used in reference to politicians from vested political parties also. Often used in a derogatory sense, ‘populism’ has recently been employed as a proudly borne nickname by European politicians claiming to be standing up for ‘the ordinary people’.
Second, the attitudinal expressiveness of the concept has to do with the presumed relationship between populism and democracy. Scholars of the United States and Europe often assume that liberal democracy and the market are the hegemonic regime, whereas liberal democracy, as ideal or effective regime, is much more in dispute in Latin America. In the United States, most politicians or movements that have been labeled or label themselves as ‘populist’ have not been opposed to the regime of liberal democracy – or have not been regarded as such –, but rather have expressed political values such as citizen involvement that have long been central to American politics. That explains the popularity of the concept of populism in the United States.

In Europe, ‘populism’ was frequently used after the fall of fascist regimes in south Europe in the 1970s and the demise of Soviet Communism in 1989. ‘Populism’ then became the new political label for opponents of the ideal of liberal democracy and was associated with ‘fascism’ or the ‘extreme-right’. Recently, the negative connotation of the concept has been overturned by self-styled populists, who allude its positive meaning such as is commonplace in the United States.

In Latin America, liberal democracy and the market are not indisputably regarded as the hegemonic regime. Politicians like Chávez, Morales and Correa appeal to alternative ‘direct’ or ‘participatory’ forms of democracy. The contesting of liberal democracy is also reflected by the scholarly debate about populism. Scholars of Latin America have evaluated populism in terms of a highly personalized leadership and popular mobilization that bypasses institutionalized forms of mediation, although Marxist scholars have condemned the implicit assumptions of liberal democracy embedded in that conceptualization of populism.

Third, shifts in the meaning of the concept of populism stem not only from its semantic variability, but from political struggles to define it. The political struggle is illustrated by the dispute between Marxist and non-Marxist scholars on Latin American democracy and populism. In that case, the contesting of ‘populism’ expresses disagreement about the preferred form of democracy. The political struggle to define the concept is illustrated also by the polemics between self-styled populists or politicians labeled ‘populist’ on the one hand, and their political enemies on the other. That conceptual conflict about ‘populism’ expresses political conflict about preferred political action. As Rancière argues, “If words serve to blur things, it is because the conflict over words is inseparable from the battle over things.”

Fourth and last, from the very start, the concept of populism has been rooted in the development of asymmetric counterconcepts, namely ‘the people’ (good) versus ‘the elite’ (bad). That distinction between good and bad, invoked by the American “People’s

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Party”, was inverted by its opponents who characterized ‘the populists’ as ‘false democrats’. The opposed speech acts (attitudinal expressiveness) between the self-styled populists and their opponents indicate that populism is a polemical notion, as will be explained in more detail in the second chapter [§2.4]. A dispute about the attitudinal expressiveness occurred in the case of narodniches’tvo also which was translated by historians as ‘populism’. Narodniches’tvo was mobilized as a badge of honor by the self-styled narodniki, but used too by Lenin and other Marxists against those who believed in the possibility of attaining the aims of socialism while bypassing capitalism. In the case of the self-styled narodniki, the sense of narodniches’tvo was centered on the asymmetric counterconcepts of ‘the simple folk’, which meant the peasantry, as opposed to the Tsarist regime and ‘the cosmopolitan gentry’. Conceptual history has shown that the asymmetric counterconcepts of the people against their supposed enemies have been given different meanings in the United States, Latin America and Europe over time.

The conceptual history of the (academic) use of ‘populism’ demonstrates that populism it is a contested concept that is ascribed different meanings in different historical contexts. It is important to realize that the normative judgments that are more or less explicitly made about populism are linked with the dominant ideological view, in the given context, of democracy and economics. However, conceptual history has shown too that in spite of all the differences, the concept of populism is centred on the counter-concepts of ‘the besieged people’ against ‘the bad other’. These observations imply that both a structuralizing and historicizing approach to populism necessarily fail, as has been explained in the introduction to the present study.
Chapter 2

Populism as a Political Label

1. Introduction

The conceptual history of populism has shown that the label is widely applied in relation to various, although not infinitely different political phenomena and agents. The label ‘populism’ is attached to agents by themselves or by others, and to phenomena by others and self-declared populists. That raises the question of why some political phenomena or agents are labeled as ‘populist’, while others are not. I will argue that it has to do with the interaction between the labeler and the agents who are labeled or who label themselves as ‘populist’. The application of the label of ‘populism’ has to do with both the attitudes of the labeler and with the features of the political phenomenon or agent, the political behavior, political ideas, or the statements of a particular politician.

In the next chapter, I shall investigate the phenomenon of populism and analyze it precisely as an ‘-ism’ with a specific democratic repertoire. The populist repertoire will be defined as a set of ideologemes and practices organized by political agents around the idea that ‘the people’ are homogenous and one. There, my hypothesis will be that political phenomena and agents are repeatedly or permanently labeled as ‘populist’ if and only if their political actions are organized in accordance with the idea of the homogeneous people-as-one. In this chapter, I shall take a step back and conceptualize the interaction between users of the label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena and agents who are labeled as ‘populist’. The conceptualization of that interaction involves five aspects: the concept of populism (logic of difference), the political act of naming and labeling (logic of equivalence), the labeler, the glue of the label, and the ‘adhesive force of the glue’.

First of all, populism is a political concept the meaning of which is defined in and through mutual difference from other political concepts, but which also yields a correspondence – a logic of difference. The association and difference between populism and other political concepts is embedded in specific historical contexts [section 2]. Second, the application of ‘populism’ to a specific political phenomenon or agent is not an exclusive conceptual operation, but a political act to name or label someone or something as ‘populist’. The performative dimension or political moment of equivalence in naming and labeling is explained by the logic of equivalence [section 3].

Third, populism is a political label the effectiveness of which rests not only on its conceptual accuracy, but on the expressive force it acquires in polemical encounters. Populism is a polemical notion because the user of the label creates a political opposition between ‘true democrats’ and ‘false democrats’ so that the label has both positive
and negative connotations. Since populism is a polemical notion, academic interpreters of populism like this author are inevitably situated somewhere on the conceptual battlefield, a field which because it consists of different claims on populism is in a constant flux of meaning, and being inherently political, is the subject of political struggle [section 4].

The fourth of our aspects of interaction is that the label ‘populism’ is not, as it were, self-adhesive but needs some kind of ‘glue’ to become effective. The glue on the label of ‘populism’ consists of the activated rhetoric of different labellers within different academic, media, and political discourses. Users of the label ‘populism’ often express their normative presuppositions and judgements through ideologemes, which are the smallest intelligible units in ideology and express a powerful political image. In addition, the glue consists of mobilized political strategies with respect to populism [section 5].

Finally, the ‘adhesive force of the glue’ depends on both the ‘material of the glue’ and a ‘good substratum’. The adhesive force of the glue increases if the number of political discourses and (corresponding) political strategies increases, although it is true also that the application of the label ‘populism’ must be plausible. That plausibility is, first of all, intersubjectively determined: the adhesive force therefore increases if the generated discourses about populism are to a large extent shared by the public. Second, given the presumption that the label will not be applied to enormously different political phenomena and agents, its plausibility cannot depend only on shared views of the public about what they regard as ‘populist’, but is determined by some core idea [section 6].

2. The political concept of populism: logic of difference

‘Populism’ is a political concept used to organize socio-political reality. Political concepts are part of what Michael Freeden has called ideology. Ideologies ‘map’, or make sense of the world, offering orientation and overview. In order to provide an interpretation of the world, agents make, reproduce and modify their mapping of social and political reality. Such mapping presupposes a differentiation of social and political reality – for example that social demands can be asserted only through difference, or that political decisions can be made only by isolating one option from many others. Differentiation is what political concepts are for.

The meaning of ‘populism’ is defined through the ‘logic of difference’, which a way of relating concepts to each other in and through their mutual difference. The logic of difference indicates that the link between one concept and any number of others is of a differential nature, and that is therefore constitutive for their meaning. In the words of

184 I have borrowed this notion from Ernesto Laclau, who views the logic of difference as one of two ways of constructing the social. The logic of difference constructs the social through the assertion of a particularity, whose only differences are of differential nature. Laclau, E. (2005), On Populist Reason, Verso, London/New York, p. 78.
Populism as a Political Label

Oliver Marchart, “[...] a particular ‘content’ is assigned to the concept through its very differential position vis-à-vis all other differential positions.”185 Following the logic of difference, a political concept is not defined in positive terms, but in contrast to other concepts or in relation to all other concepts.

A political concept then is defined through other concepts by reference to its difference from them, but it yields a correspondence also. The logic of difference can be illustrated by four examples that have been discussed in the conceptual history of populism.

First, when the American sociologists Shils and Lipset used the concept of populism to refer to senator McCarthy’s policy, they made a distinction between democrats and non- or anti-democrats, arguing that McCarthy’s activities were simultaneously a threat to liberal democracy but also showed a correspondence between populism and fascism, which they perceived as a threat to liberal democracy.

Second, when Michael Kazin describes American politicians as ‘populists’, he makes a distinction between a popular or direct style of expression as opposed to an intellectual or indirect language of political elites, but also acknowledges the correspondence between populism and a democratic expression of political life.

Third, in the context of European politics, populism has a rather different meaning. When the label ‘populist’ was put to Le Pen or Haider in the 1990s, a distinction was always made between ‘true democrats’ and ‘false democrats’ but along with that a correspondence was always suggested between populism, fascism and the extreme right.

Fourth, when the simplistic political style shared by Silvio Berlusconi and Pim Fortuyn was labeled as ‘populist’, a distinction was made between their style and a thorough and sophisticated style of politics, but the correspondence was noted between populism and demagogy.

The associations between populism and fascism, populism and democracy, or populism and demagogy are not purely arbitrary, but embedded in a specific historical context. The nature of the associations made has to do with what Koselleck calls ‘the space of experience’ and ‘the horizon of expectation’.186 The space of experience refers to past events that have been incorporated and can be remembered in the present. The horizon of expectation denotes the deployment of projects, hopes and fears which insert the future into the present. In the post-war European political context, the correspondence that was often made between populism and fascism indicated a projection of future expectations, for example that populism was a threat to liberal democracy, and that projection was based on past experience of the recent replacement of liberal democracy by fascist regimes. With the exception of scholars in the 1950s and 1960s, in the American political context a correspondence is often established between populism and democracy

and that correspondence is based on the experience of politicians and political movements which have been anti-governmental, although rarely against the existing regime.

The connection between the semantic performance of populism and the specific historical context implies that a purely discursive approach to populism is insufficient. An example of a discursive approach which fails to make any reference to historical context is Ernesto Laclau’s theory on populism. In *On Populist Reason* (2005), Laclau argues that populism is the name for the political logic that unifies a multiplicity of heterogeneous demands in equivalental chains. The chain of equivalence between heterogeneous particular demands is stabilized by a signifier, such as ‘the people’, and is established in antagonistic opposition to the dominant system which is incapable of satisfying those particular demands. The ‘global political subject’ which is constituted through the chain of equivalence is called ‘the people’.187 Laclau’s concept of ‘the people’ has a double meaning: ‘the people’ is both a possible name (signifier) holding together the particular identities and a name for the global political subject that is the effect of an equivalental chain.

However, since Laclau’s conceptualization of populism makes no reference to historical context he cannot explain why the logic of equivalence should be called ‘populism’ nor why the concept of ‘the people’ plays a central role in constituting the chain of equivalence in the first place.188 In Laclau’s theory, both ‘the people’ and ‘populism’ remain more or less arbitrary names for either a global subject or a political logic. However, as conceptual history has shown, ‘populism’ emerged as being applied to the “People’s Party” under a specific constellation of historical conditions.

### 3. Naming and labeling: logic of equivalence

The application of the tag ‘populism’ to a specific political phenomenon or agent is not an exclusively conceptual operation, but it remains a political act to describe a political phenomenon or agent as ‘populist’. Any analysis of ‘populism’ must, therefore, take into account the performative dimension of the label. ‘Naming’ and ‘labeling’ are names for the political activity of applying a word to a specific political phenomenon or agent. Naming and labeling are both ascriptive acts; they are political activities that either describe or prescribe political phenomena or agents, but ascribe or attribute a name or label to those phenomena or agents. Naming and labeling are not, however, equivalent. In contrast to naming, labeling praises or dispraises the phenomenon or agent labeled. Labeling entails a judgment by the labeler about the thing labeled.

The concept of ‘labeling’ was used in sociological theories in the 1950s and 1960s, which concentrated on the consequences of identifying a person as deviant. According

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to the labeling approach, the deviant was the person who was labeled as an outsider from society, such as a juvenile delinquent, a drug addict, a homosexual, a troublemaker and so on. Labeling theorists stressed the importance of the role of social definitions, rules and sanctions, and that the deviant was created by society as a consequence of the reactions of others to an individual. From that point of view, the outsider is, in the words of Howard Becker, one of the leading labeling theorists, “[...] a quality of the act of the person commits [...] The deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.”\(^{189}\)

The act of labeling is not however, the sole explanation for what deviants do. The actions of a drug addict or a homosexual do not result from some group having called him a drug addict or a homosexual. Hence, Becker views deviance as the result of an interaction between a particular social group and an individual viewed by the group as rule-breaker. Deviance grows out of interactional patterns: “Whether a given act is deviant or not depends in part on the nature of the act (that is, whether or not it violates some rule) and in part on what other people do about it.”\(^{190}\) Deviance lies in the interaction between the person who commits an act and those who respond to it. By similar reasoning, I suggest that the reasons why some political phenomena or agents are labeled ‘populist’ have to do with the interaction between the labeler and those labeled as ‘populist’. The application of the label of ‘populism’ depends both on the user of the label and on the specific nature of the political utterances and practices of, for instance, politicians.

In sociological labeling theory, ‘labeling’ means identifying a person or phenomenon as deviant, with the deviant as outsider, the individual or phenomenon singled out and so standing outside of the circle of ‘normality’.\(^{191}\) The sociological labeling approach can explain the difference between naming and labeling. Both naming and labeling are ascriptive actions, so neither descriptive nor prescriptive. In contrast to naming, the application of a label involves a judgment. For example, in the labeling theory of sociologists like Becker, labeling means that the labelers express a negative judgment about the outsider. However, since a judgment can be either positive or negative, I would suggest broadening the notion of labeling to include both positive and negative judgments. In contrast to naming, labeling means simultaneously to ascribe a label and to express either approval or disapproval. By way of illustration, the application of ‘populist’ to members of the “People’s Party” was a political act involving a performative dimension of naming. Initially, ‘populism’ was used as a name for the “People’s Party”, but after a time, ‘populism’ came to be used in a derogatory sense by political opponents of the “People’s Party”. ‘Populism’ eventually became a political label used both as an epithet by their opponents and a proud nickname by the self-styled populists themselves.


\(^{190}\) Ibid., p. 14.

\(^{191}\) The idea of social exclusion is also adumbrated in Norbert Elias’s influential study The Established and the Outsiders (1965).
The ascription of ‘populism’ to a political phenomenon or agent involves a performative dimension and is, in the words of John Searle, a particular speech act. Using the word ‘populism’ is a form of intentional behavior, an action. Populism is therefore defined not only using the logic of difference, but through the logic of equivalence too. While the logic of difference structures the conceptual order, the logic of equivalence structures the nominal order. According to Jacob Torfing, the logic of equivalence “[…] constructs a chain of equivalential identities among different elements that are seen as expressing a certain sameness.” The equivalential identities are not simply identical, because they are only the same in one or more aspects, while being different in others. The logic of equivalence links the differential positions into a new chain within which the differences become equivalent. The common denominator of the chain is formulated by a single name or label around which the differences are structured.

For example, in the 1960s, academics signified political leaders as different as Mahatma Gandhi in India, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, or Sukarno in Indonesia in terms of a chain of equivalence. Within the academic discourse, those political agents were made equivalent by virtue of their being labeled ‘populist’. Their separate movements and their particular political struggles were not rendered identical, but ‘populism’ was the common denominator of the chain that constructed equivalential meanings among the different entities. Such academic discourses about populism did not exceed the conceptual order, and in all of them we will probably find a concept of ‘populism’ explained in different ways vis-à-vis other concepts. But the logic of equivalence allows us to determine the political moment in those discourses. The application of the label ‘populism’ to such different political phenomena involves a performative dimension and is itself a political act.

In academic discourse, the label ‘populism’ will often be made up of linguistic elements and combined with other words, sentences or texts. However, a label can consist of pictorial elements only or of a combination of pictorial and linguistic elements. In those two cases, a label can become what Uwe Pörksen calls a ‘visiotype’, an amalgam of text and image such as maps, photographs, tables, graphs and diagrams. I sug-

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194 According to Laclau, the label or the name functions as a pure signifier that represents the totality of an equivalential chain. A pure signifier means that it does not express “any conceptual unity that precedes it.” Laclau, E. (2007), On Populist Reason, Verso, London, p. 108. There exists no conceptual correlation between the name and the reference, or, to put it differently, there is no signified to which the signifier could refer.
gest extending the list of visiotypes to cartoons, posters or banners. In visiotypes, verbal language is not subordinate to the visual, but both can be related in a complex way. For after all, language can effect visualization and images in many ways. Language is defined by grammatical rules and lexica and can produce multiple new combinations of words.\textsuperscript{197} Language is therefore flexible; it has the rich potential to combine words and produce new slogans, and can do so in combination with the pictorial forms of cartoons and posters. The combination of pictorial and linguistic elements often produces a strongly expressive effect.

Taking into consideration both the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence, visiotypes have both a conceptual and a performative dimension. For example, the cartoon about the Dutch politician Geert Wilders, which is shown below, is a visiotype and has a strong expressive and affective force. The cartoon was published in a Dutch daily newspaper and was related to an article discussing a comparison between the Weimar Republic and the contemporary Dutch political situation.\textsuperscript{198} The author argued that both situations were incompatible, but he maintained that history shows that the populist rhetoric used by Wilders could be a threat to liberal democracy. The cartoonist contrived to suggest both a difference between the populist Wilders and other Dutch politicians and a correspondence between populism and Nazism – the logic of difference. Moreover, the cartoonist labeled Wilders in a specific way by making the suggestion that Wilders is a populist who poses a threat to democracy. The suggestion is a political intervention, a political moment of equivalence.\textsuperscript{199}

The political meaning of political labels is provided by the broad social practice of labeling. The social practice of labeling in both academic and public debates has a strong impact on the meaning and effect of a particular single instance of labeling. Another example from the Dutch political context concerns the rise of Pim Fortuyn. Until the end of the 1980s ‘populism’ was a term used

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\textit{Visiotype}, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, p. 28.

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., pp. 299-300.


only incidentally of Dutch phenomena. The label in fact had a marginal political meaning in the 1980s, but that changed when Fortuyn came to the prominence in 2002, when he was labeled ‘populist’ by his political opponents. Since then, the label has become an important factor in public political debates, with most politicians preferring to reject the label, and only a few being proud to be called ‘populist’. Hence, the relative importance of the label in Dutch public debates had a strong impact on the meaning and effect of a single, particular labeling.

To sum up, ‘populism’ is mobilized as the label for a kind of politics and that mobilization indicates a performative dimension. The logic of equivalence explains the political moment of equivalence in naming or labeling someone or something as ‘populist’. That does not mean that the logic of equivalence dominates completely, for users of the label ‘populism’ will often explain populism implicitly in relation to other concepts. Hence, the application of the label ‘populism’ is both a political intervention (logic of equivalence) and an act of classification (logic of difference). Any analysis of ‘populism’ must take into consideration both logics. An analysis that remains within the conceptual order neglects the performative dimension of the label. Such an approach to populism seeks to comprehend the phenomenon of populism conceptually by distinguishing it from other forms of politics. That approach is often employed by political scientists who develop a classificatory system of, for example, party types or political ideologies, and who describe populism as a species within one of those genera.

The political science approach to populism inquires into the facts of populists ‘politics’ with its manifold practices, but is less concerned with ‘the political’, which refers to the very way in which populism is instituted, either as a political label or a political phenomenon. The difference between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’ has been conceptualized in a variety of ways by political theorists. Two different schools of thought can be distinguished in the field, represented by Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt. For Schmitt and the realist tradition, ‘the political’ refers to the ineradicable possibility of intensifying antagonisms. For Arendt and the republican tradition, ‘the political’ refers to the potential experience of care and responsibility in moments of collective action. Despite their differences, in both traditions the political remains an ever-present possibility that conditions politics. The concept of ‘the political’ is different from what political science typically refers to as ‘politics’. While political science studies the empirical field of ‘politics’, political philosophy is concerned with ‘the political’, which refers to

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“[…] the very way in which society is instituted.” The political science approach to populism assumes that it can be investigated either as a political label or as a political phenomenon that ‘already exists’. By contrast, the political philosophical approach that I prefer to adopt argues that populism does not exist independently from its naming or labeling and is, therefore, concerned also with the way populism is instituted, whether as label or phenomenon.

4. Labeler: polemical encounters

To apply the label ‘populism’ to a political phenomenon or agent is a political act. It is therefore not free from value judgments, but rather is affected by them. Politicians often use the label as a political weapon to discredit their opponents in political debates, creating an opposition between, for instance, populist politicians who respond to the instincts of the people and rational politicians like themselves. Because of the negative connotation, political agents, labeled ‘populist’, will probably not remain indifferent, but act in response to the labeler. They will probably resist the qualification, reject the label, or even discredit the labeler. Silvio Berlusconi, for example, refused to accept the label ‘populist’ that was ascribed to him and returned it with interest. Jörg Haider, on the other hand, did not fully reject the term ‘populism’, arguing that it could be equated with ‘popular’ or with ‘the people’, which is a good thing in a democracy. Haider rejected only the ‘extreme right’ sense of the label and distanced himself from other parties labeled as extreme right, such as the French FN or the “Flemish Bloc”, which was re-baptized into “Flemish Interest” in 2004 [see §8.5]. Likewise, Pim Fortuyn rejected the ‘extreme right’ label and distanced himself from Le Pen, De Winter and Haider, claiming to be inspired by Berlusconi. The link between Berlusconi and Fortuyn was analyzed in the first chapter here, on the conceptual history of ‘populism’. In the academic literature, both politicians have been associated with demagogic practices and their strategy of speaking directly to the people [see 1.5].

‘Populism’ can have both positive and negative connotations. As noted, the French philosopher Jacques Rancière views populism erroneously as a merely pejorative term. He argues that “Populism is the convenient name under which is dissimulated the exacerbated contradiction between popular legitimacy and expert legitimacy.” For

Rancière, what we call modern democracy is in fact a form of government that enables oligarchs, who claim political expertise, to rule in the name of the people. ‘Populism’ is then the pejorative term for a situation in which oligarchs govern without reference to the people: “The hope is that under this name they will be able to lump together every form of dissent in relation to the prevailing consensus, whether it involves democratic affirmation or religious and racial fanaticism.”

However, populism is not an exclusively pejorative term. Some political agents, for instance, give the label a positive twist and use it as a honorific. Those who use ‘populist’ in that way create another polemically different logic of difference. The demarcated opposition between ‘good’ and ‘false’ democrats is maintained, but the order is reversed: they are indeed populist and that is what good politicians should be! For example, the Dutch politician Rita Verdonk remarked that she was proud to be called a populist, for a good politician should be fully responsive to the wishes of the people. While the application of the label ‘populism’ creates opposition between ‘good’ and ‘false’ democrats, self-styled populists or political agents who are labeled ‘populist’ additionally articulate hostile opposition between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’. Hence the polarization comes both from the labelers and those who are labeled ‘populist’.

The disagreement about the concept ‘populism’ is not some kind of misunderstanding, but designates a polemics, which is well captured by Ralf Dahrendorf, who notes “[...] one man’s populism is another’s democracy, and vice versa.” Populism is a convenient label the effectiveness of which rests not on its conceptual precision but on the expressive force it acquires in polemical struggles. The polemical nature of ‘populism’ can be clarified in reference to work of Carl Schmitt, who argued that “[...] all political concepts, images, and terms have a polemical meaning.” According to Schmitt, political concepts are essentially antagonistic and unavoidably conflict-laden.

Schmitt’s thesis that all political concepts have a polemical connotation can have two meanings. Either it claims that political concepts have a polemical meaning (semantic interpretation), or it asserts that concepts are used polemically which makes them political (pragmatic interpretation). In Der Begriff des Politischen, Schmitt hints at both interpretations. At one point, he suggests that the polemic is a property of political concepts when

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he writes that he tries to offer an analytical framework for the relation between the notions of ‘state’ and ‘politics’ on the one hand and the notions of ‘war’ and ‘enemy’ on the other hand. Elsewhere, however, Schmitt emphasizes the concrete, performative use of political concepts, arguing that they are used to preclude the use by other parties of similar or different concepts. There, Schmitt places emphasis on the conflictuality and contextuality of political concepts. Building on Schmitt’s two interpretations of the polemical, I shall address the polemical nature of the concept of populism from both points of view and will argue that both the semantic and pragmatic interpretation are interrelated.

A semantic interpretation views the label ‘populist’ as a polemical notion, because it has a polemical content. Political concepts therefore, do not have a pre-assigned essence, but are contestable notions. ‘Populism’, for instance, is a disputable concept and refers to other concepts like ‘people’ and ‘democracy’, which are equally ambiguous and contestable. The concept of ‘the people’ too contains significant ambiguities: it can denote a collective entity or it can refer to individuals; it might mean the whole community of citizens (dèmos) or some smaller group within it; the political elite has been identified with the people and it has been used to denote the excluded lower classes or ordinary people (populus) or even the mob (plebs). The semantic interpretation views political concepts as polemical because no preferred conceptual definition can be given indisputable status and, therefore, no agreed definition of the term can ever be laid down.

Ambiguity does not refer simply to the fact that there are different meanings of the notions ‘people’ or ‘democracy’ (semantic interpretation). The disagreement or polemics about the term ‘populism’ has to do not with the concept alone, but also bears on the very situation in which the labeling parties find themselves. The pragmatic interpretation views ‘populism’ as a polemical notion because it is used as a political weapon to discredit political opponents or enemies. Political concepts are polemical because someone or something is ‘attacked’ or ‘hurt’ by the use of the concept. According to Schmitt, the meaning of political labels is incomprehensible “[…] if one does not know exactly who is to be affected, combated, refuted, or negated by such term.” In that quotation, ‘concreteness’ is a key concept and refers both to a particular political context and to a particular group of people in their struggle with another group. For Schmitt, the use of political labels is bound to a concrete situation and creates a concrete opposition, which as its most extreme consequence results in a friend-enemy opposition.

The user of political labels makes a demarcation between the inside (friend) and the outside (enemy). The demarcated outside is identified by Chantal Mouffe as the constitutive outside, a notion she borrows from Henry Staten who uses it to describe some aspects of the work of Jacques Derrida.\(^{213}\) For Mouffe, a constitutive outside explains why the constitution of a collective identity depends on an outside, which “[…] has to be incommensurable with the inside, and at the same time, the condition of emergence of the latter. This is only possible if what is ‘outside’ is not simply the outside of a concrete content but something which puts into question ‘concreteness’ as such.”\(^{214}\) Mouffe interprets the constitutive outside in terms of an opposition between two antagonistic collectivities, whereby the ‘us’ is constituted in opposition to the ‘them’. The ‘them’ or the outside is both negated by and constitutive of the ‘us’ or the inside. That is a pragmatic interpretation and views political labels as polemical, because they create a concrete opposition between inside and outside.

The semantic and pragmatic interpretations of the polemical are interconnected. The interconnection can be illustrated by Walter Bryce Gallie’s and Michael Freeden’s argument that political concepts such as ‘democracy’ are ‘essentially contested’\(^{215}\). By Gallie’s own account, the four most important characteristics of essentially contested concepts are the following: first they have to be appraisive, signifying or accrediting ‘some kind of valued achievement’, second they must be internally complex, third they must contain rival descriptions of their component features, while fourth they are open to modification in the light of changing circumstances.\(^{216}\) According to Gallie, democracy is an essentially contested concept because of the impossibility of decisively choosing between different modes of appraisal. The concept of democracy contains contestable values. Different users of the concept appreciate the values differently and hence define the concept differently. The dispute is therefore about the proper use of the concept: users of the concept will argue that it is used inappropriately by others.

Michael Freeden has correctly argued that a concept is essentially contested not only when the values it contains are contestable, but also when the frame of reference and intention of its components are contestable.\(^{217}\) Democracy is an essentially contestable concept because it contains many notions. If the concept of democracy includes the notions of equality, self-determination and popular sovereignty, there is no rule that

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Populism as a Political Label

gives a correct conceptual definition. Moreover, those notions contain manifold conceptions, some of which are mutually exclusive. For example, the idea of equality can be interpreted in various ways, be it equality of needs, merit, opportunities or liberties. But no usage of the concept can contain all those conceptions simultaneously. For instance, one cannot distribute scarce goods such as food according to need – invoking criteria of hunger, health requirements and so on – while concurrently distributing it according to merit – invoking criteria of deserving, for example by deciding that some have earned the food through hard work, while others have not.\textsuperscript{218} The essential contestability lies in the fact that we can never agree on which of the understandings of equality should be included in the concept. Essential contestability concerns disagreement not only about values, but also about different meanings and references that the concept logically entails.

Both Gallie’s and Freeden’s arguments show that the semantic and pragmatic interpretation of the polemic are interrelated. Because political concepts include different conceptions that appraise different values and exclude different conceptions logically (semantic interpretation), such concepts can then be mobilized in political struggle, creating concrete oppositions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (pragmatic interpretation). ‘Populism’ is a polemical notion because it refers to contested concepts like ‘democracy’ and ‘people’ and is, in addition, used as a political weapon either to discredit political opponents or as an honorific. Because ‘populism’ is a polemical concept, it has either a pejorative or an appreciative connotation. The use of the concept creates a concrete opposition: either between the labeler and the political agent who is labeled as ‘populist’ or between the political agent who applies the label ‘populism’ to himself and those who are not labeled as ‘populist’. In the latter case, populism acquires a positive connotation, in the former case, a negative one.

Since populism is a polemical concept, academic interpreters of populism, including this writer, inevitably find themselves on the conceptual battlefield, which is characterized by different oppositions and is, therefore, in constant flux. That means that any purely empirical instrumentalization of the concept of populism must fail. Moreover, this polemical field of different claims on populism is inherently political, which means that it is subject to political conflict and struggle. As noted, those who are labeled ‘populist’ will often reject the negative qualification and may discredit the labeler. Academic scholars can claim a neutral stance in the debate about populism, but a neutral position is not immune to political conflict. A fine example of that is the workshop ‘Framing: the Secret Weapon of Wilders’, organized by the Erasmus University of Rotterdam on October 20, 2010. According to the moderator of the workshop, the aim of the seminar was to analyze the rhetorical skills of Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch PVV. The workshop announced that it would be “[…] about the political rhetoric that makes Wilders

very successful. It really is about the analysis. And not whether you are with or against Wilders. But the question is ‘why is he so successful?’”

The claim of neutrality by the workshop was questioned by a weblog of the Dutch daily newspaper NRC that commented about the “[…] fully subsidized workshop to teach highly educated, left-wing people to combat the rhetoric of the PVV.” The weblog induced Martin Bosma, an MP of the PVV, to ask questions about it of the minister of Education. According to the PVV, the workshop provided not a neutral, but a biased analysis. Bosma introduced his question with a brief comment: “The idea that university education should be value-free has apparently not yet taken root in Rotterdam […] The cost of this very biased workshop should be deducted from the grant for the Erasmus University.” Bosma’s claim that the workshop was biased, however, confuses ‘value-free’ and ‘neutral’ science. To claim a neutral position in the debate is not value-free. The moderator of the workshop claimed a neutral stance in the debate, but that claim was itself value-laden, since the claim stressed the need to be neither for nor against Wilders. Nevertheless, the comment of the NRC-journalist and the reaction of the PVV to the organisers of the workshop makes clear that a neutral position is not situated outside but within the polemical field of forces and has to be ‘fought for’. As a consequence, my own discourse about populism is not immune to political conflict. It claims to know what populism and democracy are about, but from a populist point of view my analysis is just another elitist position. Hence, my discourse on populism creates an opposition between me – as member of the intellectual community – and populists.

5. Glue of the label ‘populism’

The label ‘populism’ requires some kind of ‘glue’ to become effective. The label of ‘populism’ is not self-adhesive like a sticker or a stamp, precisely because populism is a disputable and polemical notion. The ‘glue’ of the label ‘populism’ consists of the activated rhetoric employed by different users within different discourses (academic, media and political discourses) and the mobilized political strategies with respect to populism. Intellectual debates, public discussions in the media and disputes between political


agents about populism apply the label ‘populism’ to specific political phenomena and agents. Participants in those debates and disputes use different rhetoric about populism, so that populists appeal directly to the will of the people, express fear and rejection of foreigners, are hostile to governing elites whom they accuse of caring more about their own interests than those of the body politic; or they have a political style of simplicity and respond to instinctive feelings. Such labelers do not always make their presuppositions and normative judgments on democracy explicitly, but very often they express them only implicitly through ideologemes such as ‘true democracy’, or vice versa, ‘a danger (or specter) haunting democracy’, ‘crisis of democracy’, ‘pathology of representative politics’, ‘revival of fascism’ and so on. Such ideologemes are an important part of the rhetoric because they express a political imagery very powerfully.

I ideologemes are the smallest identifiable elements in ideology.222 The concept of an ideologeme is as a parallel construction to, for instance, a philosopheme, which is the smallest intelligible unit of philosophy. The concept of ideologemes was originally introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin in his paper ‘Discourse in the Novel’. For Bakhtin, an ideologeme is any sign in human communication. Because it is “[…] an inseparable element of the unified ideological horizon of the social group,”223 it follows that “every word betrays the ideology of its speaker […] every speaker, therefore is an ideologue, and every utterance is an ideologeme.”224 Bakhtin’s concept of ‘ideology’ is therefore very broad. According to him and his colleague Medvedev “[…] the branches of ideological creation [are] science, art, ethics, religion etc.”225 Ideology, in Bakhtin’s view, is not necessarily a political belief system, but a particular way of viewing the world.

Bakhtin’s coinage of the term ‘ideologeme’ has been picked up and redefined by, among others, Gasan Gusejnov, from whom I borrow the notion here. Unlike Bakhtin, whose notion of ideologeme is a very broad one, Gusejnov’s notion of ideologeme is more specific. In Soviet Ideologemes in Russian Discourse of the 1990s, he uses the notion of ideologeme as the main unit of analysis to examine the emergence and evolution of Soviet ideological language. He defines an ideologeme as “[…] a sign or a fixed set of signs guiding participants of communication to patterns of correct thinking, faultless behavior and warning them against the forbidden.”226 Gusejnov views ideologemes as signs that are directly perceptible and recognizable.

224 Ibid. p. 429.
225 Ibid., p. 3.
An ideologeme has both a logical and a narrative or expressive dimension. “A visual-verbal ideologeme takes shape at the meeting place of a word sign and a visual and/or corporeal-schematic image.” An ideologeme is often a compound expression of different words. For example, the ideologeme ‘crisis of democracy’ has a strong expressive and affective force.

The sense of utterances containing ideologemes is not derived from their explicit meaning. That is, the compound expression of an ideologeme is not logical, but suggests a resemblance between the words. An ideologeme derives its strength from the association and suggestion it generates. The suggested resemblance of the compound expression generates a powerful political image. The implicit message that is expressed turns ideologemes into powerful political tools. An ideologeme is not identical to a symbol, of which the meaning is based on agreement or convention. Ideologemes are often used polemically and fulfill a particular political purpose. For example, in discourses about populism, the ideologeme ‘a danger (or specter) haunting democracy’ creates an opposition between ‘good and’ ‘false democrats’. The ideologeme can then be used to legitimize criticism and motivate political strategies with respect to populist politicians.

Political strategies with respect to populism are also part of the ‘glue’ of the label and can be either exclusive or inclusive. Exclusive strategies against populism include the strategy of principled non-corporation or a *cordon sanitaire*, which means that political parties refuse to cooperate with populist parties and exclude them from participation in power. Other exclusive strategies are based on legal, judicial and administrative controls such as legislation to ban parties or measures to restrict or abolish public funding of them. A political strategy inclusive of populism involves the adoption of some utterances or practices of populists by other political agents. The political strategies that are chosen in a particular context are often justified by corresponding discourses that explain the effectiveness of political strategies and particular democratic values and principles. Very often, discourses take reference to similar cases in other countries in making their arguments. Vested political parties of different politics exchange or copy best practices and take note of what the neighbors are doing.

The type of strategy chosen, whether inclusive, exclusive or a combination of both, has an impact on the polemical force of the label. As noted, the polemical use of the label ‘populism’ introduces opposition of ‘good democrats’ and ‘false democrats’. Since the relationship between populism and democracy is the result of a political articulation, the polemical force of the label decreases if many elements previously associated with populist politicians or parties become commonplace in politics. In that case, it

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becomes harder for vested parties, politicians, media, and scholars to hold on to the older assumptions that render populism a non- or anti-democratic political performance by default. Incorporation of populist elements by vested political parties makes it more difficult for self-labeled ‘populists’ to use the term as a powerful badge of honor. The label tends to become what the Germans call salonfähig, meaning ‘able to be referred to in polite society’ – ‘acceptable’ or even ‘respectable’. Conversely, the activation of exclusive strategies against populism may increase the polemical force of the label.

6. ‘Adhesive force of the glue’

The ‘adhesive force of the glue’ determines the duration and persistence of the label once it has been applied. The label ‘populism’ is indeed hung on a wide variety of political phenomena and agents. Also, conceptual history illustrates that one and the same political phenomenon or agent can be qualified by different labels. For example, the American senator Joseph McCarthy was labeled both ‘fascist’ and ‘populist’, while European right-wing political parties in the 1990s were labeled ‘populist’, ‘radical right’, ‘nationalist’, and ‘extreme-right’. Moreover, one and the same political label can be applied to various, although not thoroughly different political phenomena. The label ‘populism’ is ascribed for example to specific behavior of certain politicians or political parties and to specific media or policies. In some cases the label sticks, while in other cases it does not. That entitles us to speak of an ‘adhesive force’, which determines whether the label sticks on certain political phenomena or agents or not.

In a metaphorical sense, the ‘adhesive force of the glue’ depends on the material of the ‘glue’ and the ‘substratum’. As noted, the glue of the label ‘populism’ consists of the rhetoric employed by different users of the label ‘populism’ within different discourses and political strategies mobilized with respect to populism. Thus, the ‘adhesive force of the glue’ is dependent, in the first place, on the extent to which discourses about populism are generated. In the second place, it depends on whether, and to what extent political strategies are mobilized with respect to populism. Discourses about populism and corresponding political strategies are an indicator of the ‘adhesive force of the glue’, which increases with the number of political discourses and strategies.

However, overly frequent use of the label will lead to a decrease in the ‘adhesive force’. Inflation of the label ‘populism’ tends to occur if it is used with abandon. In a recent article, Van Kessel, Bale and Taggart have examined how the words ‘populism’ and ‘populist’ were employed in the British national ‘broadsheet’ newspapers, how and where they were used, who qualified as populist and which issues were associated with them. They concluded that both words were applied to wholly differing agents and issues. In the so-called ‘quality’ newspapers of the United Kingdom, the label populism, they argue, is “[…] thrown around with abandon […] there seems to be almost no consistency: it almost seems as if any political agent that receives sufficiently extensive
news coverage will be labeled ‘populist’ sooner or later.” Too frequent use of the label, I would suggest, can lead to saturation or inflation of the label. In that case, the ‘glue’ of the label ‘populism’ might be said to ‘dry up’, so that the label can hardly be used effectively anymore and will probably have to be replaced with a new political label.

In addition to the material of the ‘glue’, the ‘adhesive force’ depends on the ‘substratum’. A ‘good substratum’ means that the application of the label ‘populism’ to some political phenomena or agents is seen as plausible. Hence, the ‘adhesive force of the glue’ is not fixed once and for all, but can increase or decrease, depending on the material of the ‘glue’ (discourses about populism and political strategies with respect populism) and a ‘good substratum’ (the plausibility of the application of the label ‘populism’).

The plausibility is, first of all, intersubjectively determined: the label ‘populism’ may be repeatedly or permanently applied to a specific political phenomenon, but the ‘adhesive force of the glue’ hinges on shared views among the public about what they consider to be ‘populist’. The ‘adhesive force of the glue’ in relation to a specific phenomenon or agent increases if the discourses about populism and their corresponding ideologemes, along with activated political strategies, are largely shared by the public. Because populism is a polemical notion, its plausibility will not be shared by all but will probably be contested and negated by some. A contesting of plausibility might generate new counter-discourses in which the application of the label ‘populism’ to specific phenomena or agents is rejected. Counter-discourses about populism will, however, merely contribute to the ‘adhesive force of the glue’.

Second, because the label ‘populism’ is used in relation to various, but not infinitely different political phenomena and agents, its plausibility cannot be merely intersubjectively determined by a subset of members of society. In fact I would say that the ‘adhesive force of the glue’ does have a certain core meaning. In Chapter 2, I shall provide a specific definition of populism in order to make sense of that core. Since I have argued that the ‘adhesive force of the glue’ is partly intersubjectively determined, my definition of populism makes sense only if we accept the commonsense understanding of populism. Because such a description involves a political moment (of equivalence) and is likely to be contested or rejected, it must be defined politically.

7. Summary

In this chapter, I have argued that the reasons why some political phenomena are labeled as ‘populist’ while others are not has to do with the interaction between the labeler and the political agents who are labeled or label themselves as ‘populist’. Five aspects are

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important in explaining the interaction: the concept of populism (logic of difference), the political act of naming and labeling (logic of equivalence), the labeler, the ‘glue’ of the label and the ‘adhesive force of the glue’. The concept of populism is always defined by difference from other concepts. For instance, populism is defined in difference with liberal democracy or sophisticated style of politics. At the same time, defining the concept of populism yields a correspondence between populism and demagogy for instance or populism and the extreme right. The specific relations (differences and correspondences) between populism and other concepts hinges on the specific historical context.

The application of ‘populism’ to a specific political phenomenon or agent is not, however, an exclusively conceptual operation, because it is a political act to name or label political phenomena or agents ‘populist’. Naming and labeling are both ascriptive acts, but differ in one important respect. In contrast to naming, labeling praises or dispraises the political phenomenon that is ascribed. The political moment of equivalence in labeling is, however, important to recognize because it indicates that populism, either as a label or as a political phenomenon does not ‘already exist’ independently from the labeling. The performative dimension of labeling is often disregarded or remains implicit in the approach used by political scientists, who think of populism as a pre-existing political phenomenon by distinguishing it from other forms of politics.

The political act of labeling is affected by value judgments made by the labeler. Users of the label ‘populism’ often create an opposition between ‘good democrats’ and ‘false democrats’. The polemical encounter concerns the nature of the concept, because populism is a disputable notion and refers to other concepts like ‘people’ and ‘democracy’ which are likewise inherently ambiguous and contestable. Populism depends on the situation in which the labeling parties find themselves, and can acquire pejorative or positive connotations because it is a polemical notion. The polemical force of the label allows politicians to use ‘populism’ either as an epithet to discredit political opponents or as an honorific, although a single, instance of labeling will have social and political impact only if it is part of a broader social practice of labeling.

The polemical nature of populism implies that interpreters of it are inevitably placed on the conceptual battlefield. The polemical field consists of different claims on populism, which means that the label’s meaning is always changing. Moreover, the polemical field is inherently political, which means that every discourse about populism is potentially subject to political conflict. Academic scholars who claim a neutral position are themselves standing on the polemical field, which implies that their position has to be ‘fought for’. As a consequence, my own discourse too about populism is not immune from a political dimension.

Since populism is a polemical notion, as a label it is not self-adhesive but needs some kind of glue to become effective. The glue consists of discourses about populism and corresponding political strategies with respect to populism. Different labelers within different discourses (academic, media and political discourses) activate particular rhetoric
when they use the label ‘populism’, rhetoric which is often expressed by ideologemes such as ‘crisis of democracy’ or ‘danger of democracy’, which express a powerful political image. In addition, the use of the label often activates inclusive or exclusive political strategies with respect to populism. The particular strategy selected affects the polemical force of the label, so that exclusive strategies will increase the polemical force of the label and inclusive strategies will decrease it. In cases where that force is decreased, elements previously associated with populists are incorporated by vested political parties, so that it becomes more difficult for them to retain older assumptions that render populism as a non- or anti-democratic political performance.

Discourses about populism and corresponding political strategies are an indicator of the ‘adhesive force of the glue’. The ‘adhesive force’ increases if the number of discourses and political strategies increases. However, if the label is used too frequently or too promiscuously, saturation or inflation of the label occurs. In that case, the ‘glue’ of the label tends to ‘dry up’ and the label will eventually be replaced by some other one. The ‘adhesive force of the glue’, however, does not depend only on the composition of the ‘glue’. A second relevant aspect determining the duration and persistence of the label is the ‘substratum’. A ‘good substratum’ implies that the application of the label ‘populism’ to some political phenomena is seen as plausible. The ‘adhesive force of the glue’ increases if the generated discourses about populism and corresponding strategies are shared by the public to a large extent. Not everyone will agree about the label’s plausibility. New counter-discourses about populism generated by the contestation of plausibility will tend to contribute to the ‘adhesive force of the glue’. Moreover, a ‘good substratum’ is determined not only by shared views among the public of what they regard ‘populist’, but also by a core idea, something to be discussed in Chapter 3.

‘Populism’ is an elusive concept because of the variability of the ‘adhesive force of the glue’ and polemical force of the label. However, as Peter Worsley wrote in an article published over 40 years ago, “[...] since the word has been used, the existence of verbal smoke might well indicate a fire somewhere.”230 Since a fire is more than a single flame, I will argue that the political valence of ‘populism’ involves something other than mere derision for one’s political opponents. In the next chapter, I shall say more about this fire by defining populism as a specific democratic repertoire.

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Chapter 3

Populist Repertoire

1. Introduction

More than thirty years ago, Isaiah Berlin noticed that “[...] there is a shoe – in the shape of populism – but no foot to fit it.”\(^{231}\) Since then, the concept of populism has been used increasingly frequently in academic literature, but its frequent use has not resulted in consensus about its definition, as the chapter on the conceptual history of the academic use of ‘populism’ has shown [Chapter 1]. The reasons why political phenomena and agents are labeled as ‘populist’ or not has to do with the interaction between users of the label and the political phenomena and agents labeled ‘populist’ [Chapter 2]. In this chapter, I shall try to set out a plausible description of the concept of populism in order to explain why some political phenomena or agents are repeatedly or permanently labeled ‘populist’, while others are never or only incidentally so labeled.

I shall propose a provisional, stipulative definition of populism. A stipulative definition specifies the intended meaning of a term for which there is no applicable lexical or dictionary definition. Stipulative definitions are used to introduce new terms or to restrict or narrow the use of an existing but too vague term.\(^{232}\) My stipulative definition is intended to allow for use of the term ‘populism’ in a restricted fashion. It is not a matter of arbitrary convention, because a stipulative definition has to satisfy two requirements. First, it must reconstruct at least a large part of what is commonly expressed by means of the term, and second, it should make it possible, in terms of the reformulated concepts, to develop fruitful theoretical work.\(^{233}\)

This chapter will investigate the phenomenon of populism and will define it as a relatively specific, and hence recognizable political repertoire, a notion that I have borrowed from the historian Charles Tilly. A political repertoire is a set of ideologemes and practices that agents organize around a specific idea. I have defined populism here as a set of ideologemes (the smallest intelligible units of ideology) and practices, organized by agents around the idea that ‘the people’ is a single homogeneous whole. The organizer of the populist repertoire combines homogeneity with unity. The people is


depicted as homogeneous, a set of which all the elements are of the same kind. The homogeneous people consists of ‘ordinary citizens’ and is unified – or made ‘one’ – by a movement or leader.

My description of the populist repertoire is ideal-typical. The ideal type of the populist repertoire must not to be confused with an ideal in the sense that it presents a desired state of affairs. It is meant to work as a heuristic tool to explain why some political phenomena and agents are labeled ‘populist’. The concept of an ideal type was introduced by the sociologist Max Weber, who described it as a mental model that captures some essential features of a phenomenon. According to Weber, it is rationally constructed by abstracting certain aspects from the empirical world and by subsequently generalizing these aspects.\(^{234}\) For Weber, an ideal type is a model by reference to which concrete historical events and patterns can be understood. For example, Weber’s ideal type of bureaucracy shows us the regularities of reality and where the concrete but often irrational, deviates from the rationally constructed ideal type of bureaucracy [the role of bureaucracy in modern representative democracy will be discussed in Chapter 7]. According to Weber, the regularities and deviations help us to understand what is going on in real bureaucratic institutions. An ideal type is never found in the real world and thus differs from a hypothesis.\(^{235}\) Although it does not correspond to any empirical reality, it is constructed through the assumption that more or less identical constellations of facts do exist empirically.

The ideal type of the populist repertoire is a flexible model that can be used as a heuristic tool for analysis in reference to various political phenomena and agents in different political contexts, whether movements, parties and politicians in opposition or in government, movements emerging from sectors of the political establishment, or movements emerging from outside the political establishment. I shall suggest that the idea of the single homogeneous people is the crucial element of the populist repertoire connecting the different ideologemes and practices into a coherent set. My hypothesis therefore will be that political phenomena are repeatedly or permanently labeled as ‘populist’ if, and only if, their political actions are organized by the idea that the people is a single, homogenous whole. That organizer of the populist repertoire is the litmus test of the ‘adhesive force of the glue’: only if the political behaviors, utterances or practices of political agents are guided by the idea of the ‘people as a single homogeneous whole’, will the label ‘populism’ stick.

My definition of the populist repertoire contrasts with three dominant academic approaches to populism, namely 1) Laclau’s discursive approach of populism and


\(^{235}\) Ibid.
2) the scholarly focus on populism as a mobilizing strategy and 3) ideology. My conceptualization of a populist repertoire shares the line of argumentation of scholars who view populism as thin ideology, the third academic approach to populism, but I would make two amendments. First of all, most scholars take a conceptual approach to populist ideology and tend, therefore, to play down the motivational aspects of ideologies. Hence, I have introduced the notion of the ideologeme, which captures both the conceptual and affective aspects of ideology. Second, ideologies do not do anything, but need political action to become ‘active’ in socio-political reality. The role of agency is emphasized by the concept of political repertoire [section 2].

As noted, the notion of political repertoire is borrowed from Tilly who exclusively focuses on anti-establishment social movements. Disagreeing with Tilly, I would suggest broadening his notion of repertoires of contestation to include repertoires of political establishment. I shall further argue that political repertoires are democratic to the extent to which their claim-making performance is guided by the democratic principle of popular sovereignty [section 3]. The populist repertoire is a subcategory of democratic repertoires [section 4]. The ideologemes and practices of the populist repertoire will be classified under five headings: 1) the homogeneous people-as-one, 2) anti-elitism, 3) the dangerous other, 4) the will of the people is law, 5) leader/movement. The relations among the various ideologemes and practices will be illustrated with examples of politicians, parties or movements across the world [section 5]. In section 6, I shall return to the ‘adhesive force of the glue’. My hypothesis is that the ‘adhesive force’ crucially depends on the presence or absence of the organizer of the ‘people as a single homogeneous whole’. Politicians may mobilize different ideologemes and practices of the populist repertoire, but the homogeneous people-as-one remains the crucial populist idea.

2. Three approaches to populism

In the current academic debate on populism, there is a lot of discussion of the overarching ‘genus’ of the concept of populism. Three dominant approaches can be distinguished: Laclau’s discursive approach to populism, the scholarly focus on populism as a political style to mobilize the people, and an ideological approach of populism. Is populism primarily a discursive formation, a political style or an ‘ism’, a political ideology? In the first chapter [§1.4 and §1.5], the three approaches have been discussed in relation to the specific historical context in which these conceptualizations of populism were developed. In this section, I shall take a different perspective and will analyze whether those conceptualizations are theoretically plausible.

Laclau’s discourse-theoretical approach breaks with content-based approaches to populism. As Laclau puts it: “All the attempts at finding what is idiosyncratic in populism […] are […] essentially flawed: they will always be overwhelmed by an avalanche
of exceptions.” In On Populist Reason, he argues that populism can be found not in any social content, but in the degree to which the logic of equivalence dominates over the logic of difference. Laclau understands political reality as the interplay of both logics. The logic of difference prevails if actions of the institutional system succeed in satisfying particular demands. The logic of equivalence, by contrast, articulates or shapes a shared popular identity among a heterogeneity of particular unfulfilled demands. A populist mode of articulation emerges if the institutional system is incapable of satisfying social demands, which are then transformed into a chain of equivalence. The equivalential moment signals the emergence of an instance of populism, which presupposes the formation of a global political subject antagonistically opposed to the dominant system.

Laclau’s theory of populism contains three main difficulties. The first point of criticism concerns Laclau’s purely discursive approach and has been discussed in the previous chapter [§2.2]. Laclau’s discursive approach means that his idea of populism is not embedded in any historical or political context. In Laclau’s theory, ‘populism’ remains an arbitrary name for a political logic, and his formalistic approach denies that populism as a name emerged only under the specific historical condition of representative democracy.

Second, Laclau’s conflation of populism and politics runs the risk of conceptual inflation [see §1.4]. I agree with Stavrakakis, who has argued that Laclau cannot conceptually account for the difference between an equivalential discourse articulated around ‘the people’ and any other equivalential discourse. Stavrakakis argues therefore that a reference to ‘the people’ remains a crucial criterion in the analysis of populism combined with the criterion of equivalence. However, I find Stavrakakis suggestion problematic, because the reference to an appeal to ‘the people’ or the interpellation of ‘the people’ against the political establishment is a typical characteristic of all conceptions of democracy.

Third, Stanley has shown that Laclau’s analysis of populism tends to underplay the role of agency. In Laclau’s theory, Stanley argues, the emergence of a chain of equivalence is the outcome of a formal logic. According to Laclau, if particular demands by the people remain unfulfilled by the institutional system, a chain of equivalence is articulated between a heterogeneity of unsatisfied demands. However, shared experience of dissatisfaction will not necessarily find expression in popular identity. It is equally possible that people remain passive and that no shared identity emerges. I agree with Stanley that the emergence of a people cannot be the outcome of a formal logic, but requires the initiative of one or more political agents to articulate or mobilize the people.

The second approach recognizes the role of agency and defines populism as a specific political style to mobilize the people. For example, Knight conceptualizes populism

237 Ibid.
238 Ibid., p. 264.
as a particular political style, typically involving a proclaimed bond with ‘the people’, a ‘them-and-us’ mentality, and a period of crisis. For Taguieff, the populist style contains three structural elements: an appeal to ‘the people’ that is juxtaposed to an elite; an appeal to a direct and unmediated relation with ‘the authentic people’; and the call for change to the political status quo. I agree with scholars of the ‘ideology approach’ who recognize that those elements – a specific interpretation of the people, anti-elitism, a direct relation with the people – are typical and important features of populism, but who argue that they do not define the core of it. Abts and Rummens, for example, argue that the populist style is “[...] essentially determined by the often implicit ideology that inspires and guides [its] actions”. The populist style often implicitly rests on a distinct set of ideas, or an ‘ideology’. In other words, political style is not the end of the matter, but the expression of an underlying ideology.

The third approach emphasizes the role of political ideas. Various scholars define populism as a specific ideology to mobilize the people. The ‘ideology approach’ shares with the first two approaches the idea that populism should not thought of in terms of social bases, economic programs or specific policy issues, but in formal terms as something beyond them. The main source of inspiration for the ‘ideology approach’ is Michael Freedens’s idea of ideologies. I share the line of argumentation of the ‘ideology approach’, but I will make two modifications.

Freedens does not accept the Marxist opposition between ideological illusion and scientific truth. Ideologies are not regarded as distortions of reality, but as necessary devices to structure – ‘map’ – social and political reality. Ideologies provide a simplified map of the political world; they guide people through it. Each ideology is an instance of a pattern that agents impose on how to interpret political facts. Without ideologies, people would not be able to act. According to Freedens, ideologies do not constitute reality in

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causal terms but refer to a social and political reality. Yet ideologies are not mere reflections of an ideational reality, but are themselves political interventions in that reality.

According to Freeden, the units of ideologies are political concepts, and are essentially contested, which means that political concepts can be related to many and changing conceptual meanings.\(^{245}\) Ideologies decontest political concepts by allocating specific meanings to them, so that it is an ideology which dictates that ‘this is what democracy means’. Because ideologies select one specific meaning from a whole range of possible meanings, ideologies necessarily simplify social and political reality. The meaning of an ideology is reflected by its morphology, which displays core, adjacent, and peripheral concepts.\(^{246}\) The core of an ideology consists of one or more concepts to which substantial significance is ascribed. The core of an ideology is surrounded by multiple adjacent and peripheral concepts, which give specific meaning to the core. Without such additional concepts, an ideology would be devoid of meaning.

According to Freeden, multiple ideologies exist and are different in detail and scope. Some ideologies contain a specific comprehensive doctrine attached to a general plan of public policy (macro-ideology or ‘thick’ ideology); others hardly express any comprehensive world-view nor any elaborate view on social justice (‘thin’ ideologies).\(^{247}\) In addition to Freeden’s distinction, I propose to introduce another distinction between ‘narrow’ and ‘broad’ ideologies. Narrow ideologies insist on a single issue or only a few of them. Single-issue ideologies such as ecologism and feminism, for example, are both ‘thick’ and ‘narrow’ because they provide a comprehensive range of answers (‘thick’) to issue-related political questions (‘narrow’). By contrast, broad ideologies are not preoccupied with a single issue, but with a comprehensive range of public concerns. Broad ideologies can be either ‘thick’ or ‘thin’. For example, socialism and liberalism are ‘thick’ and ‘broad’ ideologies because they give a comprehensive answer to key political questions about who gets what, when and how, and attach their answers to a general plan of public policy. Populism, by contrast, is an example of a ‘thin’ and ‘broad’ ideology. It is ‘thin’ because it does not provide a comprehensive view on society, but only gives precise (decontested) meaning to certain key and adjacent concepts such as ‘the people’, ‘democracy’ and ‘popular sovereignty’.\(^{248}\) It is also ‘broad’ because it gives a distinct interpretation of those concepts and thereby provides a specific kind of politics on all kinds of issues: ‘the people’ should get what they want when they want it [see also §4.5].


\(^{246}\) Ibid., p. 77


As noted, I shall make two amendments to the ‘ideology approach’ to populism. First of all, I agree with Canovan, who has argued that Freeden’s conceptual approach to political ideologies tends to play down the emotional charge implicit in ideological concepts. Freeden’s morphological approach views ideologies as configurations of decontested concepts, built around a set of core concepts. However, while an ideology indeed internally decontests the meaning of political concepts, the ideology is externally contested by other maps, organizing contestation in asymmetrical ways. The existence of different maps leads to a struggle for the ‘correct’ picture of social and political reality. Ideologies should, therefore, be understood in functional terms also: ideologies motivate social groups for political action and provide a legitimation of their actions. That means that one should not play down the motivational aspects of ideologies. Ideologies are not only configurations of concepts, but also expressions of emotions. Therefore, I use of the notion of ideologeme, the smallest intelligible unit of ideology, which was explained in the previous chapter [2.5]. The notion of ideologeme captures both the conceptual and the affective aspects of ideology and should be understood in functional terms: it motivates social groups for political action and provides a legitimation of their actions.

Second, there exists an interaction between ideologies and political practices which involves different kinds of political action. Freeden indeed recognizes the interaction between ideologies and political practices. However, I consider that the crucial role of agency is better covered by the notion of political repertoire, a notion that will be explained in the next section. Ideologies, Freeden says, have certain effects on political reality, for the “[...] imagined aspects [of ideologies, TH] themselves become part of political reality.” That generated effect does not mean that there is a one-to-one relation between ideologies and political practices. The launching of one and the same ideology can engender various political practices in different political contexts. Also, different ideologies can agree on a single ideological point and can therefore, engender the same political practice, in which case the cores of the different maps will not be identical but will be functionally compatible, undisputedly accepting a common ideological point. Freeden gives the example of the common ideology of the welfare state in the 1950s and 1960s. The welfare state was the ideological point of juncture, in that there was a confluence of many maps at that point that was elevated to hegemonic status. Since ideological difference remains, at least below the surface, the ideological point of juncture can lose its hegemonic status.

The interaction between ideologies and political practices often generates a learning effect. Ideologies often have a surplus of meaning and convey more information

251 Ibid., p. 37.
than the map makers are aware of, or intended. 252 If the information of the ideology is partly redundant and deficient, the map can be adapted. The new map imposes a new pattern on social and political reality and can be adapted again to new circumstances. This feedback loop does not operate when supporters of the ideology are insensitive to signals from their environment. Supporters of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, for example, remained faithful to orthodox principles and did not change their doctrine despite changing social and political circumstances. In the long run, that isolated them from their political environment, making them resemble religious sects.

The interaction between ideologies and political practices involves two kinds of political action. Initially, the making of ideologies – including the adaptation and transformation of previously existing ones – presumes a practice of mapping. Depending on the openness of the ideology, the content or meaning of the map can be openly re-contested. Second, the creation or establishment of a political practice is linked to ideologies, and that involves political struggle between people holding maps, deliberation about alternatives, and finally political decision about the chosen alternative. In sum, ideologies need political agency to become ‘active’ in socio-political reality. I suggest that this argument about political agency gains force if it is applied to the notion of political repertoires, a notion that I have borrowed from the historian Charles Tilly.

3. Political and democratic repertoires

Political repertoires are defined by Charles Tilly as “[...] the limited, familiar, historically created arrays of claim-making performances that under most circumstances greatly circumscribe the means by which people engage in contentious politics.” 253 I would highlight five characteristics of Tilly’s definition to explain the notion of political repertoire.

Political repertoires are, first and foremost, claim-making performances. Political repertoires refer to norms, ideals and political practices within and outside formal institutions. It is important to realize that repertoires have to do with performance, which means that what occurs within and outside institutions is part of a repertoire, although the institution itself is not part of that repertoire. Examples of informal practices outside formal institutions are demonstrations or public marches. Informal practices of that sort do, however, relate or refer to those institutions by criticizing, mocking or ignoring them, and involve political claims of the need to change political reality or to keep the status quo. Such political claims are ‘representative claims’ 254 about social and political reality. Representative claims are constitutive claims that give the impression of making something present. The meaning of social and political reality cannot be pinned down,

252 Ibid., pp. 46-47.
but is generated and contested by representative claims, which means of course claims on representation. Political agents make different representative claims, which are supported by distinct depictions or portrayals of social and political reality. For example, demonstrators make a political claim (representative claim) about themselves as claimants, their supporters and the link between the two. Their claim is supported by depictions or portrayals of the demonstrators and others that are bound up in the claims. The political claim that is involved in a political repertoire is thus based on a representation as depiction.

Second, political repertoires are political performances because they arise in and through political and contentious struggle. It is through political contestation that political agents learn how to protest, stage public marches or organize interest organizations. A political repertoire does not therefore represent a universal norm nor a historical and political essence, but is a ‘learned cultural creation’. In his studies on political repertoires, Tilly exclusively focuses on the political repertoires of anti-establishment social movements. Contra Tilly, however, I suggest that the notion of political repertoires refers not only to the stock of methods of resistance/struggle that people accumulate over time, but also includes repertoires of the political establishment, repertoires which can be democratic to a varying extent. Political agents of the political establishment develop discourses and practices through a similar learning process: they learn, for example, how to organize parliament and decision-making procedures, how to incorporate or reject societal demands, how to launch media attention and information campaigns, how to define enemies of and threats to the political establishment, or how to ‘spin’. Some of those practices can acquire a stable, institutional form. Hence, both anti-establishment and establishment agents mobilize political repertoires.

Third, a political repertoire is a familiar or recognizable claim-making performance. As Tilly notes, political repertoires result from “[...] the clustering of claim-making in a limited number of recognizable performances.” The recognition of a political repertoire depends on two factors. First, a political repertoire is recognizable by relevant groups in society if, to a certain extent, the claim-making performance is clustered around a coherent set of elements. A political repertoire presupposes, therefore, an ideology, as developed by Freeden. As noted, those elements can refer to norms, ideals, which are often expressed through ideologemes, and possibly institutionalized practices within and outside institutions. The ideologemes and practices of a political repertoire are arranged by political agents around a specific organizer such as ‘the nation’, ‘the proletariat’, ‘the individual’, ‘freedom’, ‘progress’, ‘social antagonism’, or ‘the people as a single homogeneous whole’. The organizer of a specific political repertoire then connects the ele-

255 Ibid., p. 47.
ments into a coherent set. While the meaning of the coherent set of elements is internally decontested, the meaning of political repertoires is externally contested and polemically mobilized against other political repertoires.

Moreover, the authorization or certification of a repertoire depends on the degree to which the set is recurrently mobilized. If the mobilization of a political repertoire is politically successful and if other political agents wish to achieve the same political results, the political repertoire will probably be activated repeatedly by other agents, too. A recurrent mobilization of a coherent set of elements will be recognized as a specific political repertoire. Given a relatively stable socio-economic and political context, repertoires will then become ‘familiar’.

Fourth, political repertoires are not context-bound, but can be transferred from one political context to another.258 The ‘new’ repertoire can be a reinvention or renewal of repertoires from the ‘domestic’ (national) tradition or it can be copied, as a best practice, from other countries, whether neighboring or distant. It is precisely because political repertoires are so recognizable, that they can be reinvented or renewed, and can be translated from one political context to another. The reinvented, renewed or translated repertoire is never an exact copy of the original, because the transfer of a political repertoire always involves some adaptation to fit the new political environment.259 Any political environment places constraints on the possible range of political repertoires that can be mobilized. That is, the cultural convention of a political environment stimulates the interrelation of ideologemes and political practices and discourages the possible configuration of others. Cultural constraints might mean that because some political repertoires are viewed as illegitimate they will be rejected in toto by political agents, or it could mean that a political repertoire is adopted in a modified form which entails the incorporation of some elements of that political repertoire and the rejection or negation of others. However, it can never be predicted with any certainty which political repertoires will be ‘excluded’.

Since the elements of a political repertoire are individually transferable, elements of one political repertoire can be combined with elements of any other. The reinvented, renewed or transported political repertoires will not, as a rule, be exact copies of the original, but will have been modified to fit a new political context, so that the original political repertoire is difficult to trace. Since the transfer of political repertoires is quite common, it is not always clear who is the innovator, who is the transmitter, and who is the receiver.260 Moreover, it remains a matter of judgment to determine in which political

260 Ibid.
context the original repertoire was invented and activated to serve as a subsequent role model for other political agents.

My fifth and final remark about political repertoires is that the adaptation and translation of elements of a political repertoire is not a simply mechanical process, but includes moments of political choice. Political repertoires, as Tilly writes, are “[...] a limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and acted through a relatively deliberate process of choice.”261 It is through political struggle and deliberation that political agents learn to develop political repertoires, and choose to reject or adapt other political repertoires or elements of them. The rejection or adaptation of political repertoires by political agents implies certain judgments about social and political reality. For example, the refusal to adopt a fascist repertoire indicates a rejection of political violence as a legitimate means for achieving political goals; the adaptation of a parliamentary repertoire indicates an appreciation of political deliberation; and the adoption of a populist repertoire implies the appreciation of a politics of ‘ressentiment’ [see §§8.1].

Those five characteristics define a political repertoire, which can be democratic to a varying extent. I suggest that a democratic repertoire is guided by the principle of popular sovereignty, which is a key principle of modern democracy [see §5.1 and §6.2]. A political repertoire is democratic if the ideologeme ‘the people’ is part of the political claim to legitimacy. That does not mean that the notion of ‘the people’ is always mentioned explicitly by the claimants, but a democratic repertoire will necessarily have to occur in the people’s name. A democratic repertoire can be exercised both by anti-establishment movements and government, and there might arise interaction between repertoires activated by both agents. For example, the mobilization of a democratic repertoire that is opposed to the political establishment can lead to new formal democratic institutions or procedures. The political establishment can design new formal institutions or practices, such as referendums, citizen panels, citizen polls, and deliberative forums, in response to social demands made by anti-establishment agents.

4. The populist repertoire: the people as a single homogeneous whole

Since no single definition of populism exists, I will propose a provisional, stipulative definition of populism in terms of a democratic repertoire, as a recognizable claim-making performance, guided by the principle of popular sovereignty, able to be exercised by political agents both in government and opposition. My stipulative definition views populism as a democratic repertoire, defined as a particular set of ideologemes and political practices organized by agents around the idea of the ‘people as a single

homogeneous whole’. My description of the populist repertoire is an ideal type, a mental model intended to explain why some political phenomena and agents are labeled ‘populist’, while others are not. It is not intended to describe the entire set of ideologemes and practices. The ideal typical populist repertoire rather possesses several ideologemes and practices that are adjacent to the core idea of the homogeneous people-as-one. The particular set of ideologemes and practices of the populist repertoire is never found in reality, but combinations of some of the elements do exist, even if some of the ideologemes and practices are in tension or even mutually exclusive. For example, the role of the populist leader claiming to embody the will of the people stands in contrast to populist devices of direct democracy. Besides, the proclaimed devices of direct democracy conflict with the populist idea that the people are a single homogeneous whole. If the people are really ‘one’, direct democracy becomes redundant.

While the ideal type of the populist repertoire affords great flexibility, the idea of the homogeneous people-as-one remains the crucial populist idea. The monolithic people is the specific organizer of the populist repertoire that connects the different ideologemes and practices into a coherent set, connecting ideologemes and linking the practices into a whole entity with the set of ideologemes. The populist appeal to a homogeneous people is something different from the appeal to ‘the people’, which is reflected by the names of parties such as the Spanish “People’s Party” (PP), the French “Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the Dutch VVD, the Austrian ÖVP, or the “European People’s Party” (EPP). Those political parties all bear the name of ‘the people’ or ‘popular’, but that does not make them necessarily populist. Their appeal to ‘the people’ makes reference to the people as a whole, to the people in their plurality, and that is something different from treating ‘the people’ as monolithic, excluding groups of individuals from the body politic.

The criterion of the monolithic people has, however, been criticized by Pierre Rosanvallon, who maintains that it is too broad because various forms of totalitarianism depend on an imagined social unity. Accordingly, they too would have to be classified as populist. Rosanvallon proposes an alternative of analyzing populism in functional terms by examining the specific role it plays in modern representative democracies. He looks at populism as a destructive counter-democratic practice because of its permanent stigmatization of ruling elites and supposed enemies. I do not agree with Rosanvallon on that point because I consider that the organizer of the populist reper-

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Populist Repertoire

toire differs from both communism and fascism. Communism shares with populism its idea of homogeneity, but it does not recognize the idea of a single homogeneous people, but assumes that the plurality of peoples will eventually become one ‘world population’. Fascism by contrast, shares the populist idea of oneness, but rejects homogeneity because it assumes organic and organizing differences, for example head versus hand, elite versus the people, farmer versus worker, within the unified whole. Differences between populism, on the one hand, and communism and fascism, on the other hand, will be explained in more detail in the next chapter [§4.5]. Rosanvallon’s suggestion of analyzing populism in functional terms and exploring its role in representative democracies will be adopted in Chapter 8 [§8.5].

The homogeneous people-as-one is the specific organizer of the populist repertoire, wherein five dimensions can be distinguished. First, the people is depicted as a homogeneous substance, consisting of ‘ordinary’ people or citizens as elements of the same kind. The idea that all elements of the people are viewed as ‘ordinary citizens’ fits with the ‘democratic condition’ of equality, in the sense of both formal equality and the rising equality of social conditions, meaning the equality of the people’s access to economic and cultural advantages and the right to self-rule.265 The democratic condition of equality undermines any fixed social hierarchy based on natural privileges [see §5.1]. Recognizing the democratic condition, populism views the people as a homogeneous group of ordinary citizens.

Second, the homogeneous people is seen as united and indivisible and its voice has a single message. The populist perception of the people excludes any pluralistic interpretation of the people, of the idea that the people are a collection of a plurality of social groups and individual citizens. Division within the people is seen as false and created by ‘the other’ who prevents the realization of the people-as-one. In populism, ‘the other’ is constitutive for the identity of the people, and the identity formation of the people-as-one occurs in opposition to what Mouffe calls a ‘constitutive outside’. According to Mouffe, the constitutive outside is the radical other that constitutes and negates a political identity.266 Mouffe adopts an anti-essentialist position with respect to identities. Every identity formation is surrounded by one or more radical others. The other is the constitutive outside which operates as a negative force in identity formation, challenging the presumption of its existence.267 In contrast to Mouffe’s interpretation of the constitutive outside, the populist vision takes an essentialist position and ascribes a particular content to ‘the other’ (‘them’) in juxtaposition with ‘the single homogeneous people’ (‘us’).

Third, the homogeneous people-as-one is depicted as *virtuous*.\(^{268}\) The people are viewed as inherently good when juxtaposed with ‘the political and intellectual elite’, to whom too unity is attributed. Political wisdom resides in the people, so the popular will should prevail over the opinions of professional politicians, administrative officials, jurists, journalists or academics, who, in the discourse of the populist, have lost any contact with ‘the ordinary man in the street’ and merely represent their own interests or the interests of a minority.

The fourth key feature of the populist repertoire is the reclaiming of the sovereignty of the people from the hands of political elites, who have perverted democracy. In the populist view, those who govern should reflect the will of the people. As Mény and Surel argue, according to the populist view, democracy means “[...] the power of the people and only the power of the people.”\(^{269}\) Democracy is, therefore, understood as government by the sovereign people, not as the government represented by professional politicians. Populism views the people as the *bearer of sovereignty*, which means that the people are considered to be capable of having and expressing a single will, and of taking collective decisions.\(^{270}\) The populist interpretation of democracy excludes both pluralism and liberalism, as will be explained in detail in the next chapter [§4.2].

The fifth feature of populism is that the goodness and rightness of the people is rooted in *history* and *traditions*. The virtuous people are rediscovered from a preferred or selected past. As Wiles notes, virtue “[...] resides in the simple people, who are the overwhelming majority, and in their collective traditions.”\(^{271}\) The people are identified with an idealized version of a virtuous folk who have their roots in a chosen past. Hence the need for populism to save, love or rediscover the culture of the people.\(^{272}\)

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\(^{272}\) By way of illustration, in his Declaration of Independence, the Dutch politician Geert Wilders claims: “We can shape history ourselves, take the destiny of our people in our own hands...” (p. 2); “At a turning point in the history of The Netherlands our ancestors have declared their independence by way of *akte van verlating* (1581). They terminated their support for a monarch who thought that the people was there for him and not he for the people. That’s also why a
and unified people as an ‘imagined political community’\textsuperscript{273} refers to Taggart’s notion of a heartland, which he defines as a territory of the imagination, “[…] embodying the positive aspects of everyday life.”\textsuperscript{274} The heartland is a harmonious place, which is held to have existed in the past, but has been lost in the present by the ‘enemies of the people’.

Populism claims to be beyond the left-right divide by appealing to the people-as-one. That appeal creates another cleavage between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’. The left-right division is replaced by a top-bottom division. Moreover, the homogeneous people-as-one can take many forms which do not easily fit the left-right divide. I suggest a trichotomy: the people-as-one can be identified with an ethnos or nation, the ordinary people, or the economic ‘underdogs’.

An ethnic or national interpretation of the people-as-one is what Taguieff has called ‘national populism’.\textsuperscript{275} In that view, the people are supposed to have a shared ethnic identity, rooted in the past and inalienable from those who are included in it. The boundaries of the ethnically defined people are not only territorial, but culturally determined too. The identification of the people with their ethnicity occurs in opposition to both the political elite and to foreigners, cultural minorities, immigrants. The political elites are blamed for their ‘betrayal of the people’, for they have silenced the potential threat that foreigners and immigrants pose to the national culture of the people and ignored the social and economic problems they allegedly cause. According to that particular populist view, only ‘the proper people’ – in an ethnical sense – should govern.

It is important to realize that an ethnic definition of the people does not imply populism. Ethnic identification of the people refers to the principle of \textit{ius sanguinis} (right of blood). It has been common for both historians and social scientists to distinguish between the principle of \textit{ius sanguinis} and \textit{ius soli} (right of the soil). Germany has often been termed as ethnic nation that rests on the principle of \textit{ius sanguinis}, whereas France is a civil nation that rests on the principle of \textit{ius soli}. Whereas the Germans have defined themselves ethnically in terms of a shared community of descent or language, the French have defined themselves territorially and politically.\textsuperscript{276} In Germany, senses of national identity are based on notions of shared kinship and ancestry that are ethnic. In France, it is said that members are bound together by voluntary and shared allegiance to civic political principles. While scholars have criticized a definition of national identity

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Taggart, P. (2000), \textit{Populism}, Open UP, Buckingham, p. 95.
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based exclusively on the principle of *ius sanguinis* or the principle of *ius soli*, the point to emphasize here is that a body politic understood in ethno-national terms is not necessarily equivalent to the populist rediscovery of the ethnic people.

Second, the identification of the people-as-one with ‘the ordinary man’ or ‘the silent majority’, whose needs remain unanswered by political elites, refers to a second variant which Taguieff has called ‘protest populism’. In that case, the appeal to the ordinary man is juxtaposed to professional politicians and intellectuals who have stolen democracy from the people. The identification of the people with the ordinary man is connected with an anti-intellectual dimension. The ordinary people is supposed to have ‘common sense’ and on that basis it is claimed that political problems can be explained and solved in a simple and direct manner. Populist interpretation of the people does not exclude foreigners nor ethnic minorities from the body politic, but distinguishes between ‘the ordinary people’ and political and intellectual elites as extraordinary.

In addition to Taguieff’s ‘national populism’ and ‘protest populism’, a third variant can be distinguished, as the people-as-one can be defined in economic terms also. The single homogeneous people then refers to the political and economic ‘underdogs’, the workers, the dispossessed, or those who do not own the means of production. In so-called ‘economic populism’, there is apparently an international political and economic ruling elite against which populism rises in the name of the people. The people is then articulated in reference to an idealized version of the united ‘hard-working people’ or ‘the small man’ who is hard-working but allegedly deprived of wealth. The particular identity of the enemy varies according to the political context. It might be some powerful international agents like multinational industrials, bankers, ‘Brussels bureaucracy’, wealthy people or social security recipients who ‘profit from the hard-working people’, or even a political ideology, such as neoliberalism – but ‘the enemy’ always tends to be drawn from economic groups who are juxtaposed with ‘the hard-working people’. The vested political parties and politicians allegedly conspire with the enemies of the people to subvert the people’s will.

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On the basis of that trichotomy, two further comments can be made about populism. First, populists may appeal to a combination of ‘national populism’, ‘protest populism’ and ‘economic populism’. Populists can identify the people-as-one with an ethos or a nation, the ordinary people or the economic ‘underdogs’, but they can also define the people in terms of a combination of those three variants or may appeal to all three variants together. For example, the Dutch PVV appeals to all three variants of populism. The PVV claims to speak on behalf of the true Dutch people that is grounded in Judeo-Christian tradition. It wishes to halt Muslim immigration and would require settled immigrants to assimilate into the dominant culture (national populism). Moreover, the PVV challenges the Dutch political establishment, which it likes to scoff at as the ‘the Broad Church of the Left’ or ‘that cozy clique in the Hague’ that is distinguished from ‘the people in society’ (protest populism). Finally, the PVV appeals to ‘the hard-working people’ who have become the victim of ‘Brussels bureaucrats’. It will not obey ‘dictates from Brussels’ when they harm the interests of ‘the hard-working people’ (economic populism).

Second, the variants of ‘protest populism’ and ‘economic populism’ make clear that populism should not be confused with nationalism. Populist movements who appeal to the ‘ordinary people’ or ‘hard-working people’ could function well enough without resorting to nationalist agendas at all. Nationalism is just a potential element of populism (reflected in ‘national populism’) but not an intrinsic part of it. Moreover, nationalist sentiments can arise that are neither connected to populism nor dependent upon the conception of a single homogenous group of people. Populism provides only one understanding of the nation, as comprising all those individuals who are seen as part of the ‘true people’. It is equally possible to conceive of nationalistic positions that are not inherently populist. For example, modern liberal notions of ‘Britishness’ have become commonplace in Great Britain today. Notions of ‘Britishness’ refer to what binds the British people – the habits, behaviors and symbols of typical British culture –, but are not inherently populist. Such notions of Britishness do not appear as part of an illiberal populist ideology, although they could be a response to current populist movements like the “British National Party” (BNP) and the “English Defense League” (EDL).

5. Ideologemes and political practices of the populist repertoire

My stipulative definition specifies the populist repertoire as a set of ideologemes and political practices organized according to the idea that the people is a single homogeneous whole. In this section, I shall offer an ideal-typical description of the set of

populist ideologemes and practices. The notion of an ideologeme has been explained in the previous chapter [§2.5], but two further comments must be made about the ideologemes of the populist repertoire.

Notions of ‘the corrupt elite’ or ‘our people’ – to mean ‘the right sort of people; the one’s we value – are used both as ideologemes by political agents and as analytical categories by scholars of populism. Populist discourses and discourses about populism are likely to affect each other, which means that expressions are likely to be transferred from one discourse to the other, too. Ideologemes from populist discourse may be transferred to discourses about populism and used as analytical categories. Equally, analytical categories may be transferred to populist discourses and used as ideologemes. Some commentators take an intermediate position between a populist discourse and a discourse about populism, and such commentators reflect on populism scientifically and journalistically and often have political ambitions, too. The Dutch commentator Bart Jan Spruyt, for instance, supported the Dutch politician Geert Wilders in 2004 when he started his PVV. Spruyt contributed to the election program and coached candidates for the electoral
list of the party. He left the party in 2006 and criticized it because it would be “[... ] the embodiment of a panic-stricken conservatism” and would have “[...] a natural inclination towards fascism.”

The transfer of expressions from populist discourses to discourses about populism and vice versa, explains, once again, why an empirical instrumentalization of the concept of populism must fail. Populism is not a political phenomenon that ‘already exists’, but is instituted through the interaction between labelers and political phenomena labeled ‘populist’, as has been explained in the previous chapter [§2.3].

Second, all ideologemes used by populists express certain political ideas that aim to motivate social groups to political action and to provide a legitimation for their actions. In addition, some populist ideologemes express a political ideal, too. Populist ideologemes that make reference to the idea of the people-as-one – ‘our people’, ‘the ordinary people’, ‘the hard-working people’ – depict an idealized version of the people which is held to have existed in the past.

The figure above shows the different ideologemes and practices of the ideal-typical populist repertoire. It displays a circle with at its centre the people as a single homogeneous entity, the organizer of the populist repertoire. The different ideologemes and practices are classified along five dimensions, which are adjacent to the core idea of the people-as-one: the homogeneous people (A), anti-elitism (B), the dangerous other (C), will of the people is law (D), and leader/movement (E). In what follows, I shall discuss the relations among the different ideologemes and practices of the populist repertoire. I shall illustrate the ideologemes and practices with various examples of politicians and movements across the world whose utterances and practices are organized by the idea that the people are a single homogeneous whole.

The idea of the homogeneous people-as-one is articulated not only with ideologemes (A1) but can be expressed through a variety of political practices (A2). First, the single homogeneous people can be shaped through the appropriation of specific cultural symbols that express the unity of the people. For example, the Flemish flag used by the Flemish VBe represents a specifically Flemish national identity. The flag represents an all-black lion on a yellow background: the lion is distinguished from the official Flemish lion which has a red tongue and claws, and the colors yellow and black, which are the Flemish national colors, are contrasted with the national colors of Belgium (yellow, black and red). To give another example: the Dutch politician Wilders proposed in 2007 that the Dutch flag should fly on every government building and school, and children should pledge allegiance to the flag as “[...] symbol for our country and freedom and

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justice.” With the proposal, Wilders aimed to appropriate a specific interpretation of the identity of the Dutch people that he alleged to be threatened by immigrants and the ‘wrong sort’ of foreigners, by which he meant primarily Muslims and Polish, Czech or Romanian workers.

Second, the single homogeneous people can be shaped through plebiscitary rituals like mass rallies or public marches (A2). For example, the political project of the Italian political party “North League” (LN) has been based on hostility to Southern Italians and the central Italian state, and the invention of a new political identity called ‘Padania’ (which has never existed geographically or historically) through plebiscitary rituals and symbols. In September 1996 LN launched a ‘march on the Po’ for the symbolic proclamation of ‘Padania’, and it continues to organize popular rallies incorporating mass rituals such as choral pledges and the baptism of party members in the waters of the river Po. Such rituals are intended to strengthen its people’s identification with the party. The bond of identification which characterizes its popular rallies is reinforced by the wearing of traditional costumes and the display of specific symbols and flags. Moreover, LN has organized independent referenda and elections in North Italian regions and has created a voluntary group of militants, the ‘Green Volunteers’, often referred to as ‘Greenshirts’ (green is the color of Padania) which, on a symbolic level, suggests the possibility of a new state.

The populist ideal of the homogeneous people-as-one is juxtaposed to a negative identification of some other groups, which are excluded from the people’s community (B and C). The people-as-one occurs in opposition to one or more ‘constitutive outsiders’, radical others that constitute and negate the identity of the people. The elite is a necessary constitutive outside of the populist repertoire. In the populist view, there is always a minority elite (political and intellectual) that has undermined the will of the people. Populists challenge not only the established holders of power, but also elite values.

The vilified elite is portrayed in different ways around the world. For instance, Marine Le Pen, leader of the French FN, is an exponent of ‘national populism’ and tends to depict ‘the elite’ as a group of powerful agents defending ethnic minorities in France. Le Pen claims that French elite political culture is strongly imbued with the value of multiculturalism and that that is a threat to the very basis of French culture, identity and shared values. She argues that where true multiculturalism has existed, it ends in

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war: “The only places were real multiculturalism existed [...] the Balkans, Lebanon [...] it ended up in conflict.”

The US American “Tea Party” is an exponent of ‘protest populism’ and portrays the elite as a strong group of progressive liberals who defend large and expensive government programs that make no contribution to the well-being of the people. In the mind of the “Tea Party” activist, ‘big government is doing too much that should be left to individuals and businesses. Government spending on perceived redistribute programs is seen as corrupted for it creates benefits for people who do not contribute at the expense of American ‘productive citizens’.

The former leader of the Dutch “Socialist Party” (SP), Jan Marijnissen, by contrast, was an exponent of ‘economic populism’. Marijnissen repeatedly portrayed a neoliberal political elite, which cooperated with multinationals in secret and had lost any connection with the concerns of ‘ordinary people’. In the words of Marijnissen “Under the white dress [i.e. of the spectre that is haunting Europe, TH], the organized big industrials of Europe are hiding.” The anti-neoliberal stance was also prevalent in the Australian “One Nation” party and in “New Zeeland First”. Both those parties tried to build a populist movement on an anti-globalization platform in the 1990s. Claiming that their views were based on common sense, both movements argued that vested interests with their policies of neoliberal globalization had positioned their countries such that jobs were being exported at the expense of the people.

The antagonism between the people and a set of elites is often articulated through ideologemes such as ‘the corrupt elite’ (B1), but can also be expressed through specific political practices that are designed to feed anti-establishment sentiment (B2). For example, parties may activate a protest agenda against hegemonic policies. By way of illustration, the Danish “Progress Party” (FP) in the 1970s and the Norwegian “Progress Party (FrP) in the 1980s pronounced anti-tax and anti-welfare sentiments. Their protest

289 The Tea Party’s conception of ‘the people’ as productive citizens has a long history in American politics. As Kazin notes about populist movements in the United States, “[...] Producerism was indeed an ethic, a moral conviction: it held that only those who created wealth in tangible, material ways (on and under the land, in workshops, on the sea) could be trusted to guard the nation’s piety and liberties.” Kazin, M. (1995), The Populist Persuasion, Cornell UP, Ithaca/London, p. 13.
agenda in the field of economic policies opposed the hegemonic commitment to high taxation required to fund the welfare state in those countries.\textsuperscript{292} Moreover, parties and politicians may feed anti-establishment sentiment by rejecting the mores currently dominant among political elites. An illustration of such a practice of anti-elitism is the Dutch PVV that in 2009 walked out of the assembly during a parliamentary debate about the financial crisis.\textsuperscript{293} According to party leader Wilders, the parliamentary debate was ‘fake’, since the opposition parties had no possibility of influencing the policy measures initiated by the coalition government. It was not his vocal criticism, but the decision by Wilders and his party members to leave the assembly that fractured political normality or what Arditi calls the ‘domesticated political order’.\textsuperscript{294}

Anti-elitism does not mean that populist politicians have to be genuine political outsiders. Populist parties might very well emerge from sectors of the political establishment as in the case of the “Tea Party” movement in the United States or the Dutch PVV. The “Tea Party” is a grass roots political movement that has worked within the “Republican Party”, acting primarily as a pressure group seeking to influence the party’s policies and its selection of candidates.\textsuperscript{295} Geert Wilders, the founder of the PVV is a former MP of the VVD, who refused to accept the VVD’s positive stance toward Turkey’s possible accession to the European Union and so left the party in 2004.

The anti-elitism of populism does not imply that the populist repertoire is mobilized only by opposition parties. Former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, for instance, presented himself as not a member of the elite, whom he characterized as intellectuals and the political Left, including ‘Left-wing judges’. According to Berlusconi, the sovereignty of the people lies and finds expression almost exclusively in the government ‘elected’ by the people: “Government is by the people and those who represent it, not by those who have passed a public examination to put on a judge’s gown.”\textsuperscript{296}

Depending on the identification of the people-as-one, ‘the good, besieged people’ can also be juxtaposed with a ‘dangerous other’ that threatens the identity of the people, be that immigrants and foreigners who allegedly ‘take our jobs away’ and pose a threat to ‘our’ way of living, or recipients of social security payments who undeservedly benefit from government policies at the expense of the ‘hard working people’. The antagonism between the people and the allegedly dangerous ‘others’ is often articulated through ideologemes such as ‘fortune-hunters’ or ‘profiteers of the welfare state’ (C1),

and can be expressed through ‘visiotype[s]’ such as cartoons, posters or banners. The
notion of a visiotype refers to an amalgam of text and images which generates a strong
expressive force, and has been explained in the previous chapter [§2.3]. An example of
such a visiotype is the poster made by the Italian LN, before the Italian regional elec-
tions in 2010 bearing the slogan: ‘Abbiamo fermato l’invasione’ ['We have stopped the
invasion']. The poster reproduced to the side depicts a ship
crowded with people, and was intended to create a general
sense of fear of immigration.

The same antagonism can lead also to policy proposals that
undermine toleration of minorities (C2). An example of that
sort of political practice is the ban on the construction of new
minarets under the Swiss constitution in November 2009. Swiss
voters supported a referendum proposal launched by the SVP,
the largest party in parliament, who said that minarets are a
sign of the ‘Islamization of Europe’, symbols of a rising Muslim
political power that could one day transform Switzerland into an Islamic nation. The
party claimed that allowing minarets would represent the growth of an ideology and a
legal system – Sharia law – which are incompatible with Swiss democracy.297

The Swiss referendum on a ban on the construction of new minarets also illus-
trates another institutionalized practice of the populist repertoire, which is the claimed
preference for the devices of direct democracy. Populists urge the adoption of refer-
endums, forms of recall, popular initiative, and direct elections to political office as a
means to break the power of the elite and to increase the scope of citizen involvement
(D2). Proposals for direct democracy are often sustained by ideologemes such as ‘give
the people a more direct voice in government’ or ‘the people should rule’ (D1). A fine
example of a proposal for direct democracy was the initiative of Rita Verdonk, leader of
the Dutch political party ToN by which the political program of her movement was to
be determined by a wiki-system, through which ‘ordinary people’ could express their
needs and come up with solutions to political problems.298 For Verdonk, the wiki-system
served as the criterion for public opinion. She argued that the system would generate
wise solutions based on the common sense and wisdom of the ordinary people.

The proclaimed devices of direct democracy, however, create tension for the party
leader or movement that claims to be both of and for the people – or at least to be closer
to the people than are the members of the political elite. Because of the supposed unity
of the people, the leader or movement can claim a direct and unmediated relationship
with the people (E1). Within the populist repertoire two opposed approaches of populist

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leadership are therefore perceptible. On the one hand, populists may claim the ability to redesign democracy in order to let the people express and impose its will without any thresholds and restrictions. An exponent of that approach was Rita Verdonk with her proposal of a wiki-system. On the other hand, populists may claim to be the true spokesman of the people and that claim makes direct democracy redundant.

Both approaches to populist leadership share some practices that reflect the presumed immediacy between the people and the leader or movement. First of all, the suggested relation of immediacy becomes manifest through a strong centralization of leadership or a low institutionalization of the party or movement (E2). Since the people is presupposed to be one entity, the populist movement or party itself has to be one, too. The oneness of a populist movement contrasts with political parties that accept political pluralism within and outside their own party. For example, the Venezuelan party “Fifth Republic Movement” (MVR), founded in 1997 to lead the electoral campaign for Chávez, has a low level of institutionalization and lacks any identity independent from Chávez. The rule of the party is extremely weak and many decisions are made and much bargaining occurs in small meetings directed by Chávez.

Second, the presumed closeness between the people and the party leader or movement becomes manifest also through a particular style of communication, a simple and direct language which reflects the common-sense views of ‘ordinary people’ as opposed to the allegedly incomprehensible terminology of professional politicians (E2). The simple style of communication can disrupt the tacit rules of sociability among politicians. For example, when the former leader of the Dutch “Socialist Party”, Jan Marijnissen, was asked by the chair of the Dutch parliament to revoke an expression “Hey, chill…!” [“Eff dingmen”, TH] which ran counter to accepted political language of the time, his retort was that the expression was just a reflection of ‘the language of ordinary people’.

It is often argued that populist movements are led by charismatic leaders. Although populist leaders may attract extraordinary devotion from movement activists or even ordinary voters, I agree with Hawkins that charismatic leadership is not an essential element of the populist repertoire. Charismatic leaders are by no means necessarily populist. Religious leaders too can be regarded as charismatic by their followers.

and populist movements can very well exist without charismatic leaders. For example, the US American “People’s Party” at the end of the nineteenth century was for several years a largely grass roots movement before it was linked with the charismatic figure of William Jennings Bryan.304 Likewise, the US American “Tea Party” is a grass roots movement which cannot be easily identified with a charismatic leader. In Europe, the local Dutch party “Liveable Netherla...
Wilders told Rutte “get a grip” when he became irritated, to which Rutte responded with the words “get a grip yourself.” The dialogue between the two denoted a populist style of communication and after the debate both were labeled ‘populist’. However, since the democratic repertoire of Rutte’s VVD is arranged around the organizer of ‘the individual’, the label ‘populism’ did not stick, while the same label is recurrently applied to Wilders since his actions and utterances are organized by the idea that the people is one.

The populist repertoire is a flexible model that serves to explain why some political phenomena and agents are labeled ‘populist’, while others are not. First, it explains why the application of the label ‘populism’ sticks to some political agents who mobilize different ideologemes and practices from the populist repertoire. The repertoire of populist elements that is mobilized by one political agent may include elements not included in the repertoire of another political agent, but both might be populist repertoires because both contain the crucial populist idea of the united people. Some of the elements of the populist repertoire are, however, not exclusive to populism and may be mobilized in other democratic repertoires. For example, the introduction of various methods of direct democracy has been promoted by democratic repertoires which are guided by republican ideals.

Although the idea of the united homogeneous people remains crucial, the ‘adhesive force of the glue’ is dependent too on the extent to which political agents make use of different elements selected from the populist repertoire. The ‘adhesive force of the glue’ increases the more an agent makes use of ideologemes and practices from the populist repertoire. In addition, the ‘adhesive force of the glue’ increases if political agents mobilize elements from the populist repertoire not only casually, for example only shortly before elections, but more substantially or frequently. By way of illustration, the former French president Jacques Chirac has been labeled ‘populist’ for his campaign before the 1995 French presidential election. Chirac criticized the elites of both the “Socialist Party” (PS) and his own camp, in power since 1988, and reclaimed power for the French people. Because Chirac articulated an antagonism between the elite and the French people only shortly before the election the populist label did not eventually stick.

Second, the populist repertoire is not bound to a specific political context, but can be transferred to different political environments. The re-invention or adaptation of a populist repertoire always involves translation so that it fits the new political context in which it is used, so that some ideologemes and practices will be adopted in modified form while other elements will be rejected or negated. For instance, Pim Fortuyn shared with the VB an anti-establishment attitude and a monolithic interpretation of the people, but Fortuyn explicitly rejected the slogan of VB ‘Our people, first!’ (‘Eigen volk eerst!’).

The slogan ‘Our people, first!’ suggests a differentiation between first- and second-class citizens, which was rejected as a legitimate political option by Fortuyn. Instead, he wanted a limited, qualified equal citizenship and argued that ‘the Netherlands is full’.309

An analysis of populism in terms of transfer forms a contrast with Mudde’s argument of a ‘populist Zeitgeist’.310 Mudde has argued that since the early 1990s populist ideas and arguments have been used both by new parties and vested politicians in Western Europe, both in government and opposition. Populism, according to Mudde, has become a regular feature of democratic politics. His notion of a ‘populist Zeitgeist’ suggests that apparently the ‘time was ripe’ for a new form of democratic politics or a new democratic ideal supported by many politicians and citizens in Western Europe. However, his concept disregards the fact that political renewals have to fit to national habits and to the mores of a country or political community.

Third, ideologemes and the practices of the populist repertoire are flexible in use and can be connected with various democratic repertoires, which may be both populist and non-populist. Non-populist repertoires will, however, be more likely to adopt elements of the populist repertoire which do not contradict the organizer of their democratic repertoire. A republican repertoire may adopt devices of direct democracy, but will probably reject a strong centralization of leadership because that runs counter to the republican ideal of self-government. From a republican perspective, citizens reflect individually upon the common interests.

A populist style of communication, or ideologemes such as ‘we should listen to the people’, can be more easily adopted by various non-populist political agents, since they do not contradict the crucial element of their democratic repertoire. In his analysis of the role of the VB in Belgian politics, Blommaert has argued that the vested political parties have adopted certain practices of VB. By their articulation of the ideologeme ‘the gap between politicians and people’ VB has created a powerful political image of vested politicians ignoring genuine popular concerns. Instead of using the misleading populist claim as the basis of attack – the populist claim that they themselves, or forms of direct democracy, simply express the will of the people is illusory, as will be explained in § 5.5 –, the vested political parties have agreed with the VB that politicians should indeed listen to the needs and concerns of ‘people in the street’. In addition, the VB view has been shared by many journalists who apply to the ‘people in the street’. As a result, media coverage of political events is increasingly commented on by ‘the ordinary man’ rather than by experts on the subject.311 In Dutch politics, something similar happened and in some cases has even resulted in self-labeling. For example, the leader of the Dutch

“Labor Party” (PvdA) Wouter Bos argued at a meeting of an international center-left think tank in 2008 that “[…] we should be more populist and less academic.”312 Social democrats should, he believed, act in a more ‘populist’ way. And Mark Rutte claimed as party leader of the VVD in 2008 that his party can afford to be “[…] more populist as long as it does not lapse into simplicity.”313

To conclude, although ideogemes and practices of the populist repertoire can be connected with a variety of political phenomena and agents, that does not imply that such phenomena or agents are populist. The central idea of the single homogeneous people remains the distinctive criterion able to explain why political phenomena and agents are recurrently labeled ‘populist’. Vested political parties may well adopt some elements – and will, therefore, be labeled as ‘populist’ or even appropriate the label to themselves –, but if political agents do not organize their actions around the populist idea of the people-as-one, the label will not stick.

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Chapter 4

Populist Democracy

1. Introduction

The populist repertoire has been analyzed as a set of ideologemes and practices organized by political agents around the idea that the people are a homogeneous unity. What have been missing in explaining the populist repertoire are the corresponding normative conceptions of democracy. The aim of this chapter is not to provide a single populist vision of democracy, thereby falling for an essentialism, but to explore populism as a generic concept that encompasses a variety of populist politicians and movements. That aim contrasts with approaches in academic literature that seek a rational reconstruction of a ‘pure populism’. Abts and Rummens, for instance, have examined populism as a specific logic, arguing that a flagrant discontinuity exists between ‘the logic of populism’ and ‘the logic of constitutional democracy’.314 Following Lefort’s seminal works, the democratic logic assumes that the locus of power in any democratic regime should remain an empty place. Within that logic, political conflicts appear on the political stage, which provides a common background for mutually opposing parties. According to Abts and Rummens, the populist logic fills the empty place of power with a substantive image of the people-as-one, so that populism appears as a “proto-totalitarian logic”, at odds with the openness of democracy.315 Scholarly attempts to reconstruct a ‘pure populism’, however, tend to fall for an essentialism, which the present study wants to avoid.

My own description of the populist repertoire allows room for different populist agents, who mobilize different sets of ideologemes and practices with different corresponding democratic justifications. Their justifications correspond with the thin ideology that is presupposed in the populist repertoire, and populist interpretations of democracy include both beliefs about how modern representative democracy actually operates and normative ideas about how it should work. That is, populist conceptions attach a set of meanings to democracy and include beliefs about what democracy is for. I shall identify populist interpretations of democracy by comparing them with both contrasting conceptions of democracy that ascribe value to liberalism and pluralism and, according to some scholars and many political commentators in public debate [see the introduction to this book], seemingly closely related conceptions of democracy such as fascism and communism.

315 Ibid., p. 414.
Populist interpretations of democracy rely, first of all, on the idea that ‘the people’ is seen as a homogeneous and essentially virtuous collective and is the rightful sovereign. These populist ideas contrast with liberal and agonistic conceptions of democracy. Moreover, the united homogeneity that is presupposed in populism explains why generic anti-partyism – dissatisfaction with the existing parties or even their rejection – can be found in many populist agents [section 2].

Second, under the condition of modern representative democracy, populist parties, and by extension every political party, substantiate their political claims to legitimacy by invoking the principle of popular sovereignty. Populist agents try to seek legitimacy for their political claims in three ways. Their claim to legitimacy is based on the ‘insight’ of the populist leader, on the mobilization of the masses, or on the organization of direct democracy and acclamation [section 3]. The populist claims to legitimacy will be scrutinized in section 4. It is argued that the role of the populist agent is the most paradoxical element of populist ideology.

In section 5, populism is compared with communism and fascism. Four differences are distinguished. First, while populism assumes that ‘the people’ is essentially virtuous, both communism and fascism aim for the creation of a ‘new man’ through education. Second, communism and fascism reject the populist idea of the people as a single homogeneous whole. Communism shares the homogeneity that is presupposed in populism but denies the idea of a united people as distinct from other peoples. Fascism, by contrast, denies homogeneity, but shares with populism the idea of a united people. Third, while populist agents in contemporary Europe have hardly mobilized the popular masses, communism and fascism aim to unleash the energy of the popular mass in order to overthrow an existing political system. Fourth, it is argued that for a proper comparison, the political context of the emergence of the manifestation of such ideologies must be taken into account.

2. The politics of anti-pluralism and anti-partyism

In the populist view, the people is interpreted as homogeneous and virtuous. The united homogeneity that is presupposed by populism implies denial of the legitimacy of conflict, and hence of plurality, within the démos (the whole political community). Consequently, populism must interpret actual political conflict in moral terms. The constitutive outsiders of people’s identity – the elite, and ‘the dangerous other’ [see §3.4] – are therefore morally sanctioned. Assuming that the people is essentially good, the constitutive outsiders are regarded as representatives of threatening partisan interests, as opposed to the properly singular will of the people. The populist view excludes liberal and agonistic conceptions of democracy that ascribe positive value to pluralism.
Pluralism can be understood as a fact, indicating the multiplicity or diversity of groups within society that may have different interpretations of the popular will or different ideas about values and principles that regulate or limit its execution, or as a principle that is constitutive for democracy. The first position is defended by the liberal John Rawls in *Political Liberalism*. Rawls views “[...] conflicting and even incommensurable religious, philosophical and moral doctrines” as a characteristic of a well-ordered democratic society. From that fact of pluralism, he formulates the central problem: how is it possible that incompatible though reasonable comprehensive doctrines live together and all affirm the framework of a constitutional democratic regime. Rawls argues that a reasonable plurality of equally legitimate comprehensive doctrines can participate in the overlapping consensus about political values, which embraces liberal values of justice and the values of public reason that apply to the institutions of a democratic society. His liberal idea of an overlapping consensus assumes a distinction between a private sphere where people have a comprehensive doctrine about the good life, and a public sphere where a political consensus can be realized about political values.316

Populism is not a comprehensive doctrine, but a ‘broad’ and ‘thin’ ideology [see §3.2] and is thus related differently to the idea of an overlapping consensus. Populism assumes that the people is a single homogeneous whole and thus denies the political relevance of all comprehensive doctrines. Because populism is a thin ideology, it does not need to deny that people have different preferences and comprehensive doctrines. Like liberalism, it does not formulate a notion of what is good for people, although it does presuppose that the people has a unique and unified will whereby an ‘overlapping consensus’ is given. The problem of which Rawls’s overlapping consensus pretends to be the solution is therefore simply denied. For example, populists maintain that people are free to practice any religious faith in private as long as they subscribe to the dominant culture of the ‘proper people’. That explains why Wilders, leader of the PVV, claims to have ‘nothing against Muslims’, but maintains to be ‘against Islam’, because ‘Islam’ is suspected of undermining ‘our way of living’ by imposing the sharia law on ‘us’.

Rawls’s assumption about citizens’ capability of having a comprehensive doctrine about the good life and a political view directed at a consensus on political values alone, excludes conceptions of democracy that ascribe intrinsic value to pluralism.317 Agonistic conceptions of democracy understand pluralism not as a mere fact, but as an ‘axiological principle’ that is constitutive for the very nature of democracy.318 Agonists take over Lefort’s idea that the elimination or resolution of conflict between different interpreta-

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tions of the popular will is both impossible and undesirable.\footnote{Flynn, B. (2005), The Philosophy of Claude Lefort: Interpreting the Political, Northwestern UP, Evanston, p. xxiii.} It is impossible because a pure, single popular will does not exist. Every interpretation of the popular will is selective and particular and, hence, impure. Therefore, “[…] democratic politics would do well to replace its faith in a pure general will with an acceptance of its impurity and an embrace of the perpetuity of political contestation made necessary by that impurity.”\footnote{Honig, B. (2009), Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy, Princeton UP, Princeton/Oxford, p. 38.} From an agonistic point of view, pluralism is the precondition for democracy and there will be no democracy without the perpetuity of political contestation about the interpretation of the popular will.

Agonistic conceptions do not defend that type of radical pluralism according to which pluralism should have no limits. Radical pluralism entails the threat that individuals will not agree on certain political principles which can form the basis of a political community and that they might hardly consider themselves to be one people.\footnote{Plattner, M.F. (2010), ‘Populism, Pluralism, and Liberal Democracy’, Journal of Democracy, vol. 21, no. 1, p. 86.} In other words, radical pluralism would undermine the very foundation of popular self-government. The pluralism advocated by agonistic conceptions requires, therefore, what William Connolly calls a bicameral orientation to political life.\footnote{Connolly, W. (2005), Pluralism, Duke UP, Durham/London, p. 4.} On the one hand, citizens are engaged partisans and adopt certain ideals, wishes and preferences. On the other hand, citizens should be partisans of a set of democratic procedures and institutions as a framework for contesting their political differences.\footnote{Mouffe, C. (2000), The Democratic Paradox, Verso, London, p. 102.} The general form through which political conflict takes place is the object of a second-order partisanship. Consequently, citizens should favor democratic procedures over other ways of dealing with political conflict.

Neither radical pluralists nor populists share the bicameral orientation presupposed by agonistic conceptions of democracy. Radical pluralists regard pluralism as the goal of both political and social life but tend to deny that citizens are engaged partisan adversaries who want to see their ideals, wishes or preferences realized. Populists, on the other hand, deny pluralism and are passionate defenders of a particular cause. From an agonistic perspective, they even tend to become ‘fanatics’ because they are driven by their cause at all costs. Populists claim that the people is one and their voice has a unified and unique message. Since the people is supposed to have a single will, populism detests differences of opinion and eschews the compromise characteristics of agonistic politics. Populist agents do not have to search for compromises among different interests and values because it posits a supreme and united popular will and disapproves of any opinion that runs counter to the unique and unified will of the people. The narrative of populism
often portrays opponents as evil rather than as simply people with different interests or values, which is the opposite of the agonistic conception which views social and political relations in terms of a proponent-opponent relation. For the agonist, the opponent is not the evil enemy, but the legitimate adversary, with whom the proponent has a shared commitment to the general framework through which political conflict is carried on.

Political parties, defined as voluntary associations of individuals organized to contest for public office, are important for the expression and manifestation of the political pluralism advocated by agonistic conceptions. Political parties can be seen as important agents for performing the function of addressing social tensions and oppositions for those are potentially threats to the political order, and shaping them into agonistic conflicts, struggles within accepted rules between adversaries. That requires political parties to commit themselves to the same political institutions in order to transform a potentially antagonistic confrontation, one between enemies who negate each other’s views of life, into an agonistic struggle. Political parties can perform the role of transforming antagonism into agonistic politics because they can articulate the relevant differing motives and considerations within the plural self-determination of the popular will. Moreover, political parties mobilize passions through the articulation of political identities. Finally, in government, political parties execute political programs which are responsive to parts of the electorate.

Political parties can perform the function of transforming antagonism into agonistic politics only if they are not driven by their own cause to the exclusion of all other considerations, but continue to share an attitude in which disagreement is permitted and from that remain disposed to compromise. The bicameral orientation of agonistic pluralism requires, therefore, an ethos of ‘dual partisanship’ where citizens, politicians and political parties are all simultaneously partisan adversaries who want to see their ideals, wishes or preferences realized, and partisans of the general framework through which political conflict is resolved.

From an agonistic point of view, political parties can perform the role of transforming social antagonism into agonistic conflict, but from a populist perspective the

existence of political parties signals division of the popular will and a falling away from an original unity. In fact, populism must reject the very idea of the plurality represented by political parties. Populist interpretations of democracy criticize political parties as factional groups that represent only partial interests. That criticism of political parties was well captured by Rousseau: “[…] when particular interests begin to make themselves felt, and small societies to influence the larger society, the common interest diminishes and meets with opposition, votes are no longer unanimous, the general will is no longer the will of all, contradictions and disagreements arise, and the best opinion carries the day unchallenged.”  

Assuming that there is one popular will, populist agents do not view parties as being part of the whole, but as being against the whole. Populists then claim to speak for the people against the partisanship of political parties.

Since the people is supposed to be one, a populist party or movement needs to be one, too. That view leads to a strong centralization of leadership and a low institutionalization of the party/movement [see §3.5]. A broad range of organizational outcomes still fit under that rubric. Some populist parties have constructed formidable party organizations to encapsulate and discipline adherents. For example, the VB emerged from a dense network of Flemish national(ist) movements that were historically rooted in Flemish society. The party attempts to prevent factionalism or defections by socializing its members within the party and demanding their loyalty. Party loyalty is a requirement for receiving a prime place on national, provincial or local lists, which are all decided by the party leaders. Socialization of party members and strong internal discipline of the rank and file is characteristic for the Dutch SP too.

Other populists opt for direct, non-institutionalized, and unmediated relationships with unorganized followers. For example, Rita Verdonk’s ToN was a political movement that initially promised that its political program would be determined by the citizens themselves, who would suggest, through a wiki-system, ‘common sense’ solutions to social and economic problems. Still other populists have also deigned to institutionalize their party organs, but have claimed to know anyway what the people wants. For example, the PVV is an association with just one member, Geert Wilders, with all its electoral candidates hand-picked by Wilders and his close associates.


The view of the PVV on political parties is nicely articulated by Martin Bosma, MP and party secretary of the PVV. In 2010, Hero Brinkman, an ex-MP of the PVV proposed the ‘democratization’ of the party and allowing the party to have members. In a reaction to Brinkman’s proposal, Bosma made three counterclaims. First of all, a democratic party is chiefly a façade. Bosma referred to Robert Michels’s law of oligarchy which states “Every party organization represents an oligarchic power grounded upon a democratic basis.” Drawing on Michels’s claim that all forms of political organization will inevitably develop into oligarchies, Bosma argued that political decisions in ‘democratic’ parties are taken by only the party elite. The requirement for efficiency of political decisions leads to a hierarchical organization in which only a party elite has decision-making power. As a result, the political influence of party members on decision-making and the creation of political ideas is illusory.

Second, democratization of the party goes against the function and role that a political party should play. A political party represents not party members, but ‘the voter’ so a minority of party members should not prevail over the majority of non-party members. Political parties that are organized by members are not democratic, because they will be oriented toward the wishes and ideals of their members rather than to those of the voter. Finally, the presence of party members leads to needless unrest within the party. Party members are unnecessary impediments to quick and decisive action and their multiple voices create different factions within the party. Bosma’s counterclaims accord with the populist idea: if the people is supposed to be a single homogeneous whole, then so is the populist party.

3. Populist claims to legitimacy

Like all political parties, the actions of populist agents are oriented, among others, toward the acquisition of political power. Political parties, as Weber notes, seek to acquire power in order to procure chances for their adherents to realize aims or personal advantages or both.

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Under the conditions of modern representative democracy, political power is legitimate insofar as it expresses the popular will. As has been explained in chapter 1 [§1.2], the will of the people was asserted as the main source of legitimacy during the key late eighteenth-century political struggles, especially the American and French revolutions. Legitimate political power is thus grounded in the principle of popular sovereignty. The sovereignty of the people is a principle by which political parties substantiate their political claims as legitimate [see §5.3].

Populist agents can potentially demonstrate the legitimacy of their political claims in three ways. First of all, they can refer to an ‘insight’ into the proper will of the virtuous people. In that case, the populist leader or movement claims both to perceive and to embody the will of the people. His voice merely articulates the popular will, which means that the populist agent thinks and acts in the same way as the people. That populist view assumes, in the words of Frank Ankersmit, a ‘mimetic representation’ of the people, as opposed to an aesthetic representation. Mimetic representation “[…] should reflect the people represented as accurately as possible.”

The relationship between the representative (the leader, movement) and the represented (the people) is supposed to take place against a backdrop of collective identity, encompassing them both. In the populist view, the populist leader or movement participates in the collective identity of the people and is not of a superior nature. The populist agent is supposed to be one of and one with the people. The direct relation between the populist agent and the people presumes, like any relation, difference, but the difference cannot lead to a qualitative inequality since both are viewed as identical. There exists only a functional differentiation between the populist agent and the people: the populist agent says what ‘the people’ thinks and does what ‘the people’ wants. By way of illustration, in 2002 a supporter of the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn was asked why she would vote for him. Her answer was that ‘He says what I think’, after which the journalist asked ‘What do you think?’; her answer: ‘What he says!’

Second, populist agents can seek to mobilize popular masses by animating political support for their claims. It is important to realize that there is a difference between popular and populist mobilizations. Popular mobilization might be thought of as a subcategory of political mobilization, in that it is the mobilization of large sectors of the people, or the poor, the marginalized or excluded social sectors into publicly visible and con-

336 Ibid., p. 34.
tentious political action. Populist mobilizations are popular mobilizations organized by populist agents around the idea that the people is one. Populist mobilization of the masses is often accompanied by corresponding populist ideologemes that aim to legitimize or motivate the collective political action.

In the United States, the “Tea Party” has stirred mass mobilizations to protest against the federal government. “Tea Party” members are not monolithically hostile toward government: they distinguish between programs perceived as benefiting hard-working contributors to US society like themselves and ‘handouts’ going to people perceived as unworthy. During 2010, their activism reshaped many Republican presidential primaries and substantially increased voter turnout. In Latin America, politicians like Peru’s Alberto Fujimori or the Venezuelan Hugo Chávez have generated legitimacy and support over the past two decades by mobilizing marginalized social sectors. In Europe by contrast, populists have barely managed to mobilize the popular masses so far. European populists do not mobilize, but merely appeal to ‘our own people’, ‘the ordinary man in the street’ or ‘the hardworking people’. The electorate appears as a passive receiver that votes for a populist leader who does the job for them, while they wait for the outcome and will ‘judge’. Such passivity chimes with the emergence of what Manin has called ‘audience democracy’, in which the electorate merely responds to the terms that have been presented on the political stage by politicians [see §8.2]. Only recently have some European populists sought legitimacy for their claims through attempts to mobilize the masses. In 2012, the Dutch PVV launched an internet hotline to collect complaints about Central and Eastern European migrant workers in the Netherlands, which populist practice inspired VBe to launch their own hotline allowing citizens to report ‘problems and nuisances’ caused by undocumented immigrants.

Third, populist agents can seek legitimacy for their political claims by organizing the devices of direct democracy. Such claims to legitimacy are based on the direct relation between the will of the people and collective binding decisions, a view of direct democracy which assumes a logic of immediacy between ‘willing’ and ‘doing’. On the one hand, the unified will of the people is directly determined through the devices of direct democracy, such as mass rallies, referendums, forms of recall, elections of political office, opinion polling (government by the people). On the other hand, the will of the people

directly legitimizes public policy. Believing that the people is always right, government should do that what the people want (government for the people), whereby policy officials are viewed merely as executers of the proper popular will [see §7.3].

Populist devices of direct democracy are built on the act of acclamation, which is a form of political action in which any aspect of political deliberation is absent. What counts as a method of selecting a decision is not public debate between individual citizens, but the immediate expression of the approval or disapproval of people. Acclamation means that people can express their agreement or disagreement, but without articulating their assent or dissent. According to that populist view, acts of acclamation realize the unmediated presence of the people. At the moment of acclamation, the people as sovereign is identical with itself and is made really present.

However, acclamation is a reactive form of political activity. The instrument of acclamation means that people do not make political claims themselves, but can say only ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in response to something put to them. Etymologically, acclamation stems from the Latin ‘acclamare’ and ‘acclamatio’. ‘Acclamare’ is a compound expression of ‘ad’, which means ‘toward’, and the verb ‘clamare’, which means ‘to call’. Acclamation means that people respond to something, that obviously precedes the call. Therefore, acclamation is not the spontaneous manifestation of the people’s will, but is organized and mediated through particular devices of direct democracy such as mass meetings, popular rallies, referendums and opinion polls. In opinion polls, for example, people must choose from a set of alternatives that they have not determined themselves, while in referendums people must simply respond to pre-given questions. Mass rallies do not provide the unorganized will of the people either, because such popular manifestations must be organized by populist agents. Hence, acclamation means that the people express their will by approving or disapproving of the imposed alternatives or questions (referendums, opinion polling) or by cheering their leaders (mass meetings).

Some populist agents in Europe organize mass rallies [see the example of the Italian LN in §3.5], while many others propagate referendums in their elections programs. For example, the FN, SVP, LN, NB, FPÖ, PVV, and die Republikaner all propose extending the role of the referendum, and populist agents increasingly ascertain the ‘will of

346 Cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s argument that the sovereign cannot be represented, except by itself. Rousseau, Du contrat social, II, i, p. 65. Following Rousseau, Carl Schmitt argued that at the moment of acclamation the people is not represented, but is, as sovereign, identical with itself. Schmitt, Verfassungslehre, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, p. 205.
the people’ via public opinion as revealed by opinion polling.\textsuperscript{348} Opinion polls serve to
demonstrate and engineer popular acclamation, they provide continuous updates and
so offer a snapshot of the will of the people. Public opinion, as revealed by opinion polls,
then tends to become the real manifestation of the people as an active and permanent
presence rather than functioning as a counter-power to create possibilities and sets lim-
its for rulers to act.\textsuperscript{349} In the populist view, political equality between individual citizens
has been realized through devices of direct democracy such as referendums and opin-
ion polling. Neither referendums nor opinion polling make any qualitative distinction
between individual opinions, as every opinion counts equally. The will (opinion) of
each has been counted as one and no will (opinion) has been counted as more than one.
The will of the people (public opinion) is thus regarded as a function of the will (opin-
ion) of each (the will of all). Finally, some populist agents claim that general elections
should become ‘acclamative events’. For example, the Dutch politician Wilders, leader
of the PVV, announced that the 2012 parliamentary elections should be a referendum
on Europe. He advocated Dutch exit from both the euro and the European Union as the
number one priority for the elections, well illustrated by the headlines of the party pro-
gram of the PVV: ‘Their Brussels, our Netherlands’.\textsuperscript{350}

4. Populist claims to legitimacy revisited

Insight into the proper will of the people, mobilization of the masses, and organiza-
tion of direct democracy and acclamation are three ways in which populist agents try
to seek legitimacy for their political claims. The role of the populist agent is, however,
the most paradoxical element of populist ideology, for two reasons. First, two opposed
approaches to populist leadership are conceivable, as has been argued in the previ-
ous chapter [see §3.5]. On the one hand, populists can claim that the will of the people
must be expressed through the devices of direct democracy and politicians must be
responsive to it. From that perspective, the devices of direct democracy are a means for
what Mudde calls ‘responsive government’: government that implements social poli-
cies for the people.\textsuperscript{351} On the other hand, a populist leader can maintain that he is the
true spokesman of the people. The logical consequence of that is that government for the
people makes government by the people superfluous. Moreover, the leader, who is one

\textsuperscript{348} Weyland, K. (2001), ‘Clarifying a Contested Concept. Populism in the Study of Latin America
Politics’, \textit{Comparative Politics}, vol. 43, no. 1, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{349} Rosanvallon, P. (2006), \textit{La contre-démocratie. La politique à l’âge de la défiance}, Éditions du Seuil,

\textsuperscript{350} See for the party program of the PVV: http://pvv.nl/images/stories/verkiezingen2012/

of the people, makes government of the people redundant, too, because if the leader is of the people, government is de facto government of the people.

In both cases, what the people thinks or wills is reproduced at the level of leadership. However, the populist claim to embody the popular will is in tension with proclaimed devices of direct democracy that gives expression to the will of the people. In practice, its ambivalence means that populist agents do not definitively advocate devices of direct democracy (referendums, methods of recall, popular initiatives and direct elections of political office). Populists in opposition are likely to urge the adoption of referendums when the view of government on some issue is not broadly supported by public opinion. They will mobilize public opinion, which will have been revealed by some devices of direct democracy, to demonstrate the will of the people so that they can break the power of the vested parties and politicians. Populists in government may favor devices of direct democracy less strongly since they claim that they already express the wishes of the people.

Second, both approaches of populist leadership are problematic because they assume identity between the leader and the people. Populists claim that either devices of direct democracy (first approach of populist leadership) or they themselves (second approach) merely reflect the interests, capacities and values of the people. However, those facts are not as simply given as populism assumes, but are shaped through political representation, which is not the same as mimetic representation. Political representation, as Ankersmit and Saward note, necessarily entails an aesthetic moment. In the words of Saward, “[...] the represented is never just given, unambiguous, transparent. A representative – or someone making a representative claim – has necessarily to be creative. He or she has to mould, shape, and in one sense create that which is to be represented. She has to be an artist, to operate aesthetically, to evoke the represented.”

Political representation means that a claim on representation (‘a representative claim’) is made by a would-be representative.

Since the will of the people is not simply a given, the populist leader needs to bind the members of the people into a shared collective identity through representative claims. The people is not ‘one’, but must be turned into a homogeneous unity. In order to build popular support, the would-be populist leader will probably mobilize different elements of the populist repertoire in a flexible way, so that individual citizens can identify with his or her propagated values and actions. The populist would-be representative does not have to be the only claimant, because spin doctors, script writers and media can also make certain representative claims about the would-be populist leader and his or her links with the people. Moreover, the creative initiative of representing the people is not exclusively on the side of the maker, because claimants “[...] will have varied, and never complete, control over how their claims are communicated, who receives or is receptive

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to them, or indeed how they are interpreted.”

The realization of the representation of ‘the people’ happens in the interaction between the maker of the representative claim (the would-be populist leader) and the people-as-population [see §5.2].

The people-as-population that is targeted by the populist claim may be engaged – if it does not remain indifferent – in different ways. The representative claim may be accepted or rejected, but its meaning can also be interpreted differently from how the maker had originally intended it. If the would-be populist leader is successful, he constructs, in the words of Laclau, a chain of equivalence between heterogeneous demands of citizens. The constructed chain of equivalence between the populist leader and the people will be maximized when the unity of the people is identified with the name of the leader alone. The name functions then as a symbol unifying the particular demands of citizens.

The logic of political representation shows that the claim of populist agents that they themselves or the devices of direct democracy merely express the wishes of the people must necessarily be ‘fake’. When populists claim to be passively reflecting the popular will, they deny that the interests, capacities and values of the people are shaped through political representation. Different representative claims, including populist claims, give shape to the will of the people. ‘The people’ does not exist other than as a ‘construct’, which means that unambiguous claims about what or who ‘the people’ is or wills must be ‘fake’. Moreover, the logic of political representation also indicates that the devices of direct democracy do not reveal the spontaneous opinion of the public. What the people think is constituted, at least partly through different representative claims by various political agents. Public opinion is shaped from the interaction between makers of representative claims and the people-as-population.

The misleading claim of populists about the devices of direct democracy embodies a potential danger, for such devices can become the instrument of the particular interests of the populist leader. Mass rallies, for example, can be fully orchestrated by the populist leader or movement. Opinion polling too can be used as an instrument for specific interests. Indeed, populists will often have less control over opinion polling than over mass rallies, since opinion polls and surveys are often executed by commercial companies and respondents can give their answers relatively independently from direct interference.

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353 Ibid., p. 49. Elsewhere Saward makes a similar point: “The maker of a representative claim may intend that the constituents invoked by the claim see it as he or she wishes, but that they are always to some extent free to reinterpret the claim, to turn it back against the maker.” (p. 54). In other sections, however, Saward attributes a more passive role the audience. He suggests then that the claimant draws the picture of the represented, which is, subsequently offered to an audience, who “[…] are able to absorb, reject or accept them, or otherwise engage with them.” (p.48). And he notes: “All of this [the representative claim] needs an “audience”, which receives the claims and accepts, rejects or ignores them.” (p. 36).

from others. But opinion polls or surveys can of course become instruments of particular interests if they are organized and guided by the populist leader or movement.

As an illustration, Silvio Berlusconi’s entrance into politics in 1994 was preceded by opinion polls to determine what expectations his potential supporters had, a strategy he used again in 2012 when he considered a return to electoral politics. Berlusconi used a survey company, Diakron, with links to his enterprise structure to carry out a series of opinion polls. With the results in mind, he proclaimed himself the true spokesman and defender of the popular will. According to Berlusconi, opinion polls were the authentic voice of the people, and if polls or surveys reported a low level of support for the government, Parliament, or the Head of State, he would say that those political institutions were de facto delegitimized and then call for their replacement. When Berlusconi made his claim that opinion polls are the true voice of the people, he had a powerful influence on public opinion through his private media company. His company Mediaset, together with the public service broadcaster RAI, accounts for 90% of national audiences and television revenues. Moreover, Berlusconi has interfered directly in broadcasting matters, for two of RAI’s political commentators and a satirist were barred from RAI channels after Berlusconi fiercely attacked them. In that sort of political context opinion polling, in the hands of a populist leader, can become a tool for particular interests.

Moreover, the misleading claim of populists that they know what the people want, tends to undermine citizens’ capacity to make decisions (government by the people) and so to reduce democracy to government for the people. The claim of populist agents to embody the popular will, in fact, opens the door to a kind of despotism already described by Rousseau. In that case, the level of sovereignty and the level of government have actually coagulated. To put it in Rousseau’s terms, ‘will’ and ‘power’ have amalgamated. In spite of his advocacy of direct democracy (popular assembly), Rousseau warned against the absence of the distinction between legislative and executive power. For Rousseau it was crucial to keep those levels separate in a significant manner, because a blurring of the distinction would imply that particular interests would dominate the general will. According to Rousseau, legislative acts belong to the people as sovereign and should remain general in scope so that they touch equally upon all citizens. Acts of government, on the other hand, are necessarily particular. The application of general laws to particular cases affects different people in different ways and requires particular


356 Ibid., p. 134.


judgments by officials about particular cases. Therefore, as soon as a government claims to embody the general will, it tends to represent particular people and to pursue particular interests.

According to Rousseau, the amalgamation of ‘will’ and ‘power’ eventually leads to despotism.\(^{360}\) The despot is not a tyrant who is simply against the law of a polity, but the individual, committee or party who places itself above the law. A despot subordinates the individual wills of the people to his own will and interest. While claiming to embody the will of the people, a despot acts de facto according to the interest of government as a particular body in society. Since the despot has an unmediated relation with the people, he or she rules by decree, a form of legislation that involves an unmediated act of will.

Chávismo in Venezuela is perhaps a good example of a political regime that combines a populist with a despotic dimension. The origin of Chávismo, and by extension that of populists like Morales in Bolivia and Correa in Ecuador, can be seen as the outcome of two related processes in the late 1990s. The failure of neo-liberal economic reforms and increasing levels of poverty were the culmination of a long process of decay of political institutions and traditional elites.\(^{361}\) The emergence of what was called ‘the Cry of the People’ – which amounted to new social demands by different sectors of society, a sense of popular frustration with traditional elites and high levels of corruption and nepotism – along with the widespread dissatisfaction with political institutions, differed from the European political context where democratic governments claim to have passed the social divide that is characteristic for some Latin American countries.

Chávez has claimed a ‘direct’ and superior form of democracy. In the 1998 presidential elections, he called for a constituent assembly as a reaction to the traditional political parties. The new Constitution of 1999 eventually reduced the role of parties while it established mechanisms of direct participation such as voter initiatives, referendums, and recall, and was approved in a national referendum.\(^{362}\) Moreover, legitimation of the regime was built partly around mobilizing large numbers of people and participatory political practices. In 2002, Chávez set up a grassroots movement “Círculos Bolivarianos”, involving the populist ideologeme ‘Bolívar’, which refers to Simón Bolívar, a Venezuelan military and political leader who played a key role in the struggle for the country’s independence from the Spanish empire in the nineteenth century. Gratuitous references to Bolívar’s legacy are used as a tool by Chávez to gain popular support and to encourage popular participation.

\(^{360}\) Ibid., III, x, p. 127.

\(^{361}\) Walker, I. (2008), ‘The Three Lefts of Latin America’, Dissent, vol. 55, no. 4, p. 9. Likewise, the origin of populists like Morales in Bolivia and Correa in Ecuador is the outcome of new social demands and the decomposition of political institutions and political elites (six governments in Bolivia in six years, seven governments in Ecuador in ten years).

The underlying ideology of “Círculos” was to encourage local self-government and community development. The “Círculos” encourage the political participation of their members and are engaged in all kinds of social work such as distributing goods in poor neighborhoods or organizing agricultural cooperatives. The ideology behind “Círculos” has been developed further by the establishment of “comités de tierra urbana” [urban land committees] in 2002 and “consejos comunales” [communal councils] in 2005. The organization of communal councils was an attempt to create a new set of participatory political institutions that would bypass traditional power structures. The emergence of parallel structures under the Chávez government should be seen as a reaction to traditional parties who largely disregarded local autonomy and themselves controlled political institutions.

However, the call for direct democracy is in tension with the tendency in Chávismo to centralize the state. The communal councils were initiated from above, by presidential decree, which created inherent tension with the idea of local self-government, because it left little room for community experimentation or development of new institutions. Moreover, the communal councils are controlled by the state, and the economic cooperatives are state-sponsored. In short, while the commune system stimulates participation among members and allows deliberation about common local problems, governmental control over the communes tends to undermine their autonomy.

Moreover, Chávismo tends to outvote the opposition. Basic government services are often denied to members of the opposition, while key government positions are held by Chavista appointees. Additionally, Chávez himself has not always tolerated voices of dissent. He has frequently accused journalists in his news broadcasts, while media outlets have been repeatedly threatened and even physically attacked by his supporters. Chávez has also curtailed private media when they have given him negative coverage, arguing that freedom of speech is subordinate to the goals of the ‘socialist revolution’.

Finally, Chávez illustrates the ambiguous status of the leader in populism. On the one hand, Chávez advocates participatory values and his government has created new

364 Ellner has indicated that within Chavismo there is discussion between ‘two schools of thought’: one movement advocates a revolutionary change reflected in the call for immediate creation of parallel institutions to replace the old ones. Others call for a non-revolutionary transformation conducting a political struggle in which old structures are dominated rather than eliminated. Ellner, S. (2005), ‘Revolutionary and Non-Revolutionary Paths of Radical Populism: Directions of the Chavista Movement in Venezuela’, Science & Revolution, vol. 69, no. 2, pp. 162, 186.
political institutions that allow for broad grass roots popular participation. But on the other hand, there is a tendency to place those political institutions under the control of the government and to downplay disagreement and opposition. Chávez presents himself as the true spokesman of the people, which is reflected by a statement by one of the politicians closest to him: “If there is any power represented by Chávez, it is the power of the people, which means that Chávez is above institutions because he is the embodiment of the people.”

Chavismo shows how populism can imply despotism: the tyranny of the alleged will of the people.

5. Populism versus communism and fascism

The underlying ideology of the populist repertoire provides a particular way of interpreting democracy. It maintains that “[...] the people ought to get what they want, when they want, however they want.” As noted, populism is a ‘broad’, but also clearly a ‘thin’ ideology. It is ‘broad’ because it conveys a distinct set of ideas about democracy and the people, which implies a specific kind of politics on all kinds of issues. Its ideology is ‘thin’ because it does not possess the features of ‘thick’ ideologies like socialism, liberalism, conservatism, fascism, or communism, all of which provide a comprehensive view of society and a corresponding general plan of public policy. For example, populist ideology does not produce a scheme for the just distribution of scarce and vital goods. Populist ideology concentrates on the supreme authority of the people, while emphasizing its virtuousness. The point is that it does little more. Populism expresses in formal terms what the people do not want, such as political elites who undermine the popular will or political institutions that mediate or check it. Populism can therefore positively claim in formal terms only that the people should get what they want, whatever it is they want.

However, populism rarely appears in its thin form. In practice, the thin ideology of populism does not exist on its own, but attaches itself to aspects of one or more thick ideologies, which it must do if populism wishes to provide a comprehensive policy proposal in its own right. Populism is therefore always likely to seek shelter within a thick host ideology. Populist ideology can attach itself to a wide variety of ideologies, but the range of potential ideological partners is not endless, being constrained by the ideological core of populism. As noted, the populist idea of the homogeneous people-as-one limits political liberalism, but not economic neo-liberalism [see §7.3], and pluralism. Second, the anti-elite appeal, which is a core aspect of the populist repertoire, makes it less likely that populism will attach itself to ideologies associated with the elite. Indeed, populism can adopt elements of elite-associated ideologies, but then the populist repertoire

369 Ibid., p. 107.
‘suffers from’ its own negative impetus. If populism adopts such ideologies, the negative appreciation of elite values becomes a burden to the populist repertoire itself. Third, since populism assumes that the people are essentially good, it cannot attach itself to thick ideologies like deep ecology, Christian ‘moralism’, communism or fascism, which all claim that people are simply not acceptable ‘as they are’.

Although populism is sometimes seen as a precursor of totalitarianism [see the introduction to this book] or examined by scholars as a ‘proto-totalitarian logic’, that third aspect indicates the first crucial difference between populism, and communism or fascism. In the academic literature, both communism and fascism have become generic concepts that encompass a variety of communist and fascist parties. The image of communism has been dominated by the Russian revolution and its consequences. Thus, Soviet communism has been the dominant model of communist rule and variants of Leninism have been the ruling ideology of the communist world. Therefore in discussing communism I will focus primarily on some of the principles of Leninism. The concept of fascism encompasses, among others, Italian Fascism, German Nazism, Spanish Falangism, Portuguese National Syndicalism, the Hungarian Arrow Cross, and the Romanian Legion of the Archangel Michael. I will focus on the Italian version because it is often seen as the paradigmatic example of fascism and has also been a source of inspiration for other fascist parties.

Populism generally thinks that society and its population are ‘okay’. There is nothing wrong with the ‘ordinary people’; on the contrary, they are essentially good and ‘healthy’. Hence, whatever people think, or say that they want is acceptable. The key presumption of populism that the people are right in wanting what they want is the same as that of liberalism – the idea that all preferences are equally legitimate is a liberal principle. A liberal does not formulate any notion of what is good for the people, but fundamentally identifies political good with what the people want. By contrast, neither communism nor fascism share the assumption of populism that the people are good, but both ideologies think rather that they can know what is good for the people, independently of any views that people themselves might have about what is good for them. Both communism and fascism are, therefore, strongly anti-liberal.

Marxism and Leninism claim that the people – meaning the proletariat – is deluded by bourgeois beliefs. Unlike Marx, Lenin did not believe that the proletariat would spontaneously develop revolutionary class consciousness to subvert the bourgeois state. Lenin argued that only the workers party, a vanguard party, could lead the


working class from bourgeois consciousness to revolutionary class consciousness, and, subsequently, guide the whole people to its ultimate goal, that of building communism. In the pre-communist era, a ‘new selfless man’ would be created through social engineering and education. The party’s claim to leadership would lie in its theoretical consciousness, specifically in its understanding of Marxist theory. Only the workers party possessed the true theoretical consciousness and could, therefore, also be the guardian of the proletarian consciousness, regardless of whether or not the party had popular support.373 Armed with true theoretical consciousness, the workers party could become the vanguard of the proletariat, capable of recognizing the basic needs of the people.

Because the party was the exclusive owner of theoretical consciousness, it was the only legitimate source of political initiative. That idea is well illustrated by Lenin’s conception of ‘democratic centralism’, which was held to be a supposed balance between, on the one hand, freedom of discussion within the party and free election to party offices (democracy) and, on the other hand, strict unity of political action (centralism).374 The latter meant that once the decision of the party had been made by majority vote, all members were expected to support that decision. Democratic centralism implied the concentration of all power in the central party organization, which was made responsible for the organization of every institution in which political influence might arise.

That unity of true knowledge and political decision is well captured by Lenin’s notion of partijnost [partisanship], which means ‘party spirit’ as well ‘belonging to the party’.375 The concept was primarily part of the Marxist doctrine on the class character of philosophy, morality, religion, art, and the human sciences, but Lenin turned the concept into a practical maxim. He applied partijnost to the party itself and it implied that the party should take the lead in political and ideological matters. Since the party was the effective vanguard of the proletariat, expressing its basic needs, all other values and interests become subordinate to the objectives of the party. When the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917 they did so in the name of the proletariat and since theoretical consciousness belonged to the party it followed that opposition parties must represent the interests of the bourgeoisie. With the establishment of Bolshevik rule, partijnost attracted a different meaning to indicate that the party had the fundamental right to interfere decisively in all political or ideological matters.376
Like communism, fascism did not assume the goodness of the people. While communism maintains that man is alienated from nature, fascism asserts that people have become decadent, self-indulgent, hedonistic, physically coward, and morally soft. The revolution in fascist thinking was a ‘revolution of spirit’, aimed at creating a new ‘healthy’ man. As in communism, the fascist man is not a naturally occurring being but has to be shaped through education. The ‘fascist man’ is motivated by a duty to serve the state and to sacrifice his own private interests, so that he is prepared to dissolve his personal life in that of the social whole. Fascist man is understood to be a moral entity whose life finds fulfillment in a higher spiritual community that transcends materialism.

In Italian Fascism, the moral tenets of society were determined by the state that gave the people a single will and therefore its existence. Italian Fascism emphasized the ideal of a ‘totalitarian’ state, insisting that all individuals and groups (political parties, associations, syndicates, classes) were understood to receive their full realization only in the state. The positive valuation of the state is characteristic for fascism and differs from communism, which perceives the state as a transitional phenomenon, even though Stalinism in particular displayed strongly statist positions. The fascist state, it is argued, sets the people free, because any tension between individual liberty and state authority is absent. In the new fascist order, the state would be immanent in man, which means that the state is identical with the inner conscience of the individual. In such a state, fascist man would be shaped through education, thereby making the law (general will) the same as his own individual will. As Gentile, one of the leading Italian philosophers in the interwar period, wrote, the fascist man “[...] feels the general interest as his own, and wills therefore as might the general will.” In so far as the law expresses a general will that is willed by the individual, it is not externally imposed, subjecting the individual to restrictive coercion, but realizes an ‘absolute freedom’. In the organic state of fascism, any opposition between the individual and the state is absent and thus the self-realization of the individual is no longer constrained.

To conclude, the principles of both Leninism and fascism differ from those of populism. Ideas of ‘alienation’, ‘decadence’ or ‘uplifting the people’ are all alien to populism,

378 Ibid., p. 41.
379 Gentile, G. (2009), ‘What is Fascism?’, in: A. James Gregor (trans./ed.) Origins and Doctrine of Fascism. With Selections from Other Works, Transaction Publishers, London, p. 55. As one of the leading Italian philosophers, he wrote different articles about fascism from the moment he openly espoused fascism in 1923, after the March of Rome. He also wrote the official doctrine of fascism together with Mussolini in 1932. Moreover, he was one of the members of Mussolini’s first Cabinet. As Minister of Education he developed an authoritarian educational system to make men ‘Italian’.
because populism asserts that the people are essentially good. In contrast to populism, both Leninism and fascism maintain that political wisdom does not reside in the people. Leninism argues that political wisdom resides only in the workers party that is regarded as intellectually superior to the people. The workers party articulates the interests of the proletariat, regardless of whether or not the party has popular support. Fascism views the leader as a uniquely gifted individual who gives the correct interpretation of the popular will. Like the workers party, the fascist leader possesses a monopoly of political truth, which is reflected by one of the articles of the dogma of the Italian fascist doctrine: ‘The Duce is always right’ (‘Il Duce ha sempre ragione’).³⁸¹ Since the leader defines the destiny of the people his authority is absolute. The leader principle (in German Nazism: the ‘Führerprinzip’) demands the people’s unconditional obedience to the leader.

Populism assumes that the people is a single homogeneous whole and it portrays the people as if it were some homogeneous synthesis of equal and ordinary citizens. Equality is therefore part of the homogeneity that is presupposed in populism. Populism indeed accepts the democratic condition of equality whereby every citizen is formally equal to every other and has an equal right to self-rule [see §3.4]. Additionally, the homogeneous whole of ‘ordinary citizens’ is made one by the populist leader or movement. The idea of a united homogeneous people is absent from both communism and fascism.

Communism is oriented toward the collective emancipation of all humankind, with its ideal a classless and stateless society, from which political conflict is absent. Both Marx and Lenin agreed that the communist era would be preceded by socialism, which could be introduced only by an international revolution of the proletariat. Under socialism, capitalism would be replaced by the temporary dictatorship of the proletariat, needed to protect the transition from capitalist private ownership of the means of production into social ownership.³⁸² In the pre-communist but post-capitalist era, single national states would continue to exist but they would gradually wither away because class antagonisms would gradually vanish. However, as long as world revolution had not taken place, the construction of socialism must be protected by a strong state. In the Soviet Union, the road to socialism underwent an important shift when Stalin proclaimed a ‘second revolution’ in the 1930s. According to Stalin, and in disagreement with Trotsky, the Soviet Union could succeed in building socialism in one country, without the need for a world revolution.³⁸³ The idea of communism in one country and thus any idea of ‘this people’ is, however, alien to Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism and Maoism. During the communist era the plurality of people became a single world population, but in contrast to populism, communism does not appeal to one single people but represents

all of humanity. Still, it shares the idea of homogeneity that is presupposed in populism. Like populism, communism recognizes the democratic condition of equality, but adds that formal equality must be replaced with actual equality for all, meaning the realization of the rule, “[...] from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”

Fascism, by contrast, rejects the homogeneity of the people and claims that they are not equal. It believes that human beings are born with radically different abilities, talents and attributes, resulting in differing roles for different persons. There are those who might be farmers or laborers, and those who might serve as soldiers or ministers of state, and between those roles lie differences of natural capacity. Moreover, fascism believes in an organically unified national community, based neither on economic class interests, as in communism, nor shaped by the calculations and interests of individuals, as in liberalism. Rather, natural loyalties and emotional bonds will be formed by a common past. In Italian Fascism, innate loyalties were not defined in racial terms, which marks an important difference from German Nazism, where the coherence of the national community was founded on racial theories and Social-Darwinism.

An organic community requires that the relations between its parts are necessary, not accidental. As in the single animal organism where different jobs must be done by the various organs, fascism argues that in a social organism each individual citizen is engaged in some organic function of the whole, contributing to the whole by some specific role. The units of the organic whole are related mainly as subordinates and superiors. Fascism broadly assumes that society is composed of three kinds of people, a supreme, all-knowing leader who possesses absolute authority, an exclusive mail ‘warrior elite’, distinguished by its capacity for self-sacrifice, and the masses, whose destiny is unconditional obedience to the leader. Such an idea of an organic community is only a temporary phenomenon in communism in which the party has the ‘brains’ and the political will, but not the end-stage, which is full equality for all. Fascism differs from populism in the sense that it does not accept the democratic condition of equality but

assumes organic and organizing differences between people. However, it shares with populism the idea of a people as a united whole.

As noted, populist agents in contemporary Europe have barely mobilized the popular masses [see §4.3], which contrasts with both communism and fascism. In communism, it is argued that the working masses must be mobilized in order to unleash a revolution against capitalist property and the capitalist state. In fascism, the fascist elite tried to incorporate the masses of the people into the myth of a national rebirth through incendiary speeches about ‘radical new beginnings’ and ‘new social orders’. Unleashing dormant potentialities is something that communism and fascism share, but communism is ‘instrumentalist’ at that point, while fascism – in Italy at least – tended to attribute positive value to ‘unleashing energy’ as such. In the interwar period, fascist and communist movements in countries like Germany, Italy and Spain had their own militias, which claimed sovereign power and often wanted to subvert the state. Militias fought for a control over the street, and for political power in opposition to weak democratic regimes. Moreover, once fascist regimes were in place, they often organized mass rallies, with popular demonstrations as well as military parades, with the intention of unleashing mass popular energies and creating strong identification between the fascist leader and the people as a whole. Thus, fascist regimes differed from authoritarian regimes, which did not claim to incarnate the popular will and were neither based on any mass movement nor proclaimed any sort of social revolution.

The political manifestation of populism, fascism and communism have emerged in different political contexts. In Europe, communist and fascist parties emerged in the interwar period, when parliamentary democracy, as both political ideal and regime was contested, as was the free market. Although liberal and democratic principles prevailed in the peacemaking of 1919 and in the establishment of the League of Nations, democracy and the free market were not a generally accepted political ideal. Some political parties, such as Christian parties, did not view democracy as a political ideal and secretly hoped for the realization of their own political ideal which was a Christian corporatist society, while both communist and fascist parties aimed to subvert parliamentary democracy. As noted, both communism and fascism aimed to create a new social and political order and a ‘new man’ to populate it. Their political project would have to be achieved not through gradual reform within existing parliamentary democracy, but through a radical transformation of the existing social and political order. From the perspective of both communism and fascism, parliamentary democracy was a ‘dead’

political system that was preventing the realization of the ‘healthy body’ of the fascist state or communist society and must, therefore, be eradicated. Given the condition of existing parliamentary democracy, fascism and communism exploited parliamentary democracy for their own ends, using it as a means to prepare the ground for the proletarian revolution in the case of communism, or to achieve “[...] the total renewal and regeneration of the nation” in the fascist view.

Moreover, both communism and fascism reject the liberal idea of a free market. Under Stalin’s rule the capitalist market in the Soviet Union was entirely removed and replaced by a system of central planning. Stalin’s ‘Five Year Plans’ eradicated private enterprises. Agriculture was collectivized and peasants were forced to join state farms (sovkhozs and kolkhozs). The Soviet planning served as the role model for Herman Göring’s ‘Four Years Plan’ in Nazi Germany, although the aim of Göring’s economic policy was not to remove capitalism but to bring it under the control of the state. Italian Fascism likewise did not attempt to collectivize economic life as had happened in the Soviet Union. Italian Fascism rejected class struggle and proclaimed the idea of corporatism, which was based on the belief that social classes (business, labor and agriculture) are bound together in the organic whole of the state. Fascist corporatism was opposed to the ideas of both free market and central planning; the capitalist market should not be entirely removed, but be subordinated to the objectives of the state.

In the interwar period in Europe, many democratic governments, usually coalitions, appeared weak and unstable when confronted with political or economic crises. Democratic governments broke down in Hungary (1919), Italy (1922-1925), Spain (1923/1936), Poland (1926), Lithuania (1926), Portugal (1926/1936), Greece (1926), Yugoslavia (1933), Germany (1933), Estonia (1934), Austria (1938), Romania (1938) and Czechoslovakia (1938). By the time World War II began, Europe had more authoritarian than parliamentary regimes. After the Second World War, democracy gradually became the generally accepted political ideal across the world. The ideological shift does not mean that all European countries became democratic immediately. In Eastern Europe, communist parties ruled until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, while in Southern Europe, Salazar’s authoritarian regime in Portugal lasted until 1974 and Franco’s regime in Spain ended only with his death in 1975 – but that does mean that the burden of proving that their ideas for alternatives are better now lies on the opponents

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392 Ibid., pp. 214, 218.

of democracy. Opponents of democracy must come up with arguments to explain why democracy is a bad idea, or a bad basis for a regime. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, parliamentary democracy and free market economics have become the hegemonic regime in Europe and like any hegemonic regime it is articulated and legitimized as a ‘natural’ political order.\footnote{Mouffe, C. (2000), \textit{The Democratic Paradox}, Verso, London, p. 99.}

Once the political system of parliamentary democracy and the free market becomes hegemonic and has apparently defeated its former archenemies, communism and fascism, populism tends to become its internal challenger. Believing in the rightness of the people’s cause, populism views parliament as a means and not as an end in itself. Its instrumental attitude toward both legislation and constitutional arrangements is something it shares with communism and fascism [see also §6.3] but unlike them, populist agents in Europe do not claim a ‘turf’ of their own. Capitalist relations of production are accepted and they do not aim to subvert parliamentary democracy. Parliamentary democracy is rather the political ‘host’ for European populists. Populist agents then proceed to live off their political host and formulate their responses along with a dependent relationship with that host. In being the awkward guests of parliamentary democracy, it appears that European populist agents crucially differ from their fascist and communist counterparts during the interwar period.

6. Summary

I have argued that the populist ideology provides distinct interpretations of democracy. First of all, it depicts the people as a virtuous and homogeneous collective. It denies the legitimacy of conflict, and hence plurality, within the political community and must therefore interpret actual political conflict in moral terms and overcome it politically. The united homogeneity that is presupposed in populism excludes liberal and agonistic conceptions of democracy that attribute value to pluralism. The liberal John Rawls understands pluralism as a fact, assuming that there are conflicting though equally legitimate comprehensive doctrines in a liberal democratic society. From that fact of pluralism, Rawls argues that an overlapping consensus can be reached about liberal values of justice and the values of public reason. Populism is not a comprehensive doctrine, but a ‘broad’ and ‘thin’ ideology that denies the political relevance of all comprehensive doctrines. Given the assumption that the people is homogeneous and one, it does not offer room for different politically relevant comprehensive doctrines. Populism shares with liberalism the view that the preferences of the people are equally legitimate. However, it assumes that the people has a single will, whereby an ‘overlapping consensus’ is given, effectively denying the problem that Rawls tries to solve in \textit{Political Liberalism}. 

In contrast to the liberal perspective, agonistic conceptions of democracy do not understand pluralism as a mere societal fact, but as a principle that is constitutive for the nature of democracy. The agonistic view does not defend any radical notion of pluralism according to which pluralism would have no limits. A radical pluralism would in fact undermine the very foundation of a political community. Instead, agonistic conceptions defend a type of pluralism that requires a bicameral orientation on life or an ethos of dual partisanship in which citizens, politicians and political parties are both engaged partisans who want to see certain ideals and preferences realized, and partisan adversaries, who have a shared commitment to resolve their conflicts in and through the same political institutions. Populists do not share that bicameral orientation. Armed with the idea that the people is always right, populists tend to be driven only by their own particular cause and eschew the compromise characteristics of agonistic politics. Moreover, while from an agonistic perspective political parties can be seen as important agents for transforming social antagonism into agonistic debate, populism rejects the very idea of a plurality of political parties because the people is supposed to be one. Hence, a populist party or movement needs to be one, too.

Like all political parties in modern representative democracy, populist parties seek legitimacy for their political claims by invoking the principle of popular sovereignty. Populists substantiate the legitimacy of their claims in three ways. First, populist agents refer to an insight into the proper will of the people, thereby claiming to be its true spokesmen. Second, populist agents might seek to mobilize popular masses. While populist agents in the United States and Latin America have generated legitimacy and support by doing that, in Europe, populist mobilizations have occurred only rarely. Third, populists can seek legitimacy for their political claims by organizing forms of direct democracy such as mass rallies, referendums, and opinion polls all of which, in the populist view, are built on acts of acclamation.

The role of the leader is the paradoxical element in the populist claims to legitimacy, and for two reasons. First, two opposing approaches to populist leadership can be distinguished. On the one hand, the populist agent claims that the popular will is expressed through devices of direct democracy (acclamation), while on the other hand he or she claims to embody the will of people. That ambiguity means in practice that the preference of populists for direct democracy will depend on political context. Populists in opposition will probably insist on devices of direct democracy when they can break the power of the vested political parties and politicians, but once in government they will not automatically be in favor of direct democracy. Second, the claim of populist agents that they themselves or the devices of direct democracy merely express the wishes of the people is ‘false’, because the interests, capacities and values of the people are shaped, and thus mediated, by political representation. The misleading claims of populists entail a potential danger. The devices of direct democracy can turn into instruments of the particular interests of the populist leader, illustrated by
the Berlusconi case, while the claimed incarnation of the popular will by the populist leader opens the door to a kind of despotism already described by Rousseau and exemplified by Hugo Chávez in Venezuela.

Populist ideology conveys a particular way of interpreting democracy, but its interpretation does not possess the features of thick ideologies which provide a comprehensive view of society. Populism often explains what it does not want and can, in fact, say positively only that the people should get what the people want. In practice, however, populism rarely appears in a thin form, but is attached to at least some of the aspects of thick ideologies. The range of possible ideological partners is constrained by populism’s ideological core. Populism holds the idea that the people is a homogeneous and united group which excludes liberalism and pluralism, and its anti-elite appeal means that it is less likely to attach itself to ideologies associated with elite values. Finally, populism presumes that the people are essentially good, which disqualifies ideologies that assert that people are not inherently acceptable members of the body politic.

That final aspect is the first crucial distinction between populism on the one hand, and communism and fascism. Communism and fascism each claim that the people are not simply right in wanting what they want, because they are either ‘alienated’ (communism) or have become ‘decadent’ (fascism). Both ideologies then aim to create a ‘new man’ through education. Political wisdom does not reside in the people, but only in the workers party (in the case of Leninism) or in a fascist elite. They articulate the interests of the people regardless of the people’s actual views.

Neither communism nor fascism shares the populist idea of the people as a single homogeneous whole. Communism shares the idea of homogeneity that is presupposed in populism, viewing the people as a homogeneous entity, consisting of equal and ordinary citizens. It thereby recognizes the democratic condition of equality, but in contrast to populism communism denies the idea of a single nation, appealing instead to the world population as a whole. Fascism on the other hand rejects homogeneity and assumes organic and organizing differences between people. Like populism but unlike communism however, it views the people as a united whole.

While populist agents in Europe have hardly managed to muster popular mobilizations such as mass rallies or demonstrations, communism and fascism have sought to mobilize the people and to set up militias to fight for the monopoly of power and to break the established order.

The political context in which the political manifestations of these ideologies emerge must be taken into account, too. In the interwar period, European communist and fascist parties emerged at a time of rising mass democracy, but when regimes of parliamentary democracy and the free market were still being contested. Communist and fascist parties claimed a political territory of their own and viewed parliamentary democracy as a dead phenomenon preventing the realization of a healthy organic society. Further, in the Soviet Union under Stalin’s rule the capitalist market was replaced
by a system of central planning, while the Italian fascist regime subordinated the market to the objectives of the state. In the postwar period, European populist parties have emerged into a political context in which parliamentary democracy and free markets have become the hegemonic regime after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. Postwar populist parties are internal challengers of the hegemonic regime, although they do accept the capitalist market and do not aim to subvert parliamentary democracy. In fact, they feed off parliamentary democracy as if it were their host, and formulate their responses to it along with their dependent relationship with it. Rather than regarding parliamentary democracy as a dead political system, populism itself has a parasitic relationship with it.
Chapter 5

Populist Modes of Representation

1. Introduction

The relationship between the use of the label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena and agents labeled ‘populist’ is linked to a specific historical context. The word ‘populism’ was coined at the end of the nineteenth century in the United States to name the “People’s Party”, and since then the historical context of modern representative democracy has given rise to a recurrent application of the label ‘populism’, as shown in the first chapter. That does not mean that the use of the label is confined to the modern setting of representative democracy, for it has been applied in reference to phenomena within non-democratic settings. Historians have labeled as ‘populist’ political agents and phenomena which predate the advent of modern democracies. As has been mentioned, the narodniki in nineteenth century Russia and the set of ideas and actions known as narodnichesvstvo have often been seen as examples of peasant-based populism, although of course Narodnichesvstvo existed in an autocratic setting with no trace of modern representative democracy. Moreover, modern representative democracy is grounded, as a matter of fact, in the nation-state or based on what Arditi calls territorial representation. 395 Territorial representation is typical for modern representative democracy but is challenged by an expansion and legitimation of politics outside the territorial boundaries of the nation-state. The modern construct of democracy is in transformation through processes of globalization and European integration, and this new historical situation too encourages the application of the label ‘populism’, as will be discussed in Chapter 7 [§7.4].

The next four chapters will explore the historical and political context in which the label ‘populism’ comes to be applied. More specifically, I shall analyze some of the intrinsic tensions present in every system of modern representative democracy. These tensions are not contingent and inevitably generate discontent among citizens about democracy’s performance. That dissatisfaction is voiced and mobilized by various political agents some of whom are labeled ‘populist’ and some who use the label as self-description. The reasons for application arise out of the interaction between the labeller and those agents or phenomena labeled ‘populist’. The hypothesis defended in Chapter 3 [§3.6] was that the label will stick only if agents organize their utterances and practices around the idea that the people are one homogeneous entity.

This chapter and the next (Chapter 5 and 6) will provide a systematic exposition of concepts that are crucial to understanding some of the intrinsic tensions of modern representative democracy. Drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire, I shall analyze the way in which populist politicians feed upon those tensions. This chapter will explore some of the ambiguities inherent in the idea of the people as sovereign. Chapter 6 focuses on liberal democracy, marked by the principles of the rule of law and popular sovereignty and examines the strains caused by that combination of principles. Chapter 7 and 8 will offer a historical-conceptual clarification of the political and historical context which see application of the label ‘populism’. Chapter 7 discusses the role of bureaucracy within and outside the context of modern representative democracy, while Chapter 8 focuses on the relation between governing elites and the people.

In this chapter I shall discuss the notion of the people-as-sovereign, which is both one of the key principles of modern democracy and crucially present in the populist repertoire. Populist mobilizations conceive the people in different ways, since the mobilizations are linked to different themes, but what all such mobilizations have in common is an appeal to ‘the sovereign people’. Both modern democracy and populism refer to the people as sovereign, but what does that mean? It is in fact ambiguous. On the one hand, popular sovereignty is understood as the ultimate source of legitimacy. In that sense, power-holders legitimize their political actions in the name of the people-as-dèmos, meaning the whole political active community. On the other hand, the people-as-sovereign can be identified with the collective power, potentia of the people-as-population or multitude. As Spinoza argues, the ability (potestas) of government to govern is always predicated on the power (potentia) and will of the multitude.

The principle of popular sovereignty, understood in terms of the people-as-dèmos, is formulated in several constitutional texts. ‘We, the people of the United States’ bestowed their authority on the American Constitution in 1776. The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens similarly opens: “The representatives of the French people” (“Les Représentants du peuple Français…”). In the course of the last two centuries, several polities have been designed as peoples’ polities in authoritative political documents. The 1949 Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany, for example, presents itself as adopted by ‘the German people’ (‘das Deutsche Volk’) and the Russian constitution appeals to ‘the multinational people of the Russian Federation’.

In all such legal documents, the sovereign people is presented as being the ultimate source of legitimacy. Bernard Yack has argued that this interpretation is essentially modern. Yack makes a distinction between a traditional and modern conception of popular sovereignty. In the Roman and Athenian assemblies, popular sovereignty was understood in a context of direct lawmaking by an assembled people. In modern politics, Yack argues, popular sovereignty is understood quite differently because the people-as-démos is regarded as a 'constituent sovereignty'. In that view, constituent power, meaning the power to establish or dissolve forms of government, stays with the démos, while constituted power is limited to those powers that are delegated by the démos to the actual rulers. According to Yack, the modern conception of popular sovereignty was provoked by the modern revolutions in England, United States and France, and views the people-as-démos as a pre-political sovereign that authorizes legitimate governments. Yack’s distinction, however, does not hold good, because the idea of the people as ultimate sovereign is much older. Canovan has shown that such a notion of the people emerged stage by stage from the Roman principle of lex regia, according to which the sovereign power exercised by the emperor was derived by a process of delegation from the Roman populus. The principle provided the theoretical possibility of dissolving the boundary between popular assemblies and other forms of government. As a consequence, all governments could be seen as taking formal legitimacy from the people.\(^401\)

What is new about the modern conception of popular sovereignty is that it entails an egalitarian picture of political order, since it denies that any individual or group can legitimately claim political authority as a property right based on birth or wealth.\(^402\) The same belief in equality is shared by social contract thinkers like Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, who stipulate that by nature all humans have equal rights and that no person may rightfully rule another without the consent of the person being ruled.\(^403\) In the modern conception, popular sovereignty is linked with equality, both in the sense of formal equality as well as of the increasing equality of social conditions.\(^404\) The organizing principle of equality undermines the medieval, organic and natural community in which different parts of the population have their own destiny and it leads to the modern conception of popular sovereignty. The organizing principle of equality enabled the individual to liberate himself from the hierarchical relationships involved in the functional


\(^{402}\) Rancière, J. (2005), La haine de la démocratie, La fabrique éditions, Paris, p. 44.

\(^{403}\) According to these social contract thinkers, a legitimate authority is set up through a mutual agreement among individuals and stems from the consent of those over whom power is exercised. The belief in equality thus places individual people together on an equal level but they have no obligations except those duly agreed upon. Popular consent does not, however, in itself do anything to mandate popular government, as is illustrated by Hobbes, who favors monarchy.

positions of rulers and ruled. The organic and hierarchical order of medieval society will be replaced by a society that is organized through the principle of equality.

As noted, popular sovereignty is not only a source of legitimacy. Another view on popular sovereignty is presented by Spinoza who identifies the people-as-sovereign with the power (potentia) of the multitude or people-as-population. The potentia of the people-as-population refers to the dynamic of social forces residing in the multitude and must be distinguished from the concept of potestas which refers to power when understood as the competence and capability to influence, control or command people.\(^{405}\) According to Spinoza, as a matter of fact the right of government to govern is always limited by the social forces (potentia) of the people-as-population: the power (potestas) of rulers can never be absolute. Spinoza speaks, therefore, of democracy as the ‘absolute’ form of state. There, the concept of democracy is not one particular kind of political order, but the basis of every political order.\(^{406}\)

From that angle, the people-as-population can be considered as sovereign, but that does not mean that it has actual power to build a political order for itself. Actual political power (potestas) is in the hands of politicians, who attempt to bring the multitude in concord, but the effectiveness of imposed laws always depends on the support of the people-as-population. As Balibar argues, the strength of the people-as-population, both in its quantitative sense (the majority of citizens) and in its qualitative sense (the collective behavior of individuals who are brought together en masse), is a power for discord as well as a power for harmony.\(^{407}\)

Drawing on the ambiguity of the people-as-sovereign, three arguments will be made in this chapter. First, the people-as-đēmos cannot be simply presumed, but must be constituted through political representation. A people-as-đēmos emerges from the interaction between those who claim to speak on their behalf and the people themselves. The đēmos is represented in a selective way and, consequently, the constitution of a sovereign people is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. The boundaries of the đēmos are defined through political reflexivity: the people-as-population may accept, reject, confirm, re-interpret, or ignore plural, competing representative claims [section 2].

Second, in modern representative democracy, the people-as-đēmos delegates its power to representatives who are then authorized to act in its name. Representation of the people-as-đēmos is, however, not just a reflection of the previously stated interests, values and capacities of the people. Political representation has an aesthetic or performative component which means that a claim on representation is a transformation


and is therefore a mediation of the interests of the people. Accordingly, political representation of the people-as-sovereign is partial and selective. In that sense, the sovereign people is a political fiction through which a plurality of individuals see themselves reflexively as a political unity [section 3].

Third, on occasion, for example during revolutions, the people-as-population can form a mass and emerge as a mobilized unity acting against the political regime. In such revolutionary moments, the people-as-population appears to be a collective being, seeming to be present through its actions and is able to take collective, and powerful, action. The ‘people-as-event’, as Rosanvallon calls it, is an indeterminate phenomenon and its clarity can be determined only retrospectively. Moreover, the people-as-event has a strong symbolic meaning and gives rise to different stories of peoplehood. It is in part through those stories that plural and competing representative claims and democratic repertoires are articulated [section 4].

These three arguments about popular sovereignty explain why the label ‘populism’ is intermittently used in reference to certain political agents. Drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire, I would suggest that like any conception of democracy, populism argues that democracy assumes a limited dèmos, but then adds that its boundary is fixed once and for all. Populism further suggests a closing of the gap between government by the dèmos and political representation. It denies any mediation of the popular will as deceitful and advocates instead ‘full’ representation, suggesting a relation of immediacy between the populist leader and the people. The populist claim to be able to redeem politics from corruption may give rise to the sense of charisma, so that the populist receives a gift of grace (charisma) from the people to act in its name [section 5].

2. The emergence of a people-as-dèmos

How can a sovereign people be constituted or shaped from of a plurality of equal individuals? How can individuals form a collective ‘people’ capable of wielding or controlling political power? How can the people-as-sovereign be collective and individualized at the same time? Those questions about the constitution of the people-as-dèmos have already been explicitly discussed by Rousseau. As a social contract thinker, Rousseau argues that the people is constituted through an agreement, whereby participants make a voluntary decision to associate. However, Rousseau wonders if a constitution of the people does not presuppose that participants in the social contract who will form a constitution have some understanding of a people: ‘For a nascent people to be capable of appreciating sound maxims of politics and of following the fundamental rules of reason of State, the effect would have to become the cause, the social spirit which is to be the work of the institution would have to preside over the institution itself, and men would have to be prior to laws what

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they ought to become by means of them.” As Bonnie Honig has clearly shown, Rousseau formulates a paradox: for a people to come into being out of a non-democratic condition – a people cannot be democratically founded –, the ethos needed for a virtuous people would have to be preceded by laws that support it. However, those good laws, in turn, would have to be preceded by that ethos if the virtuous people is to emerge. Good laws and a virtuous people would have to precede each other...

Rousseau’s proposed solution is the figure of the wise legislator, who has the capacity and the knowledge to get the law really right for the people. Since the people are supposed to be a self-governing dèmos, the lawgiver does not have legislative power, but attempts to imbue the people with a public ethos, good morals and customs in order to become self-governing. Rousseau distinguishes between four different kinds of laws: constitutional laws, civil laws, criminal laws and, finally, the morals, customs, and beliefs of the people. According to Rousseau, the lawgiver deals with the latter which are the most important laws, providing stability in the long run. Rousseau’s paradox (good laws precede good people and vice versa) is solved performatively by acting as if ‘the good people’ has a referent already. However, the reference to a lawgiver, who unites the people-as-population into a dèmos by way of a story about good morals and customs, turns Rousseau’s paradox into a paradox of political representation: the lawgiver founds the people-as-dèmos by representing it, while it does not yet exist. But then what does political representation of the people-as-dèmos mean here?

Political representation does not mean a making present of what is absent. That definition was laid down in Hannah Pitkin’s pioneering work The Concept of Representation, where she explains that representation means that something not literally present is made present in a non-literal sense. Pitkin mistakenly assumes that representation is simply given. Representation is rather made, or constructed, by someone, for someone, and for a purpose. Its meaning cannot be pinned down, as Pitkin assumes, but is generated and contested by political claims or ‘representative claims’, as Saward calls them. Representative claims are constitutive claims that create the impression of something being present. Saward interprets political representation as depiction of political reality and adds that this depiction is connected with a political claim. Political representen-

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tation thus means that something absent is rendered present through a claim-making performance. Political representation entails, therefore, an aesthetic moment, which is important to realize because it indicates the constituted nature of ‘the people’. The performative side of political representation is also stressed, albeit from a slightly different angle, by Laclau, who argues that the will of the people does not precede representation, but is constituted in the first place through political representation.414

The people-as-đemos is not a unified identity awaiting expression, but is enacted or envisioned through representative claims. The story of ‘peoplehood’415 (good morals and custom) told by Rousseau’s lawgiver represents a political claim and is based on representation as depiction. The lawgiver attempts to give an impression of himself, ‘the people-as-đemos’ and the relation between the two. In fact, Rousseau’s lawgiver makes a threefold representative claim about himself. ‘Trust me’, he says, ‘I am a true lawgiver, not an imposter’; he describes the people-as-đemos – a plurality of individuals is disclosed as ‘this’ or ‘that’ people – and through link between both entities he claims to be formulating the correct representation of ‘the people’.

The claim-making performance is not merely a reflection of facts about the people-as-đemos, but constitutes the interests, capacities and values that define their identity. The representation of the đemos, as soon as it is claimed, becomes contestable. People will have to respond to the political claims of the lawgiver, but the lawgiver does not have the authority to impose the law. Hence, the apparent contradiction in the task of the lawgiver: the lawgiver has “[...] an undertaking beyond human force, and to execute it an authority that is nil.”416 The lawgiver having authority over the law but not over the people, tries to shape a đemos, but in the end it is up to the people-as-population to accept or reject his proposals and shape themselves as a đemos.417 That is, the people-as-population must decide whether they see themselves retrospectively as a đemos. The ‘self-definition’ of the people-as-đemos is not the expression of an identity, but of a representative relation between the lawgiver and the people-as-population, whereby a plurality of individuals is depicted or framed as a đemos.

417 Honig, B. (2009), Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy, Princeton UP, Princeton/Oxford, p. 21. A modern example of a lawgiver would be the European convention, founded in 2001 and chaired by the former French president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing. The task of the convention was to prepare a European constitution. The proposal (treaty) was ratified by most parliaments in Europe, but rejected in French and Dutch referendums in 2005. Subsequently, the constitution in that form was scrapped and replaced by the Lisbon Treaty, which was initially rejected by the Irish electorate in 2008 but accepted in a second referendum in 2009.
The constitution of a sovereign people is inclusive and exclusive at the same time. The boundaries of the *dèmos* are shaped retrospectively by the people-as-population: the lawgiver claims to know who and what the people are and thus makes clear who does and who does not belong to the *dèmos*, and his claim can only retrospectively be retrieved by the people-as-population, who are, meanwhile, represented by the *dèmos*. The people-as-population constantly resolves the paradox of political representation simultaneously performatively and retrospectively. The populist repertoire makes use of a necessary logic of inclusion and exclusion, as will be demonstrated in the final section, to identify the *dèmos* with the true people and to suggest that the boundaries of the *dèmos* are fixed in perpetuity.

The self-definition of the people-as-*dèmos* is not a single and singular decision but involves multiple and repeated decisions. Words, rules, and laws encounter uncertainty as they run into unforeseen circumstances. As a consequence, new laws have to be invented and existing laws have to be modified or annulled.\(^{418}\) Moreover, the constant immigration of people and renewal of populations leads to a constant flux of new ideas within society, and people may also change their visions of democracy. Finally, citizens are trapped in political institutions and the norms of political regimes that they could not freely will. Not only is the law coercive, but it is also at least partly alien, since the law by which the *dèmos* is founded at any given moment, does not come from the people itself. As Nässström notes, that marks a gap in legitimation: “Man is born free, and yet everywhere he is in chains, and this is what sets him in motion.”\(^{419}\) The gap in legitimation can be a source of civic withdrawal, but it can also be a source of political activism and protest.

### 3. Popular sovereignty as a source of legitimacy

Rousseau’s *lawgiver* is a *technical* name for a person or institution that imbues the people with good morals and customs in order for them to become a self-governing *dèmos*.\(^ {420}\) The people (not the lawgiver) is supposed to be the lawmaking authority. In modern representative democracy, however, the people does not directly participate in the sovereign authority, but delegates its power – through elections – to political representatives who are then authorized to act in the people’s name [see Chapter 8 for a more detailed account of modern democracy as a representative form of government]. In modern representative democracy, the people-as-sovereign is the source of legitimate political power, which contrasts with the *ancièn regime*, as Claude Lefort has powerfully demonstrated.

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In the *ancien régime*, Lefort argues, God was the source of legitimacy in whose name the king could exercise legitimate political power. Power was vested in the king and it therefore gave society a corporeal being. The king’s power referred to a transcendental point: “His power pointed towards an unconditional, otherworldly pole, while at the same time he was, in his own person, the guarantor and representative of the unity of the kingdom.” 421 The body of the king was thought of as divided into his earthly, mortal body and a celestial, immortal and collective body incarnating the unity of the kingdom. The king could play the mediating role between the sensible and the super-sensible, between the people and God, because his power referred to an absolute, transcendental point, while his ‘second’ celestial and mortal body guaranteed the unity of the polity.

Here, Lefort relies on Kantorowicz’ account of the medieval theories about the king’s two bodies.422 The political image of the king’s two bodies is not a simple distinction between the office and the person who temporarily occupies the office. The notion of the king’s two bodies generates a juridical fiction that the king was *two persons in one*: one being mortal individual, the other being the supernatural, immortal and omnipotent king. That juridical fiction means political power resides neither in an office nor in the visible body of the king, but in the invisible body of the king as a being that never dies. The emphasis is on the word *corpus* (body) and not the word *persona*. The individual king as a human being would die, but not ‘the Dynasty, the Crown and the Royal Dignity.’ 423 The maxims ‘the king as King never dies’ and ‘The King is dead, long live the King!’ powerfully demonstrate the perpetuity both of kingship and of the body poli-


422 The concept of the king having two bodies was absent in Antiquity, but is an offshoot of Christian theological thought. Citing an anonymous Norman cleric in the year 1100, Kantorowicz writes “We thus have to recognize [in the king] a *twin person*, one descending from nature, the other from grace….One through which, by the condition of nature, he conformed with other men: another through which, by the eminence of [his] deification and by the power of the sacrament [of consecration], he excelled others. Concerning his personality, he was, by grace, a *Christus*, that is, a God-man.” (p. 46). Christ is human and God by his very nature, but the king is human and God-man by grace only. The king becomes deified by grace by which he becomes another man excelling all others. The king is a *gemina persona*, i.e. a person human by nature and divine by grace, and his power is a consequence of the doubling of his body. This doubling is an effect of the consecration by which the king is inserted in a chain that goes back to Christ. The origins of this chain, according to the Norman cleric, are the kings of Israel of the Old Testament, who have been foreshadowing the advent of the true Christ. According to Kantorowicz, the king’s *gemina persona* is the foreshadowing of the later vision of the King’s two bodies. Kantorowicz, E. (1997), *The King’s Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton UP, Princeton/New Jersey, p. 505.

423 Ibid., p. 272.
tic. The image of the two bodies plays a double role. It enables the king to incarnate the political unity and it points up the fact that the king – and therefore society – is not identical with himself, but relies, for its unity, on a transcendent source.

In modern society, the rise of popular sovereignty has broken the link between the super-sensible and the sensible that was formerly incorporated in the person of the king. The type of king has disappeared and nobody in particular incarnates society’s identity and political power. Modern society indicates a new enactment of ‘the site of power’. The place the king once held remains like an empty plinth. The image of the empty place means that political power cannot present itself as the embodiment of a higher Law or Knowledge. The disincorporation of political power implies that no political agent can legitimately claim a final decision on how to make use of political authority. The absence of any superiority whether wealth, birth, knowledge, or competence, in the name of which authority could be claimed by nature, has been formulated by Jacques Rancière as the principle of democracy. According to Rancière, democracy is not a specific constitution or political form, but a principle that institutes politics based on “[...] its own absence of foundation.” The principle of democracy is based on the absence of any natural title to govern. According to Rancière, democracy is the power of the people and that means the equality of capabilities to occupy the positions of governors and governed (anarchic government). That principle of democracy negates any organic conception of society and once forms of government are no longer seen as naturally given, no one has any more right to govern than does anyone else. As a consequence, individuals come to experience a fundamental indeterminacy, with regard to the foundations of Power, Law and Knowledge, as well as with regard to the relations of the one with the other.

In modern democracy, the principle of popular sovereignty has a unifying, integrating force. The sovereignty of the people is a principle by which elective candidates and elected representatives of the people make political claims. That is, would-be representatives speak in the people’s name explicitly or refer to the principle by means of rituals and symbols. However, while the people-as-démos must be represented as the ground of political authority, the people cannot be fully represented, for the constituted nature of political representation leads to the paradox that “[...] the presence of ‘the people’ is

at once indirect and impure.” As noted, the people-as-\textit{dèmos} that is rendered present through claim-making performances is precisely not the people that existed prior to the representative claim. What is rendered present by the political claim is not an unaltered sameness, a reflection of pre-given interests. The representative claim modifies or transforms, it \textit{mediates} the interests, values, and capacities of the people-as-\textit{dèmos}.

In that sense, the representative is a constituent power, such that his representative claim shapes a people. During the election campaign or in parliament, the representative makes claims in the name of the people-as-sovereign and seeks support for claims from the people-as-population or from members of parliament. The logic of political representation indicates that constituent and constituted power are not simply opposed, as Yack’s interpretation of popular sovereignty seems to suggest. Constituted power is involved in the representative claim. Each representative claim or democratic repertoire makes a claim of representation and therefore portrays the people-as-\textit{dèmos}, and states how, when, where and by whom that power is to be exercised. Constituted power is, subsequently, created when the people-as-population recognize and accept the representative claim or democratic repertoire, accepting their status as represented \textit{dèmos} and ultimately as sovereign people.

Since the claim of representation itself introduces a differential and mediated element, ‘full’ political representation of the people-as-sovereign must fail. The people therefore remains, as Rosanvallon notes, untraceable. In that sense the people-as-sovereign is a useful political fiction through which individuals recognize themselves as members of a democratic society. The indeterminate abstractness of ‘the people’ has given rise to criticism of the principle of popular sovereignty. Hegel, for instance, viewed the abstract notion of the people as a breeding ground for demagogy. Talking about the people as the ultimate source of sovereignty, Hegel argued, merely provides charlatans or demagogues an abstract notion which can be used for particular ends. The abstractness of the concept of the people makes it an easy vehicle for appeals to public emotions and enthusiasms. Moreover, for Hegel it made no sense to talk about the people as a sovereign who governs, since that would suggest that there should be a democratic (or republican) constitution of political power. Hegel argued that the idea of the people as constituent sovereign lacks any constitutional definition.

Along similar lines, the Dutch sociologist Dick Pels complains that the abstractness of ‘the people’ is a breeding ground for contemporary populism. Pels argues that it is

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431 Ibid., § 279, p. 251.
meaningless to use the concept of ‘popular sovereignty’ in democratic politics, since the people-as-sovereign does not appear as a concrete unity, but is always pluralized. Moreover, the principle of popular sovereignty as a source of legitimacy seduces populist politicians into making the false claim that they are speaking in the name of the true people.\textsuperscript{432} Therefore he suggests that the concept should be banished from the political vocabulary. Such banishment of the concept would allow a demarcation between ‘liberal democrats’ and populist politicians, the latter making the false claim of ‘full’ representation. However, the principle of popular sovereignty is not just an exchangeable concept, but, as Lefort argues, a ‘generative principle’ that guides democratic institutions and the way people characterize themselves in a democratic society.\textsuperscript{433} But Pels might still have a point: popular sovereignty can be a useful political fiction, but is not necessary to enable a plurality of individuals to see themselves reflexively as a people. Other political fictions might be equally useful, but have fewer disadvantages.

4. Popular sovereignty as redemptive force

The sovereign people has been viewed as a political principle, a source of political legitimacy. Consequently, the people-as-sovereign can be rendered present only in and through claim-making performances. However on occasions in revolutionary times, the sovereign people is revealed as ‘us’ in action that has constituent power. At such times, the people-as-sovereign corresponds with the power (potentia) of the multitude or people-as-population. In action, the mobilized people-as-population is given tangibility by what the people cause to happen. That phenomenon is what Rosanvallon calls ‘the people-as-event’ (‘le peuple-événement’). The people-as-event is a contingent movement of individuals acting together as ‘us’ (against the political regime as such), and capable of generating political power and authority. The people-as-event is “[...] revealed, for the event allowed it to leave behind ambiguity and obscurity to become pure positivity, practical power.”\textsuperscript{434}

In such cases the constituent power of the sovereign people does not point to an absolute and normless beginning. The idea of such a beginning was formulated by Carl Schmitt who defines constituent power [die verfassunggebenden Gewalt] as “[...] the political will, whose power or authority is capable of making the concrete, comprehensive


decision over the type and form of its own political existence.” Schmitt compares constituent power with an unstructured foundation or ‘Urgrund’, and in his view, constituent power is a beginning that is based not on a norm but springs from willful self-creation (people’s constituting powers). The people are simply given and then exercise constituent power by directly enacting a constitution.

Hannah Arendt makes a similar claim with respect to the “American Declaration of Independence”. She suggests that the ‘we’ (the people) exists prior to the “Declaration of Independence”. The foundation of a people seems to occur from nothing: “[...] the beginning [of a political community, TH] has as it were, nothing whatsoever to hold on to; it is as though it came out of nowhere in either time or space.” As Honig has argued, Arendt’s account of beginning does have something to hold on to, being the public subscription to a shared authoritative practice of promising. For Arendt, political action would be impossible without the human faculties of promising. Promising reduces the unpredictability of the future and provides for continuity in the relationships among people. Honig concludes that Arendt’s characterization of political action as beginning presupposes a community of promise-makers who respect the contingency of the political community, but that Arendt does not give an account of the conditions of the practice of promising.

The logic of political representation explains that there is not a founding or promising that occurs out of nothing, nor is there an unstructured foundation or ‘Urgrund’. The people-as-sovereign does not emerge spontaneously but requires political representation or requires to be mobilized in order to be enacted. It is, I think, important to realize the distinction between speech and action here. Indeed, the people-as-population can act as a unity, but since it can make no statement on its own behalf – as if it were an individual – it is therefore unable to posit itself as a political subject. A distinction must be made between the person who speaks for ‘we’ and ‘we’ as the agent who invokes and enacts whatever is said on its behalf. The East German demonstrators shouting ‘Wir sind das Volk’ (‘We are the people’) in 1989, or the Arab people’s revolutions in 2011

reclaiming political power for the people, required an individual act of initiative. The invocation of ‘we, the people’ is a speech-act: someone takes the initiative to constitute the plurality of the people into a unity. The invocation of ‘we, the people’ involves some representative individual ‘I’ who speaks on behalf of a ‘we’ that cannot speak for itself, although the ‘we’ can shout, chant, cheer, cry, sing and acclaim. An ‘I’ who speaks in the name of ‘we’ necessarily implies that the ‘we’ does not itself speak.

The invocation of a ‘we’ has both an inclusive and exclusive effect: the ‘we’ are included by ‘I’ but ‘they’ are excluded because they object to ‘I’ (‘not in our name!’). The political claim ‘we are the people’ is charged with a powerful political indeterminacy, the claim can and does operate as what Laclau calls an ‘empty signifier’, that is a heterogeneity of social demands that cannot be absorbed by institutional channels, is entered into a relationship of equivalence (or solidarity) and crystallized around the claim ‘we are the people’ (logic of equivalence).

The claim stands in antagonistic opposition to the political regime: ‘we are the people’ (not you, the regime) implying that authority is on the people’s, not the regime’s, side.

The people-as-event may seemingly relax the paradox of political representation, since a unified ‘we’ is mobilized against a common enemy. However, since the people is unable to speak for itself, the people-as-event is not readily available but has to be mobilized and articulated. That is, the people-as-population is somehow transformed into a collective mass so that it becomes capable of wielding political power. The people-as-event is given tangibility by what people make happen, but it does not emerge without representative claims made by political agents and stories by journalists, writers, commentators, and others. Nevertheless, in moments of political action, the people-as-sovereign is not only a legitimating abstraction in the name of which political claims are made, but a real mass of individuals capable of direct intervention in politics.

Canovan suggests that in such extraordinary moments of political action the abstract constituent of the sovereignty of the collective people is united with the political action of concrete individuals acting together as a body. According to Canovan, the ambiguity of the people as both abstract collectivity and concrete individuals is briefly reconciled by a mobilized people (people-as-event) appearing on the public stage. On occasions of popular mobilization a multitude acts together and is able to present itself as ‘the people’ with enough credibility to generate authority. A collection of individuals turns into a present and powerful mass: the mobilized people then has the capacity or power to subvert and reconstruct the political regime.

The people-as-event is an indefinable occurrence and clarity can be created only after the event, with hindsight. In revolutionary moments the existing political order is experienced as fragile and contingent and any mobilization might or might not result in

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the collapse or transformation of an existing regime. At such moments, it is difficult to
know in which direction changes will take place (decline of the political order, its resto-
ration or its creative adaptation). Revolutionary moments can be hijacked by a particu-
lar group that could subsequently make the fictional claim of ‘full’ representation, such
as the Revolutionaries did after the French Revolution or the Bolsheviks in 1917. In that
framework, the representative fuses with the people and gives an unmediated expres-
sion to a directly clear will. But the people-as-event can also be captured by a democ-
cratically institutionalized collectivity, as happened in the former German Democratic
Republic (GDR). The East German demonstrators acted together as a mass when they
shouted ‘Wir sind das Volk’, but the sense of popular unity disappeared when the slo-
gan was changed within a couple of days by those who started to say ‘Wir sind ein Volk’
(‘We are one people’). The change to the political slogan signaled the reunification of
Germany, which for the East Germans meant joining Western Germany’s democratic
system.442 The integration of the former GDR in the West German system implied that
the paradox of representation came to life again as different agents began to make com-
peting representative claims to speak in the name of the people.

The people-as-event indicates that the sovereign people is not only a symbolic prin-
ciple or a source of legitimacy, but also a collection of individual people that turns into
a ‘we’ who can emerge in collective action. The collective mass of people has two faces,
of promise or danger. The people-in-action has the power to redeem politics from fraud,
corruption and oppression, as Canovan argues,443 but can also turn into a political disas-
ter for democracy when revolutionaries make the fictitious claim of ‘full’ representation.
That Janus face of the people is equally present in populism, as will be explained in
Chapter 8 [§8.5].

Stories of peoplehood

The people-as-event not only has constituent power, but a strong symbolic value, too.
Symbolic value is shaped through the multiple stories told and retold about events
when the people was mobilized as a collective and powerful being. The people-as-event
can become a symbol to enable people to see themselves reflexively as a unity. The
retrospective perception of a people that finds its inspiration in a particular event is
also the position defended by Jürgen Habermas. In his theory on constitutional democ-


442 Molenaar, R. (2004), ‘Slavoj Žižek and the Real Subject of Politics’, Studies in East European
Thought, vol. 56, no. 4, p. 279.

constitution-making that continues across generations.” He sees constitutional history as a learning process based on the assumption that later generations start with the same system of rights as did the founders. For Habermas, the constitutional project has a clearly marked beginning. Habermas seeks to articulate the reasonable trace of the constitutional assemblies of Philadelphia and Paris, which we see retrospectively as new beginnings. All later generations have the task of actualizing “[...] the still-untapped normative substance of the system of rights laid down in the original document of the constitution.” The idea of tapping into the rights of the original normative substance is contained within pre-political procedures and rules of political participation.

Habermas’s historical story about the constitutions of Philadelphia and Paris establishes an imagined unbroken relation of the present generation to the revolutionary past and thus selects the claims that do and do not count. Jameson Frank argues, in his book on the American people in the post-revolutionary period, that Habermas’s story is highly contestable. Many alternative stories of the American people are told. Competing claims to the revolutionary inheritance have led to different and competing historical stories about the relation between present and revolutionary past. Hence, the originating constitutive moment of ‘the American people’ cannot be fixed or anchored, which means that the founding story is a political fiction, too.

Honig takes the argument one step further and argues that it is not self-evident, but a matter of decision to see Paris and Philadelphia as entirely new beginnings: “Signs do not speak for themselves. No criteria decide which event is a sign and which is its (un) reasonable trace”. Habermas’s story about Paris and Philadelphia is not a neutral recording of historical facts, but is itself part of the democratic contestation involved in representing the people. Moreover, claim-making practices do not anticipate a chrono-

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logical development of rights nor can they be easily subsumed into a progressive history of constitutional development, as Habermas assumes.

Instead of Habermas’s tradition-building project with its clearly marked beginning, Honig proposes a different way of thinking about political origins with the help of Michael Oakeshott’s distinction between stories that begin with the unconditional ‘in the beginning’ from those that begin with a conditional ‘once upon a time’. ‘In the beginning’ posits a single starting point or time and tends to construct a myth, while ‘once upon a time’ posits many temporalities and has no unconditional conclusion, which means it is less mythical. According to Honig, most historical ‘stories of peoplehood’ have elements of both ‘in the beginning’ and ‘once upon a time-stories’. The plural ‘once upon a time’ timelines make it difficult to identify any single event or norm as the clearly new beginning of a practice. It is in part through plural and competing stories of peoplehood that representative claims of ‘the people’ are articulated.

For Honig, the past does not just offer a system of rights that needs to be tapped into, as is Habermas’s position. Instead, the past has to be transformed or reinterpreted in the light of new political events, ideas, and claims of legitimacy. Claims of legitimacy do not anticipate a chronological development of rights (anticipation would assume a teleological time), but may create or invent a new, unanticipated and unforeseeable political space in which different types of claims are recognized as political claims. These political claims enable what Frank calls ‘constituent moments’, when “[...] claims to speak in the people’s name are felicitous, even as they explicitly break from the established procedures or rules for representing popular voice.” Constituent moments change or break with the inherited rules and conventions of political representation and make apparent a new identity of a dèmos that is never at one with itself.

Every political representation of the people-as-dèmos draws a distinctive and limited picture of the people, their sets of interests, capacities, and values. The representative claim, supported by a distinctive portrayal of the people-as-dèmos, is necessarily selective and views the people from a certain perspective with no ‘neutral’ representation. Political representation necessarily presents a particular interest or capacity of the people as a concretization of ‘the people’ and that leaves space for the contestation or rejection of the political claim. Since political representation is necessarily partial and selective, a political representation of the people always produces ‘remainders’, a notion I have derived from Honig, who argues that “[...] every politics has its remainders, that resistances are engendered by any every settlement, even by those that are relatively

enabling or empowering.” The remainders or unmet demands are marginalized, but retain the potential to subvert existing political representations. Unmet demands of the marginalized can be rendered present through new democratic claim-making practices, which challenge or contest established forms of political representation. Competing and plural claim-making performances undo the purity of a political origin and give shape to the changing self-understanding of the dèmos. The partial and selective concretization of the people also leaves space for the populist repertoire of mobilizing the excluded or marginalized part in the name of the true people (and not just a portion of it). Populism claims ‘full’ representation and uses that claim against any form of mediation. Hence, a populist mobilization makes use of the logic of representation and, at the same time, does not accept it.

5. The rise and fall of populism

Three arguments about the principle of popular sovereignty have been made in this chapter. First of all, the sovereign people is constituted through political representation, with the emergence of a people-as-dèmos at once inclusive and exclusive. Second, popular sovereignty is a key democratic principle which has a unifying and integrating force, and third, the people-as-population occasionally appears as a collective, powerful body capable of exercising power. Those three arguments about popular sovereignty explain why the label ‘populism’ is recurrently used in reference to certain political phenomena and agents. Drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire, my thesis is that populists make political use of the first argument and reject the second in the name of the third.

First of all, the emergence of a people-as-dèmos is an effect of political representation: representative claims are made in the sovereign people’s name but can be validated only retrospectively by the people-as-population. A dèmos exists by virtue of self-inclusion and by inference also exclusion. That is, political representation depicts the dèmos as ‘this’ or ‘that’ group of people and is necessarily inclusive and exclusive at the same time. The dèmos in a democracy has limits: a decision must always be taken as to who does and who does not belong to the dèmos, although the boundaries are drawn through recurrent political reflexivity. People must consider themselves reflexively as a particular dèmos. Since the facts of continual immigration and birth rate of human beings leads to a constant flux of new ideas in society, and since individuals can readily change their minds, too, the plural and competing representative claims such as are made in the name of the sovereign people are recurrently ignored, accepted, rejected, confirmed, or re-interpreted by the people-as-population.

Populists make use of the necessary logic of inclusion and exclusion inherent in representing the people. Like any other democratic repertoire, populism assumes that the

dèmos in a democracy must have some boundary, but it adds that the boundaries of the
dèmos are fixed once and for all and so populism denies that the self-definition of the
people is a recurrent dimension of popular sovereignty. For example, the Dutch politi-
cian Pim Fortuyn argued – in response to Dutch refugee policy – that boundaries to the
dèmos simply had to be drawn (‘full is full’).65 In the populist view, a boundary is just a
boundary, suggesting that the boundaries of the dèmos cannot legitimately be contested
nor even discussed. Populism uses the democratic logic of exclusion by self-inclusion
against those who demand hospitality for those excluded from the established politi-
cal settlement, such as refugees and other non-immigrant border crossers, and against
those who request new and porous borders.

Populism further maintains that the boundaries of the dèmos are marked by the iden-
tification of it with a selected people, viewed either as the ‘silent majority of ordinary
people’ or as an idealized version of a virtuous and unified people. A good example
of the latter is the slogan ‘Our people, first!’ (‘Eigen volk eerst!’) of the Flemish VB. As
pointed out in Chapter 3 [§3.6], the slogan emphasizes ‘our’ and ‘first’, suggesting a dif-
ferentiation between first-class and second-class citizens. The slogan excludes part of
the dèmos by self-inclusion expressed in ‘Us first’. In this example, the boundaries of the
dèmos are marked internally making a differentiation between a true and a false dèmos in
the sense that there is a true ‘core’ dèmos and a false ‘peripheral’ dèmos.

Second, the people-as-sovereign is a political fiction through which a plurality of
individuals sees itself reflexively as a dèmos. Since political representation of the dèmos
is not simply a reflection of a pre-determined identity but a modification or transfor-
mation of it, the people-as-sovereign cannot be ‘fully’ represented, hence its fictitious
nature. The fiction of the sovereign people points to tension between the principle of
popular sovereignty and political representation. The principle of popular sovereignty
gives expression to a general unity, but the concrete particularization of the people is
selective and thus excludes or marginalizes certain interests, capacities and values within
the people.

From both a Lefortian and an agonistic perspective, the tension between the prin-
ciple of popular sovereignty and political representation has to be made productive for
democratic politics. That is, there must remain a gap between the principle of popular
sovereignty and the concrete particularization of the people. That gap will provide for
the unity of society through the principle of popular sovereignty and offers room for the
articulation of plural competing practices that claim to speak in the name of the people-
as-sovereign. Moreover, the gap means that it is always possible for the potential of
excluded or marginalized interests, capacities and values of the people to be rendered
present through new democratic claim-making practices.

452 Poorthuis, F. and H. Wansink (2012) [2002], ‘Tim Fortuyn op herhaling: ‘De islam is een achter-
Populist politicians try to mobilize the marginalized part of the people by reclaiming power for the true people. The populist would-be representative claims to formulate a ‘true’ depiction of the people and thereby creates the suggestion that he is ‘fully’ representative. That explains why populism often remains vague about who the people are, referring to ‘the silent majority’, ‘the dispossessed’, ‘the ordinary man’ and in many other terms. Vagueness of that sort enables the populist to appeal to a larger assemblage of the heterogeneous claims made by citizens and so construct a larger chain of equivalence between particular demands of citizens.453

Populists make use of the paradox of political representation, but do not accept the logical consequence of it, refusing to accept that the political representation of the people involves forms of mediation. On the contrary, populism claims that any mediation of the popular will is false. In other words, populism activates the paradox of political representation as a contradiction. According to the populist view, the people-as-sovereign cannot be at once one and divided, general and particular. Hence the populist claim that the leader is both one with the people and one of the people. In the populist view, the people-as-sovereign is made truly present through the presumed immediacy between the people-as population and the populist representative who is regarded as the true vehicle of expression of the popular will.

The populist claim of ‘full representation’ suggest a closing of the gap between the principle of popular sovereignty and the concretization of the people. The populist claim is, in fact, a continuation of the logic of the ancien régime. While the king claimed L’état, c’est moi and realized ‘full’ representation of the political unity, the populist leader says Le peuple, c’est moi, which means ‘I alone incarnate the people’. In the populist view, the people is viewed as a corpus mysticum (mystical body).454 Just as under the ancien régime

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454 Kantorowitz, E. (1997), The King’s Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology, Princeton UP, Princeton/New Jersey, p. 268. Originally, the expression ‘the mystical body of Christ’ (corpus mysticum) has a liturgical or sacramental meaning. Corpus mysticum referred to the presence of the body of Christ in the liturgy, i.e. the consecrated host, as opposed to his real body in heaven. As a result of heretical sectarians who did not accept the real presence of Christ in the liturgy, the Church was forced to stress the real presence of both the human and divine Christ in the Eucharist (p. 196). Meaning shifted in the corporational doctrine of the Roman Church when the corpus mysticum was designed as a church, i.e. Christian society composed as a unity of all the faithful (p. 196). The notion corpus mysticum as a designation of the church was the beginning of the so-called secularization, because it places the Church as a body politic on the level of secular bodies politic. The church had been the mystical body of Christ but became a mystical body in its own right. The concept of corpus mysticum, after having lost its transcendental meaning and having been secularized by the Church itself, was easily transferable to any body politic of the secular world. Jurists used the notion to clarify the relation between the body politic and their king. As the Church was a mystical body with Christ as its head, so the realm is the mystical body with the king as its head (p. 268).
the realm of the polity was the mystical body with the king as its head, so the people
is the mystical body with the populist leader at its head, and in that sense the populist
leader is the ‘king’ of the people. However, whereas the king of the ancien régime was
human and a God-man only by the grace of God, a populist leader can receive ‘the gift
of grace’ only from the people, but he can seek it when running for office.

Charisma literally means ‘gift of grace’,455 A charismatic leader is thought to have
innately superhuman qualities and to transcend the sphere of everyday routine. In the
words of Max Weber, charisma is ‘[…] a certain quality of an individual personality
by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with sup-
ernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. Such qual-
ities are not to be found in the ordinary person but are regarded as of divine origin
or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as ‘the
leader’.456 The possessor of charisma is a leader who has an extraordinary personality.
Of course, the exceptional qualities and magic powers of the populist are not received
from God, but attributed by people who are convinced of the populist claim to redeem
politics from corruption. He or she cannot become charismatic by simply claiming to
be. Charisma must be affirmed by observers – in contemporary politics particularly by
political followers and media analysts.

People attribute charisma to a leader if they are convinced of his extraordinary per-
sonality and magical powers. Weber places one-sided emphasis on the role of followers
in the constitution of the faith-relation between the charismatic leader and the followers.
Disagreeing with Weber, I suggest that a leader will be recognized as charismatic only
if he – or, as always of course, she – distinguishes himself and if he imparts a message
that can represent the symbolic order of society. While the populist leader claims to be
both one of and one with the people, he or she must pretend not to be an ordinary citi-
zen or politician, because then his or her charisma would vanish. Distance is the protec-
tive layer of charisma, as the attributed extraordinary qualities can be warranted only by

455 Charisma was defined by the apostle Paul in the middle of the first century as ‘the gift of God’s
grace’, usually translated as ‘spiritual gift’. In the early 20th century, the German sociologist
Max Weber displaced the word from its theological origins and applied it to secular phenomena,
2-5. Weber regards charisma as characteristic for pre-modern societies, but argues that it is still
a part of modern society. Its influence is, however, restricted to the different spheres of modern
society, e.g. the military, artistic, religious and political sphere.

Claus Wittich (eds.), University of California Press, London, p. 241. […] außeralltäglich […] gel-
tende Qualität einer Persönlichkeit […], um derentwillen sie als mit übernatürlichen oder über-
menschlichen oder mindestens spezifisch außeralttäglichen, nicht jedem andern zugänglichen
Kräften oder Eigenschaften [begabt] oder als gottgesandt oder als vorbildlich und deshalb als
Soziologie, Mohr, Tübingen, p. 140.
Reclaiming power for the People. Populism in Democracy

virtue of a distance between the populist leader and his followers. Moreover, a populist leader is recognized by people as charismatic only if he or she succeeds in attuning his representation of the symbolic order to the faith of the people. The populist claim that the true people should govern is a message in the idiom of the symbolic order of modern democracy. A populist politician who no longer makes that claim tends to become proto-fascist. In that case, the populist claim turns into the belief that the people-as-population has to play an essentially subservient role, obeying the populist leader unquestioningly.

In order to build popular support, populist would-be representatives claim to have a vocation, a mission or even a spiritual duty to overcome a certain political crisis. Moreover, they claim not to ‘live from’ politics as many other politicians seemingly do, but to live ‘for politics’. A populist claims to have a “[...] passionate commitment to a cause [Sache]”\(^{457}\) and gives his life meaning and purpose accordingly. Since the populist leader claims to ‘live for politics’, he mobilizes people not by an abstract political program, but rather through his personal devotion, which arises out of enthusiasm and hope. Associated with that enthusiasm, people focus emotions of hope on the populist leader that he will redeem politics.

However, the populist claim to speak in the name of the true people and to use their language merely ‘duplicates’ the tension between the principle of popular sovereignty and political representation. Like any political representation of the people, the populist claim of ‘full’ representation leads to the paradox that what is rendered present is not what existed prior to its representation. The populist representation of the people, no matter how vague, is selective and thus adopts a particular and hence contestable perspective on social and political reality. The populist would-be representative claims to be the true spokesman of the people but his claim merely renders present a particular concretization of the people. The populist suggestion that it can replace a plurality of opinion by unity of popular will is, therefore, illusory. The popular will is not readily available, and can be rendered present only through particular forms of mediation. The populist claim to speak in the name of the people (vox populi) is itself a transformation and mediation of the people’s voice. As a consequence, if the paradox of political representation causes any success it might have to backfire on populism itself undermining its claim of ‘full’ representation. The populist claim paradoxically represents the very plurality it seeks to deny in the people. For, like every claim of representation, the populist claim is selective and therefore contestable.

In order to conceal the lack of ‘full’ representation, populism has to produce or invent an enemy within society, for example an elite, immigrants, foreigners in general, welfare recipients, and so on, which is regarded as an alien element of the ‘proper people’ and can subsequently be blamed for the alleged deprivation of the people. Moreover, since ‘full’ representation is illusory, the populist claim can be politically effective or

successful only as a political claim against other established forms of political representation. The populist claim of ‘full’ representation is therefore politically effective only as a counter-claim, since it needs other established forms of political representation to react and protest against.

If the populist strikes political compromises and cooperates with those against whom a political claim is directed, the populist counter-claim will itself become corrupted or perhaps infected. The populist negates himself if he starts to do business with his declared enemies (e.g. political elites). Therefore, the populist claim tends to be undermined as a counter-claim, too. As a consequence, the air of excitement and hope, which can be expected to have caused a lot of expectations on the part of the people, will disappear and the populist politician will gradually lose popular support for his redemptive politics, so he is forced to try to reinvent himself. The effectiveness of populist’s habit of reinvention will be diminished, however, once the ‘trick’ is spotted, although that does not mean that the populist illusion is negated. On the contrary, since the paradox of representing the people cannot be overcome, it will be likely that another populist politician or movement stands up and appeals to the marginalized groups, the excluded persons, and the unmet demands.

6. Summary

This chapter has explored some ambiguities inherent in the notion of the people-as-sovereign. I have argued that the emergence of a people-as-đemos is the effect of political representation, since a đemos emerges from the interaction between those who claim to speak on its behalf and the people-as-population. That is, the people-as-population are required to decide whether they see themselves reflexively as ‘this’ or ‘that’ people. The ‘self-definition’ of the people refers to a transcendent point, something outside society, a source from which political power can be legitimized. In that sense the people-as-sovereign is a principle having a unifying and integrating force. However, the people-as-sovereign is not only a source of legitimacy, but can be a redemptive force, too. On occasion, during revolutions for example, the people-as-population appears as a collective mass of flesh and blood individuals that is powerful and acquires political legitimacy through its actions.

These three aspects – self-definition of the đemos, principle of popular sovereignty, and redemptive force of the people-as-sovereign – can make sense of the reasons why the label ‘populism’ is applied to specific political agents. Drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire I have argued, first of all, that populism makes use of the logic of inclusion and exclusion inherent in representing the people. Indeed the constitution of a đemos is both inclusive and exclusive, but populism suggests that the boundaries of the đemos are permanently fixed. Moreover, the populist identification of the đemos with actual people excludes some of the population from the đemos. Second, since political representation is
selective, populist politicians can mobilize the marginalized groups, the excluded persons and their unmet demands by invoking the redemptive force of the people.

Populism claims that every form of mediation is deceitful and only ‘full’ representation of the démos is truly democratic. Its claim of ‘full’ representation does not accept the logic of political representation, namely that representation renders present a partial and selective concretization of the démos. The populist claim articulates immediacy between the démos and the populist who is regarded as the true vector of the expression of the popular will, thereby suggesting a closing of the gap between the principle of popular sovereignty and the particular concretization of the démos. However, that populist suggestion is illusory, because the populist claim merely renders present a particular concretization of the people. Therefore, the tension between popular sovereignty and political representation returns to haunt populism itself and undermines its claim of ‘full’ representation.
Chapter 6

The Ambiguity of Liberal Democracy

1. Introduction

A number of political theorists have argued that populism as such is non-democratic or even anti-democratic. They view populist perspectives as incompatible with democracy. The incompatibility of populism with democracy is, however, correct only if the term democracy is used exclusively for the subtype liberal democracy; which is what most theorists implicitly or explicitly do. The identification of democracy with liberal democracy dominates current political thinking, and the view is sustained by political scientists who ascertain what democracy is by simply and mechanically applying a set of criteria. Such a list of criteria is developed, for example, by the New York-based monitoring agency “Freedom House”. “Freedom House” rates countries as democratic on the basis of competitive elections, and provides more refined ratings of political rights and civil liberties as the litmus test for democracy. By that standard, it scores some countries as democratic and others as undemocratic on a scale of 1 to 7.

I agree with the minority of political thinkers who argue that the two elements of the composite expression ‘liberal democracy’ are not linked by a principle of necessity. Liberalism and democracy can appear together in the expression ‘liberal democracy’, but that does not mean that there is necessarily any connection or relation of implication between them. According to MacPherson, Mouffe and Arditi, liberal democracy is not the expression of natural affinity but the historically contingent articulation between two different traditions, a democratic and a liberal one. The principles and values of both

traditions were first articulated simultaneously in the opening passages of the American “Declaration of Independence” (1776) and the French “Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens” (1789). However, the development of a link between both traditions has not been a smooth process, but has been the result of many decades of agitation and organization by both liberals and democrats. As a consequence, liberal democracy is a ‘bastard’, the survival of which can never be guaranteed. It is a compromise between liberal and democratic aspects and must be recurrently ‘renegotiated’ through political struggle. The general hypothesis of this chapter is that there exist certain permanent tensions between democratic and liberal aspects of liberal democracy and that they are activated and used by populist politicians in a specific manner.

Both the liberal and democratic tradition represent different perspectives on democracy. An exploration of those perspectives sheds light on some of the intrinsic tensions of liberal democracy, which are exploited by populists. Therefore, the next section [section 2] will discuss both the liberal and the democratic traditions. I shall discuss Locke and Montesquieu as ideal-types representing the liberal tradition, a tradition which defends limited government based on the principle of rule of law. The rule of law is sustained by constitutional rights and liberties (Locke) and checks and balances (Montesquieu). In addition, I shall discuss some of the differences between Locke’s and Montesquieu’s political doctrines. Locke’s individualist liberalism and Montesquieu’s republican liberalism illuminate tension within the liberal tradition. Locke’s emphasis on negative liberty concerns the individual, while Montesquieu’s emphasis on political liberty and political virtue concerns the individual as citizen. It is important to realize the tension within the liberal tradition, and indeed the current hegemony of neo-liberalism clearly brings out the tension between individualist liberalism and republican liberalism.

Neo-liberalism advances the cause of the market as the key mechanism of economic and social regulation, to restrict the scope of government interference. The hegemony

462 The American Declaration takes explicitly reference to the values of liberty and equality, the recognition of popular sovereignty and the protection of inalienable rights: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document. Likewise, the French Déclaration asserts that “Les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits […]” (Art. 1); “Le but de toute association politique est la conservation des droits naturels et imprescriptibles de l’homme […]” (Art. 2). But whereas the American Declaration of Independence claims self-determination for one people in terms of universal natural rights, the French Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen does not formulate popular sovereignty in universal terms: “Le principe de toute Souveraineté réside essentiellement dans la Nation […]” (Art. 3). http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/dudh/1789.asp.


of the neo-liberal commitment to the market has partly contributed to the shrinking influence on political decision-making of the citizenry, as exerted through the designation of elected representatives, as will be explained in Chapter 7 [§7.4].

I shall then discuss Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Carl Schmitt as ideal-typical representatives of the democratic tradition. The democratic tradition emphasizes the principle of popular sovereignty and the values of equality and positive liberty as collective self-determination. I shall discuss too various differences between Rousseau’s and Schmitt’s conceptions of democracy. Rousseau’s republican democratic perspective and Schmitt’s popular democratic views illuminate the tension within the democratic tradition: in Rousseau’s view, the people are involved as individual citizens when they reflect the general will, while for Schmitt, the people are collectively involved as a single homogenous group when they participate in making the law.

This chapter will examine some of the intrinsic tensions in liberal democracy but will not analyze their political manifestations, such as the hegemony of neo-liberalism. Section 3 argues that the combination of the principles of the rule of law and of popular sovereignty contains the potential for a crucial conflict crystallizing around the principle of sovereignty. The principle of the rule of law sets limits to the discretion of political authorities who exercise power in the people’s name. Both constitutional protection of individual rights and liberties and checks and balances secure individual rights and political pluralism. The rule of law as a check on legislation contains a potential conflict with perspectives which view the people as the supreme authority in lawmaking and would exclude any other source of authority. The populist repertoire requires such a ‘popular democratic’ perspective, as it claims that supreme authority resides in the people, and only in the people.

Sections 4, 5 and 6 discuss three intrinsic tensions of liberal democracy, all of which are connected with the potential conflict which crystallizes around the principle of sovereignty as discussed in section 3. Section 4 discusses the intrinsic tensions between equality and liberty, the underlying values of liberal democracy. Those twin demands are well captured in Balibar’s notion of égaliberté, which constitutes itself in and by rights that have to be reclaimed in and through political struggle. The claim-making performance of populism is equivocal. It demands the broadening of the scope of citizen involvement in the formation of political will, but maintains that such involvement is possible only in a homogeneous and united community. Populism denies the legitimacy of conflict, and hence plurality, within the political community.

Section 5 argues that there is the potential for tension between the legal system of formal rules occasioned by the principle of the rule of law, and the substance of the popular will. While procedural standards do involve checks to protect individual citizens from arbitrary oppression, the unintended consequence of them is complexity in the

decision-making process and multiple levels of mediation, which gives rise to polemical
attack by populists against the rule of law and more generally widens the gap between
government administration and the citizenry. Opposed to the legislative process of
mediation, populism advocates a direct connection between the will of the people and
binding collective decisions.

Section 6 discusses the tension between the majority criterion for decision-making,
which is deduced from the principle of popular sovereignty, and the constitutional
rights and liberties of minorities. The majoritarian decision-making rule implies that
the dèmos is divided into a majority and a minority. If majority rule is limited by minor-
ity rights, all people have a right to participate, directly or indirectly, in the sovereign
authority. A self-limiting majority rule implies ‘changeable majorities’ which may lead
to an agonistic struggle between adversaries, who can gain political power alternately.
Populism breaks through the logic of ‘changeable majorities’ through its claim that the
people is one.

2. Two traditions

Liberal democracy is grounded in two different traditions: a liberal tradition repre-
sented by Locke and Montesquieu, and a democratic tradition, represented by Rousseau
and Schmitt. According to Sabine, the anti-absolutist doctrine of Locke can be linked
with the British revolution of 1688. The British revolution, which resulted in the acquis-
tion of more power by parliament and imposed limits on royal power, was justified by,
among other things, Locke’s resistance theory which said that any king – or his
parliament for that matter – owed his authority to the people of his realm who could
in the last resort reclaim authority for themselves. The people as a body of individuals
could legitimately reclaim the authority of the king when its trust had been betrayed.
Montesquieu offers an alternative anti-absolutist doctrine. His sympathies were with a
monarchy tempered by intermediary powers combined with an independent judicia-
ry. Montesquieu’s anti-absolutist doctrine was part of a trend in French politics which
ultimately produced the French revolution of 1789, which, in contrast to the British revo-
lution, displaced the old intermediary structures of the French state. However, for the

Inaugurale rede door prof. dr. Evert van der Zweerde, Van Eck & Oosterink, Nijmegen, pp. 51 ff.
467 Canetti, E. (2006), Masse und Macht, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, p. 220;
469 Locke, J. (2005), Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration, Digireads.com
French revolutionaries the source of inspiration was not Montesquieu but Rousseau, whose ideal was a pure democracy as a state form.471

**Liberal tradition**

Both Locke and Montesquieu defended the constitutional principle of limited government. Limitation of governmental power is based on the principle of the rule of law, which finds its roots in pre-modern times and was integrated into liberal anti-absolutist doctrines. The principle of the rule of law refers to a variety of practices.472 First of all, in its most minimal form, the term refers to rule by established law rather than by casual force. Political authorities are not above the law but must act under its auspices. That minimal definition goes back to Aristotle who claimed that any government should be guided by laws. The law is sovereign and rulers gain legitimacy insofar as they derive their political power from the law. For Aristotle, the rule of law protected common citizens against the arbitrary actions of an absolute monarch.473

A second definition of the rule of law denotes the obedience of subjects to the law. The suppression of lawlessness is sometimes used to legitimate absolute obedience to political authorities, although that conflicts with a third definition which interprets the rule of law as a set of procedural constraints. This third interpretation elaborates the minimal definition of law in contrast to force, and expresses the idea that law regulates the ends that a legislature can pursue. The rule of law as a set of procedural constraints does not say what the legislature must yield, but how it can yield it. The legislature must make new laws according to the rules set by established law and not according to its own whim. Only when a pre-existing body of law is sovereign over new legislation can the rule of law exist.474 Pre-existing rules and standards can be made up of common law – the body of legal principles and concepts that have been developed over many centuries by judges in the courts of law – which is characteristic of the United Kingdom, or it can be laid down in a written constitution, which is generally the case for continental Europe and the Americas. The third interpretation of the rule of law is shared by the liberal tradition. Procedural constraints set limits to the discretion of political authorities so that individual liberty and juridical equality are protected insofar as all individuals are equal under the law.

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While Locke and Montesquieu share the principle of limited government based on the rule of law, their constitutional theories differ considerably. The element introduced by Locke is the doctrine of natural rights (the rights of man) and the rights-based protection of individual liberty. Individuals enjoy inalienable natural rights which are not inscribed in positive law but reside in the created order of things. Hence, a government does not create but only enforces the natural rights and liberties of individuals. According to Locke, mankind forms a kind of community, constituted by its being under natural law, which “[...] teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions.” Individuals are independent of the will of any other man and are free to pursue their own ends and dispose of their possessions as long as they do not interfere with the law of nature.

The demarcation of a private zone of non-interference within which individuals are free to pursue their particular ends, has been conceptualized by Isaiah Berlin in terms of ‘negative liberty’. Berlin regarded negative liberty as the freedom from deliberate interference by other human agencies – by other men or laws or institutions. Berlin’s concept of negative liberty is the opposite of ‘positive liberty’, which consists in the freedom to be one’s own master, to be self-directed and not subject to outside influence. The difference between negative liberty and positive liberty is closely paralleled by two different conceptions of citizens’ rights. Negative rights are those rights which protect the individual from interference by others, while positive rights stress the powers of citizens to participate in the sovereign authority, such as the right to vote and the right to free association.

While Locke’s political doctrine stresses negative liberty, Montesquieu, by contrast, emphasized positive liberty or what he called political liberty. He defined political liberty in terms of a relationship between the state and its citizens: political liberty means the right to do whatever the law permits. Political liberty is to be gained by obeying the law not by violating it, because everybody could violate the law and there would be liberty for nobody. There will be political liberty only in a state where the law rules and where no individual or body of individuals is above the law. According to Montesquieu, the rule of law requires political virtue among the citizens, and virtue is the opposite of self-interest. Montesquieu compared the virtue of citizens with the love that monks had for their order. Just as monks must subordinate their particular interests to those of their convent, so must citizens, for the general good. Montesquieu’s emphasis on civic

476 Ibid., p. 72.
479 Ibid., V, ii, p. 274.
vogue forms an important contrast with Locke’s emphasis on individuals pursuing their
own private interests. Whereas Locke views collective interest (common wealth) as the
sum of individual interests, Montesquieu maintains that the common good requires that
citizens abstain from their private interests. The value of political virtue as advocated
by Montesquieu implies the same idea of the identification of private and public interest
that Rousseau made the keystone of his democratic doctrine. However, Montesquieu
was no democrat, and he did not believe in popular sovereignty.\footnote{Ibid., II, iv, p. 249.}

According to Montesquieu, republican virtue cannot sustain itself and may even
destroy itself by trying to suppress human interests, which in fact that happened when
Robespierre and the French revolutionaries invoked republican virtue whenever it
suited their purpose. Therefore, a mixed regime of checks and balances is needed. The
idea of a mixed regime has a long history and was defended by Cicero, for example,
who argued that the best government was a mixture of democratic, aristocratic and
p. 151.} Montesquieu saw the best guarantee of political liberty not
in Locke’s idea of the protection of natural rights, but in the separation of the three
powers of government – legislative, executive and judicial – combined with a system of
legal checks and balances. Separation of powers is not equivalent to a balance of powers,
because separation could still mean that the separate tasks and powers might remain
in the hands of one person, or of one body of officials. According to Montesquieu, there
can be no political liberty if both legislative and executive power are to be found in the
hands of one person or body, or if judiciary power is not kept separate from legislative
397.}

\textit{Democratic tradition}

Rousseau’s \textit{Du contrat social} represents the republican democratic tradition. It is true
that Rousseau did not speak in terms of ‘democracy’, which he viewed as a form of
executive power, but of liberty in a legitimate state. Still, what he advocated was demo-
ocratic: liberty required the political participation of all citizens in the sovereign author-
ity. For Rousseau, the people, understood as the collective body of citizens, is not simply
sovereign, because the general will remains the transcendent criterion of popular will-
ing. Thus, the people is sovereign only in its capacity as the collective body of citizens
dedicated to the general will. For Rousseau, liberty and political participation are cor-
relates: when the collective body of citizens governs, citizens are free because everyone
obeys only himself. That kind of liberty is identified by Macpherson as positive liberty
of collective self-determination. Positive liberty in that case does not mean the ability of the individual to be his own master or to be self-directed, but the right to participate in the sovereign authority. It is that sense of positive liberty that can be associated with the democratic tradition.

Liberty within and through self-government, Rousseau says, presupposes that all citizens are equal. A legitimate society not only presupposes juridical equality, but also requires equality of both political rights and property. For Rousseau, political equality means that all citizens have an equal right to participate directly in political will formation. Regarding economic equality, he argues that there is no need for all to have exactly the same amount of wealth, but that “[…] no citizen be so very rich that he can buy another, and none so poor that he is compelled to sell himself.” According to Rousseau, in a state where there is a high degree of economic inequality it will not generally be the case that the impact of the laws will be the same for everyone. Too large differences of property would divide men into different social groups so that they would be unable to articulate any general will. According to Rousseau, only political and economic equality are consistent with the sovereignty of the general will.

For Rousseau, the power of the people as sovereign is neither limited by natural rights (Locke) nor by legal checks and balances (Montesquieu). First of all, in Rousseau’s doctrine, individuals must abandon their particular powers and rights unconditionally in constituting a sovereign dèmos. Individuals cannot reclaim their powers or rights, for if particular individuals were to preserve certain of their particular rights or powers, the association would become either tyrannical or meaningless. Second, while Rousseau called for a separation of legislative and executive powers and argued that a blurring of that division would lead to despotism, he did not share Montesquieu’s idea of the value of an independent judiciary to administer both criminal and civil law.

While for Rousseau the general will provides the ultimate criterion for the legitimacy of society, Schmitt asserts that sovereignty resides with the people and not above them. Schmitt’s ‘popular democratic’ perspective is an inverted version of Rousseau’s general will. According to Rousseau, the people will not necessarily exercise their will in the right way, but for Schmitt the people is always right: the voice of the people (vox populi) is the voice of God (vox dei). Therefore, the will of the people must prevail. Only the will of the people is constitutive for political facts and nothing can oppose it, so that “[…]
all other institutions transform themselves into insubstantial social-technical expedients which are not in a position to oppose the will of the people, however expressed with their own values and their own principles." ⁴⁸⁷

Schmitt maintains that democracy is direct democracy, which he defines as an identity between rulers and ruled.⁴⁸⁸ Such an identity can be realized only by the plebiscitary method of acclamation: "The genuinely assembled people are first a people, and only the genuinely assembled people can do that which pertains distinctively to the activity of this people. They can acclaim [...]" ⁴⁸⁹ At the moment of acclamation, Schmitt argues, the people is not represented, but being sovereign is identical with itself. In Schmitt’s view on democracy the people are collectively involved when they directly express their will through acclamation. That is another important difference from Rousseau, for whom the people are involved as individual citizens when they reflect on the general will and participate in making the law. According to Rousseau, individual citizens make up their minds autonomously when they vote on proposed laws,⁴⁹⁰ but in Schmitt’s conception of democracy there is no room for individual reflection.

3. Rule of law and popular sovereignty

Liberal democracy is the historically contingent articulation between the liberal and democratic tradition, so that liberal democracy combines the principle of the rule of law with the principle of popular sovereignty, which embodies the potential for conflict crystallizing around the principle of sovereignty. On the one hand, the rule of law sets limits on the discretion of political authorities who exercise power in the people’s name but, on the other hand, the rule of law is constantly threatened by the need of political authorities to generate executive political power. The rule of law needs, therefore, to be sustained by constitutional protection of individual rights and liberties, and by checks and balances.

First, constitutional protection implies that the exercise of political power will be limited by the constitutional demand that any political decision – even if supported by the majority – cannot run counter to constitutional rights and liberties. Constitutional


safeguards secure the protection of individual and minority rights against political oppression and thus set limits on the discretion of rulers. Such constitutional constraints can be more or less ‘flexible’ or ‘rigid’. The British constitution is often regarded as ‘flexible’ since its provisions can be altered in the same way as ordinary legislation. A simple majority of votes in the House of Commons (the lower house of parliament) can alter the constitution at will, unless there is a veto from the House of Lords (the upper house of parliament). In practice, however, the common-law principles of constitutional importance have not proved as easy to change as have other rules, because of the broad agreement among crown, political leaders and citizens that such principles are crucial to the country’s constitution.

More often, written constitutions are ‘rigid’, which means that they can be amended only through political procedures that are more complex than those followed for the enactment of ordinary legislation.\(^{491}\) The rigidity of a constitution depends on various extra-legal factors. The first of those is the number of political institutions legally required to participate in the process of amending the constitution. The second factor is the size of the majority needed to approve any amendment. The third factor is the need to consider whether the participation of the people is required.\(^{492}\) Those potential barriers prevent hasty and arbitrary decisions which nevertheless might have the support of the will of the people.

Some rigid constitutions allow the possibility of constitutional change through democratic procedures. In that sense, Mouffe speaks about a ‘democratic paradox’.\(^{493}\) On the one hand, constitutional safeguards secure the protection of individual and minority rights and warrant political pluralism, thus setting limits on the exercise of popular sovereignty. On the other hand, the will of the people remains ultimately decisive because political decisions, made through democratic procedures, can modify existing individual rights and liberties. Hence the democratic paradox: constitutional rights and liberties temper the exercise of the sovereignty of the people, while those constitutional constraints have to be secured by the people-as-sovereign.

However, dependence on the sovereign people is true only in states having democratic procedures that allow for an alteration of existing constitutional rights and liberties. The Swiss constitution, for instance, offers the institution of a ‘constitutional initiative’. If a certain number of people sign a petition to change the constitution, then a nationwide referendum will be held. Subsequently, the outcome of referendums is automatically anchored in the constitution. But some written constitutions protect certain

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characteristics which cannot be amended at all. The German Grundgesetz, for instance, rejects the possibility of any constitutional amendment that would erode the essential principles of the political system (e.g. the federal nature of the country), the concepts of human dignity and human rights, and the special role of the Federal Constitutional Court as guardian of the constitutional order.\footnote{Kommers, D. (1991), ‘German Constitutionalism: A Prolegomenon’, Emory Law Journal, vol. 40, p. 839.}

Second, rule of law needs to be sustained by legal checks and balances so that political interference in legal matters and the exercise of arbitrary power which is the result of it, becomes impermissible. In contemporary liberal democracies the principle of checks and balances is realized in its most pure form in the presidential system of the United States of America, where the actions of each branch of state power – legislative, executive, and judicial – are limited by constitutional law. Legislative power is divided between the president and congress (both elected); executive power is in the hand of the president; and the judiciary (the constitutional court) interprets laws which are democratically made by the legislature, in the light of constitutional principles. Those checks and balances limit the actions of each branch of government. The crucial difference between the mixed regime in the US and the mixed regime advocated by Montesquieu is that in the first case all three branches of government and all levels of government are, even if sometimes indirectly, elected by the people.

In a parliamentary democracy, there is not always a constitutional balance of powers. The political party that gains the absolute majority of votes has a majority in both parliament and government. In that case, legislative and executive power tend to fuse and can hardly be considered as separate powers. In most cases, however, the majority of votes are not gained by one party and thus a coalition government has to be formed. In some parliamentary democracies, the power of the majority is limited by the establishment of a bicameral system: an Upper House (or Upper Chamber) checks the laws made by the legislature (parliament and/or government) in the light of principles which respect individual liberty and judicial equality.

Both political mechanisms – constitutional rights and liberties and legal checks and balances – warrant the possibility of legitimate political pluralism, and contribute to what Robert Dahl has called ‘polyarchy’ – a situation of open contest among group interests.\footnote{Dahl, R. (1989), Democracy and Its Critics, Yale UP, New Haven/London, p. 218.} Polyarchy ensures a diffusion of power away from any single center and toward a variety of individuals, groups, and party organizations. The extent to which liberal democracy succeeds in preserving political pluralism does not depend on constitutional safeguards and checks and balances alone, but also on the commitment of the majority of citizens to adhere to those institutions and to preserve the political rights of all citizens. Shared commitment requires, first of all, some form of common sentiment of
nationality, as Mill calls it. According to Mill, common sympathies between fellow men are a condition of the possibility of liberal democracy. If such commonality is absent, democratic government will reflect the mere balance of forces in society: “Their mutual antipathies [of the sectional groups, TH] are generally much stronger than dislike of the government. That any one of them feels aggrieved by the policy of the common ruler is sufficient to determine another to support that policy. Even if all are aggrieved, none feel that they can rely on the others for fidelity in a joint resistance; the strength of none is sufficient to resist alone, and each may reasonably think that it consults its own advantage most by bidding for the favour of government against the rest.”

The absence of common premises can turn democratic government into a despotism in which a majority rules over a number of minorities.

Mill concludes that ‘free institutions’ are impossible in a country that consists of different nationalities, which does not mean that he argues in favor of national homogeneity. For Mill a common sentiment of nationality can co-exist with linguistic or cultural differences. The required commonality might be linguistic or cultural, ethnic or religious, or it might be a shared commitment to the political system itself, which is well captured by Habermas’s notion of Verfassungspatriotismus (constitutional patriotism). For Habermas, Verfassungspatriotismus designates the idea that political attachment should be based on the norms, values and procedures of a liberal democratic constitution. According to Habermas, the perspective of Verfassungspatriotismus is not confined to the level of the nation-state but, can be transposed to the European level.

Such different but functionally equivalent commonalities provide the sense of solidarity among citizens which enables them to live together and to resolve their conflicts by recourse to common political institutions and procedures. Moreover, a shared commitment to such institutions and procedures requires a shared attitude of tolerance by which disagreement is permitted, and further requires a disposition to compromise. As has been explained in Chapter 4, tolerance presupposes an ethos of ‘du al parsanship’, which implies that political agents are adversaries but both are partisans of the common political institutions and procedures. Under those conditions, a liberal democracy allows for the political articulation of a plurality of different views and opinions.


497 Mill discusses Belgium and argues that the Flemish and the Walloon provinces have a much greater feeling of common nationality than the former has with The Netherlands, or the latter with France. Ibid., p. 309.


about (i) concrete (individual and collective) needs, interests and wants; (ii) worldviews, or ‘comprehensive doctrines’ as Rawls calls them;\(^{500}\) and (iii) democratic repertoires.

In default of tolerance or an ethos of ‘dual partusanship’ by the citizens, constitutional rights and liberties and checks and balances will not be sustainable, and will be unable to prevent the tyranny of the majority in which a majority of the \textit{demos} at any given moment can impose laws without paying any attention to the needs of the minority. For political mechanisms of that sort to be effective, there must be a judiciary which must be granted the power to challenge the legislature in the light of established law and procedural standards. Moreover, the judiciary must have a certain degree of autonomy to train its own lawyers and judges. Effective rule of law means that political representatives who act in the people’s name cannot act only according to their own will but must act according to the rules set by pre-existing law. If the law is regarded as sovereign, those who govern in the people’s name gain legitimacy only insofar as they derive their political power from the law. However, the rule of law and the role of the judiciary as a check on legislation also entail the potential for conflict with ‘popular democratic’ perspectives viewing the people as opposed to any other source of authority, as the supreme authority in lawmaking.\(^{501}\) The populist repertoire makes use of that perspective, since it claims that the people is the only true sovereign authority in lawmaking.

Populism maintains that supreme authority resides with the people, and only with the people, which conflicts with the principle of the rule of law that states that the people is not above the law, but must act in accordance with it. In the populist view, the people is regarded as the political subject of ‘constituting power’\(^{502}\) and its role should not be constrained by the rule of law. The populist commitment to democracy denies the judiciary its role as a check on public policies and makes the constitution directly subordinate to the will of the people. According to the populist view, the sovereignty of the people is incompatible with the deferring of public action to legal experts whose job it is to amend legislation. The role of the judiciary carries with it an unacceptable


\(^{502}\) Schmitt, C. (2003), \textit{Verfassungslehre}, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, p. 79. This view on the people as ‘Urground’ has been criticized in §5.4. The people does not exist out of nothing, but requires political representation in order to exist in the first place.
form of dominion, because the people are obliged to submit to decisions made by judges. Populism contends that all legislative power belongs to the people and maintains that legislative power should not be alienated from it. Balancing legislative power by means of constitutional safeguards is therefore contrary to the populist view of democracy.

Populism denies autonomy to political institutions because it is the people that directly legitimizes political institutions. That explains populism’s instrumental attitude to both legislation and constitutional arrangements. For populists (and by extension, Jacobins and Leninists), political institutions like courts of law or parliament have purely instrumental value and are not to be treated as an end in themselves. Populists tend to treat political institutions and rules as mere means to achieve goals, tools which are appropriate insofar as they further the desires and interests of the people. Populism’s instrumental attitude is well illustrated by Silvio Berlusconi who has successfully passed various laws to escape some of the trials in which he has been accused of corruption, of sexual activity with a minor, and of evading taxes by, for instance, extending the statute of limitations. Another example is Pim Fortuyn, the Dutch political leader of LNe who proposed to drop article 1 of the Constitution, which forbids any discrimination on any grounds. According to Fortuyn, the ban on discrimination should be lifted if it continues in practice to curtail freedom of expression. Dutch MP Geert Wilders, leader of the PVV has also proposed that the anti-discrimination article should be scrapped and replaced by a new article in which the Jewish-Christian and humanist tradition and culture is laid down as the dominant culture of the Netherlands. A final example of the instrumentalist view is Hero Brinkman, an ex-MP of the PVV, who argues that “[...] even sabotage is simply a legitimate tool to reach your goal.”

An instrumentalist view of political institutions strips those institutions of their normative principles, which means that political institutions become tactical or strategic means used by populists as long as it suits them. Carl Schmitt has highlighted the destructive potential of an instrumental view of political institutions, for if it is adopted and shared by a majority of political parties, legitimation of political power becomes an empty shell: “Neither parliamentary legality nor plebiscitary legitimacy, nor some other conceivable system of justification, can overcome such a degradation to a technical-functional tool. [...] Legality, legitimacy, and constitution would then contribute only the sharpening, not the prevention, of civil strife.”

4. Liberty and equality

The value of liberal democracy lies in its protection of political pluralism, conceptualized by Dahl as polyarchy. More specifically, and giving greater content to the concept of polyarchy, Dahl has described it as a political order distinguished by seven institutions: the presence of elected officials; free and fair elections; inclusive suffrage; the right to run for office; freedom of expression; alternative information; and associational autonomy.\(^{508}\) From that perspective, popular sovereignty can be properly exercised only if all citizens are politically equal, while political equality cannot be realized without negative liberties such as the freedom of expression, a free press, and positive liberties like the freedom to vote and to associate. Those freedoms allow for the development of public opinion, so that citizens can choose effectively from a set of political alternatives. Hence, the right of citizens to participate directly or indirectly in collective decision-making can be an effective exercise of political power only if those liberties are guaranteed.

According to Noberto Bobbio, equality and liberty are reciprocally related only if liberal democracy is taken in its procedural sense of government by the people. If democracy is viewed in the substantive sense of government for the people, the relation between the values of equality and liberty becomes more complex.\(^{509}\) In the substantive sense, democracy is linked with the achievement of social and economic equality, but then liberty and equality tend to become antithetical values, in the sense that neither can be fully realized except at the expense of the other. On the one hand, the aim of citizens to achieve social and economic equality through government intervention is compatible with positive liberty and even contributes to citizen empowerment, but it creates a tension with negative liberty because it reduces the domain of non-interference. On the other hand, promotion of negative liberty will expand the domain of non-interference, although it will increase social and economic inequality if egalitarian polices for redistributing wealth are rejected.

Further to Bobbio, I consider that the increase of social and economic inequality is not only a question of democracy for the people, but also a question of democracy by the people. Socially or economically powerful actors are often able to exercise political domination.\(^{510}\) Political equality therefore tends to be effectively undermined by excessive social and economic inequalities among citizens. While citizens have formally equal

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political rights to participate in collective decision-making, many of them tend to have little or no real access to political institutions or procedures through which they might influence the outcome of the decision-making process, and that impedes positive liberty as collective self-determination. In that sense, there can be no positive liberty, understood as the right to participate in the sovereign authority, within a system based on equality, since unequal persons cannot have equal opportunity to participate in collective decisions. In such circumstances, conflict will arise between political equality and socio-economic inequality. Balibar has further pointed out the reverse argument: situations of constraints on positive liberty also means social inequality. If the freedom of some people is limited, then access to certain social goods is limited. According to Balibar, the suppression or even limitation of the one necessarily leads to the suppression or limitation of the other.511

Balibar has coined the term égaliberté (a contraction of ‘equal liberty’) to refer to the demand for the maximal realization of both liberty and equality. According to Balibar, it makes little sense to talk about freedom without equality as a necessary dimension of it. The notion of égaliberté expresses the idea of the inextricability and irreducibility of equality and liberty – the idea that one cannot be realized without the other: “It states the fact that it is impossible to maintain to a logical conclusion, without absurdity, the idea of perfect civil liberty based on discrimination, privilege and inequalities of condition (and, a fortiori, to institute such liberty), just as it is impossible to conceive and institute equality between human beings based on despotism (even ‘enlightened’ despotism) or on a monopoly of power. Equal liberty is, therefore, unconditional [Balibar’s italics, TH].”512

By stating that equality and liberty are inseparable, Balibar’s principle of égaliberté extends the emancipatory potential in demanding maximal realization of both liberty and equality. For Balibar, the very promise of democracy is founded on the universalizing process of emancipation as égaliberté. That promise is, however, always perverted because the unconditional demand for equality and liberty transcends any existing social order. The principle of égaliberté can never be fully integrated into the whole of a social order and therefore necessitates its continuous reclamation. The struggle for égaliberté constitutes itself in and by positive and negative rights that are never offered or granted, but can only be forcibly taken. Acquired rights are not beyond social and political contestation, but have to be reclaimed in and through political struggle.

From that angle, the claim-making performance of populism appears as equivocal. On the one hand, the populist demand to broaden the scope of the direct involvement of, and control by, the people embodies emancipatory potential, as will be discussed in Chapter 8 which deals with the relationship between the people and governing elites. On the other hand, populism maintains that people’s participation in government is possible only in a

homogeneous community fostering exclusion. Hence, what populists claim is not égalib-
érété. By way of illustration, populist parties and politicians often embrace the rhetoric of
‘freedom’ but their message is not one of freedom and full equality for all. Populist par-
ties such as the Dutch PVV and the Austrian FPÖ explicitly refer to the notion of freedom
in their party’s names. The first Italian coalition led by Berlusconi was labeled ‘House of
 Freedoms’, while his new party, a fusion between “Forza Italia” and “Alleanze Nazionale”,
was reconstituted as “People of Freedom” (PdL). In all those examples, the notion of ‘fre-
dom’ operates as a ‘double signifier’. On the one hand, ‘freedom’ makes reference to the
tradition of the Enlightenment with liberty as one of its main values. More specifically,
these populist parties stress both positive liberty as collective self-determination of the
people and negative individual liberty ‘within’ the people – the ‘ordinary citizens’ are
free to pursue their own happiness, however they may conceive it. On the other hand, the
notion of ‘freedom’ makes reference to a specific cultural identity of the people, allegedly
threatened by a dangerous other, nowadays very often ‘Islamism’.

Negative and positive rights that are required in order to secure individual liberty,
such as freedom of expression and religion, or equality between the sexes, are identi-

died as part of a specific majority culture and are mobilized against ‘the backward cul-
ture of Islam’.513 In the populist view, the dangerous other ought to assimilate itself into
the dominant culture of the true people. By way of illustration, on March 20, 2012, the
Dutch MP Hero Brinkman announced at a press conference that he would leave the PVV,
which he duly did saying that he could no longer accept the lack of democracy within
the party’s organization nor its habit of permanently stigmatizing different groups in
society. He went on to say that while Islam is indeed a backward religion, he himself
knew many Muslims who had fully assimilated themselves into Dutch society but felt
they were being treated as second-class citizens.514 The example illustrates that accord-
ing to the populist view, the dangerous other must assimilate into the dominant culture
of the people. The signifier of ‘freedom’ includes, therefore, a double claim: populists
claim to defend both the right to freedom of speech and religion and the ‘indigenous cul-
ture’ of the ‘true folk’. In contrast to Balibar’s striving for equal liberty, populists claim

513 In Dutch politics, the populist perspective on the Islam was widely shared by other political
parties than the PVV when a possible ban of religious animal slaughtering was discussed in
parliament. In 2011, the Dutch “Animal Party” [“Partij voor de dieren”] managed to gather
overwhelming support in parliament for a bill that would ban animal slaughter without prior
stunning. The bill to ban ritual slaughter did not find a majority in the Upper House. Debate
showed that the opposition to these ritual methods of Muslims and Jews often portrayed ritual
slaughter as a barbaric and primitive custom that should have no place in a civilized society.
Netherlands parliament rules against ritual animal slaughter. Left and right unite to pass mea-
guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/28/netherlands-animalis-ritual-slaughter.

freedom and equality only for the ‘right people’, thereby excluding part of the population from participation in the *dèmos*.

5. Proceduralism

In liberal democracy, the political representatives of the people have the power to make and enforce new laws but are bound by existing law in doing so. As noted, intrinsic to the principle of the rule of law is that it should regulate the ends that the legislature pursues. Such regulation is not merely a mere means to facilitate those ends but also involves certain procedural standards restricting the means the legislature may employ to pursue its ends. Procedural requirements are, among other things, that the law cannot be directed to any particular individual or group of individuals, but must take the form of general rules, namely that laws should relatively definite and clearly expressed, they must not conflict with each other and the legal system must be internally consistent and, in that sense, rational.\textsuperscript{515} If the law is not a consistent and clearly expressed body of rules, it cannot be used to limit the power of rulers.

General rules and procedural standards enable collective decision-making without the need for substantive agreement about conflicting and sometimes incompatible views and opinions. Michael Oakeshott, in *On Human Conduct*, aimed to craft a detailed vision of the state as a formal set of procedures for regulating the substantive ends of private action and the goals of collective action. Oakeshott distinguishes between two ideal types or models of state. The first he called enterprise association or *universitas*; the second he called civil association or *civitas*. Drawing on Oakeshott’s thesis that any existing modern state is in fact a practical combination of those two ideal types, and that no state has ever succeeded in becoming one or the other exclusively, I would suggest that liberal democracy can be seen as a combination of civil and enterprise association, a mingling which exists in parallel with the combination of the principles of the rule of law and of popular sovereignty.

According to Oakeshott, in enterprise association, the associates conceive of themselves as related to one another in pursuit of a common, substantive purpose or interest. It is an association in terms of “[...] the pursuit of the common purpose, some substantive condition of things to be jointly procured, or some common interests to be continuously satisfied.”\textsuperscript{516} Civil association, by contrast, does not presuppose that its associates must share common beliefs about substantive ends, nor does it expect action toward a common purpose. Instead, it allows associates to pursue self-chosen actions and to choose different substantive ends. Civil association requires of associates only that they act according


to the rules while pursuing their own private ends. In a civil association, members “[...] are related solely in terms of the common recognition of rules which constitute a practice of civility.”

As a practice of civility, rules are understood as formal considerations citizens must take into account when acting and choosing their performances. Rules do not tell associates what to do nor what to say, but prescribe ‘norms of conduct’.

Rather than being sustained by an overarching purpose or interest shared by all of its members, civil association is defined as the recognition by its members of the moral conditions to be subscribed to in their conduct. Those conditions are specified by a consistent system of rules. Civil association does not expect its members to approve of the system of rules, but only to accept its authority.

The recognition of authority indicates a formal but not necessarily a substantial relationship: association in respect of a common recognition of rules, and not in respect of having the same beliefs, purposes, and interests. The rules are not beyond social and political contestation, they can be questioned, amended or repealed by a legislative procedure, which must also be composed of rules and be recognized as authoritative.

Since any actual modern state is a practical combination of civil and enterprise association, citizens are thus ruled in two different ways: by instrumental and substantive rules that require the performance of specific actions intended to pursue goals set by rulers, and by non-instrumental formal laws that prescribe the moral conditions under which each citizen can act and pursue his own goals. The latter are the rules of civil association, which protect individual citizens against arbitrary oppression and must ensure that citizens are treated equally before the law and are just as equally subject to the law.

Liberal democracy can be seen as a practical combination of the two distinct models of state according to Oakeshott. The combination of civil and enterprise association is parallel to the combination of rule of law and popular sovereignty. Nevertheless, the combination embodies the potential for tension between the systems of formal rules occasioned by the idea of procedural justice (civil association) and the substance of the popular will (enterprise association). Since legitimate decision-making in liberal democratic polities takes place according to general rules and procedural standards, the formation of political will involves several forms of mediation: the plurality of individual will has to be transformed into the will of the démос and, subsequently, the will of the démос has to be translated into legislation. That is, if an individual citizen articulates his political will, he has to compete with what other citizens want on the same point, and he might well have to make compromises with the other citizens. Some of these individual wills are mediated by political collectivities such as social movements, labor unions, employer’s organizations, churches, and political parties which will subsequently have to compete with what all citizens and other political collectivities want on all other

517 Ibid., p. 128.
518 Ibid., p. 184.
points. Presuming the plurality of political views, the outcome of the decision-making process will be the result of different political compromises at different levels. Finally, the will of the démos has to be translated into positive law, a mediation process which can take place only if it is willed by citizens, politicians and political collectivities and requires, as noted, a dual ethos of partisanship.

The general procedures required for the legislative process imply that the translation of the popular will into legislation is very indirect. The legislative process of mediation among different individual opinions occasions a polemical attack on liberal democracy by populists. From a populist perspective, liberal democracy does not do what the people want. By way of illustration, the US American “Tea Party”, a populist grass roots movement, maintains that policies of the American government do not give expression to the popular will. It views what they perceive as government programs of redistribution as intrinsically objectionable, and maintains that the political elite is a morbid growth that subverts the principles of self-rule and individual liberty. In the minds of the “Tea Party” activists, government programs of perceived redistribution are corrupt because they create benefits for those who do not contribute at the expense of ‘hard working people’. The antagonistic articulation of populism between ‘the people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’ has, therefore, less to do with the content of political struggle and decision-making, and more with the political system as a form. The populist claim is that in or through mediations, the will of the people comes to be ignored.

Populism claims to state what the people want, in terms of content, particular issues, and not in terms of poor decision-making procedure. Populist politicians often turn the private experience of themselves or others into a political argument. They tell stories of people who culpably live off welfare payments, are inconvenienced by immigrants, have bad experiences with nursing homes, and so on, instead of talking about the problems of funding social welfare, criminality, or health care reform. Subsequently, populists simplify such issues by presenting a single solution which is often expressed through ideologemes such as ‘cut expenditure for profiteers’, ‘expel the immigrants’, ‘more hands at the bed’, or through political practices, such as the launching of a hotline to collect complaints about immigrants [see §4.3]. The populist focus on particular issues moves away from the complex decision-making process and suggests the clarity, directness and simplicity the populist persuasion aims at.

Opposed to the complex process of mediation, populism appeals directly to the popular will. Since populism gives primacy to the identity between rulers and ruled, it rejects a procedural legitimation of democratic decisions. Populism thus negates the intrinsic connection between the exercise of political power and general procedures in favor of a direct connection between the will of the people and collective decision-making, as explained in Chapter 4 [§4.3]. The populist denial of procedural legitimation of

political decisions also explains why many populist proposals in the field of immigration, rights of asylum, human rights and European integration would be difficult or impossible to reconcile with the existing legal framework. For example Geert Wilders, leader of the PVV, suggested the Netherlands to resign from the European Convention on Human Rights, and claimed that Greece should leave the euro and return to the drachma; he further proposed withdrawal from the European Union itself – all steps virtually impossible under European law, but certainly having the effect of feeding anti-European sentiment in the name of democracy.

6. Majority and minority

The legislative process described in the previous section does not specify what rule should be followed if collective decisions are to be taken according to the legislative process. Indeed, a rule for decision-making would not be needed if there were be no disagreement, but such a rule is necessary to overcome a deadlock if people do not agree. From a democratic perspective, the qualified majority rule is often seen as the legitimate decision-making criterion. Rousseau, for example, prescribes unanimity at the time of the social contract by which the state is founded, but majority rule thereafter. The general will is determined by a majority of votes. “Therefore when the opinion contrary to my own prevails, it proves nothing more than that I made a mistake and that I took to be the general will was not.” Rousseau did not, however, advocate unlimited majority rule, since he had reservations, arguing that all the characteristics of the general will continue to be found in the majority. That illustrates, once again, that for Rousseau the general will transcended individual will even if there happened to be unanimity.

From a democratic perspective, majoritarian decision-making rule is justified on the condition that the mass of the people are committed to political equality. On the presumption of political equality, majority rule is regarded as democratic, and if deadlock

is to be overcome the preference of the greatest number, whether an absolute majority or any plurality must prevail over the lesser number. An alternative to majority rule would be unanimity rule, where decisions are taken only if all citizens agree, which would mean that in the absence of unanimity a minority or even a single dissenter could veto any decision. Rule by unanimity then paradoxically implies that decisions are not made by majorities, but by minorities. A decision-making process in which minorities are decisive evidently conflicts with the value of political equality, for it reduces the number of citizens who can exercise self-determination.

From a democratic point of view, majority rule is deduced from the principle of popular sovereignty. However from a liberal perspective, which regards negative liberty as the supreme value, the link between popular sovereignty and majority rule is not self-evident. From a liberal standpoint, rule by unanimity would be the best decision-making rule to protect the private domain of non-interference, because then every individual would have the power of veto. A common objection to rule by unanimity is that the decisional costs are high and add up to paralysis. From a liberal perspective, majority rule is therefore often accepted, albeit as a limited rule that respects minority rights. Majority rule is not assimilated with the people-as-sovereign, which would undermine individual liberty, but is viewed as a necessary tool for passing a law.

Limited majority rule can, however, be defended from a democratic perspective also. The majoritarian decision-making rule implies that the dèmos is temporarily divided into a majority and a minority in the decision-making process. If majority rule is limited by minority rights, all people have the possibility to participate, directly or indirectly, in the sovereign authority (positive liberty as collective self-determination) and to express their views as part of the decision-making process. As Sartori notes: “It is precisely because the rule of the majority is restrained that all people […] are always included in the demos.” If, on the other hand, democracy is equated with absolute majority rule, part of the dèmos is excluded, to become a non-dèmos. Democracy conceived as majority rule limited by minority rights corresponds to the people as a whole, to the sum total of majority plus minority. In such democracy, there are often a lot of concurrent majority-minority divisions: both the people as a whole and parliament are continuously plurally divided. Losses on one matter may therefore be balanced by victories on others.

The translation of popular sovereignty into limited majority rule implies that a majority can become a minority. Limited majority rule implies changeable majorities, with the various parts of the dèmos being able to alternate in the wielding of power. The logic of changeable majorities can enable the establishment of ‘agonistic’ relations.

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525 Ibid., p. 153.
526 Ibid., p. 135.
between conflicting parties, wherein both sides recognize the legitimacy of their opponents.\textsuperscript{528} The logic of changeable majorities defuses the potential antagonism in social relations, enabling the transformation of opposing social forces into contested political power, if citizens and politicians acknowledge that a loss in a vote or an election should not mean the end of participation in the political process. In that case, every division between majority and minority is merely temporary, and political struggle through democratic institutions can be repeated, so that political adversaries can gain political power alternately.

Populism breaks with that logic of changeable majorities by claiming that the people has one will. In many cases, populist politicians define the popular will through the expression of ideologemes such as ‘the hard working people who are no longer willing to pay for cheats’, ‘the ordinary citizen who really wants to be heard’, ‘our people that must be protected against external influences,’ and so on. Such ideologemes do not articulate agonistic relations, not proponent-opponent relations ‘within’ the \textit{dēmos}, but friend-enemy oppositions between ‘us’ (\textit{dēmos}) and ‘them’ (\textit{non-dēmos}).

In certain cases, populist politicians declare that the sum of individual opinions (the will of all) is equivalent to the will of the people-as-one (general will). For example, the former Dutch populist politician Rita Verdonk turned the majority criterion for decision-making into an absolute majority rule that directly reflects the will of the people. In an interview in 2008 she said: “I listen to the people. The majority decides. That is democracy. We cannot reckon with a minority.”\textsuperscript{529} According to Verdonk, the majority of the people is functionally equivalent to the popular will on moral grounds. Since the will of the people is supposed to be essentially good, the minority is not just the group that comes off worse in political decision-making, but is regarded as representative of sinister interests, opposed to the true will of the people. Decisions reflecting the majority of the people are also morally sanctioned. Verdonk’s populist view of majority rule differs, therefore, from Tännsjö’s notion of ‘populist democracy’, defined as “[...] the equation of a majoritarian or unanimous decision-making with a rule by the people.”\textsuperscript{530} Tännsjö argues that a decision is democratic if and only if it reflects the preference of all or a majority of the people. For Tännsjö, both majority and unanimity rule are just two ways of collective decision-making among a set of alternatives, which are not morally sanctioned.

The populist logic of single homogeneity, whether made equivalent to the majority of individual opinions or not, does not allow for changing majorities. However, the populist logic itself can occupy a majority or minority position in liberal democracy. If

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{528} Canetti, E. (2006), \textit{Masse und Macht}, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, p. 220;
  \item \textsuperscript{529} Mouffe, C., (2005), \textit{On The Political}, London/New York: Routledge, p. 22.
\end{itemize}
parties that share that logic possess the majority of seats in parliament or congress, it may lead to a series of policies tending to dispel minorities and pluralism. A good example from Europe is Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary, who claimed that voters had carried out a revolution by giving his “Alliance of Young Democrats - Hungarian Civic Party” (Fidesz) more than two-thirds of the seats in parliament in the 2010 election. Since Fidesz gained his absolute majority, the party has set up a national media board that has the power to impose fines for media coverage that is considered immoral or ‘offensive to human dignity’, has passed a law that infringed the national bank’s independence, and has changed the Hungarian constitution to include, among other things, a preamble committed to defending the intellectual and spiritual unity of the nation and a rewriting of the electoral system.\footnote{Orbán has come under strong attack for his ‘national revolution’ policies, which are seen by Hungarian opposition parties and the European Union as a campaign to entrench his power and suppress political opposition, and as a violation of human rights.}

7. Summary

This chapter has argued that liberal democracy is a combination of two sets of principles and values, grounded in two main traditions, a liberal and a democratic tradition. Although the two traditions have been articulated together in the course of history, they represent different perspectives on liberal democracy which give rise to a number of intrinsic conflicts and tensions which have been exploited by, among others, populists. I have discussed here one key conflict and three related intrinsic tensions of liberal democracy.

First of all, liberal democracy combines the principle of the rule of law and popular sovereignty, a combination with the potential for a key conflict crystallizing around the principle of sovereignty. If the rule of law is in place, a pre-existing body of law is sovereign over legislation, so that the power of the legislature to make and enforce new laws is itself controlled by established legal standards and procedures. The rule of law is often sustained by constitutional rights and liberties as well as by legal checks and balances. They are political mechanisms warranting political pluralism, the political articulation of different preferences and needs, comprehensive doctrines and democratic repertoires.

The rule of law as a check on legislation entails the potential for conflict with perspectives that view the people, and the people alone, as the supreme authority in lawmaking. The populist is an exponent of such a ‘popular democratic’ perspective, seeing the people as the supreme authority and opposed to any other source of authority. Populism denies autonomy to political institutions such as law courts or parliament because it is the people that directly legitimizes political institutions. Political institutions have only

instrumental value for the populist and are not treated as ends in themselves. Such an instrumental view of political institutions becomes highly problematic when the populist perspective is shared by the majority of political parties. In that case, political institutions are emptied of their normative principles and any political institution becomes merely tactical or a strategic means to an end. As a result, the legitimation of political power becomes an empty gesture.

Second, the relation between liberty and equality, the underlying values of liberal democracy, is complex. According to Bobbio, liberty (negative and positive) and political equality are reciprocally related if liberal democracy is taken in a procedural sense as government by the people. But the relation between both values is more complex if democracy is taken in a substantive sense of government for the people. The achievement of social and economic equality creates tension with negative liberty while, conversely, the promotion of negative liberty will increase social and economic inequality if egalitarian polices for redistributing wealth are rejected.

In contrast to Bobbio, I argue that an increase of social and economic inequality too is a problem for government by the people, since social and economic inequality tend to undermine political equality and positive liberty as collective self-determination. The twin demand for the maximum realization of both equality and liberty is well captured by Balibar’s emancipatory principle of égaliberté: equal liberty for all. The claim-making performance of populism is ambiguous in this respect: it claims to broaden the scope of direct involvement, but adds that it is possible only in homogeneous communities, which fosters exclusion. Populism makes the demand for freedom (or equality) only for its ‘own people’, thereby excluding part of the population from participation in political will formation. The populist claim-making is therefore inconsistent with the twin demands of liberty and equality for all.

Third, the rule of law regulates the ends the people’s political representatives pursue, and that involves procedural standards and formal rules to restrict what the legislature can do to further its ends. Intrinsic to liberal democracy is the potential tension between the legal system of formal rules and procedures (Oakeshott’s civil association) and the substance of the popular will. The legality of the decision-making process implies that legislation has to meet certain procedural standards in order to be legitimate. A consequence of the resulting procedural requirements is that political will formation involves a number of forms of mediation, which gives rise to a complex and very indirect decision-making process.

The legislative process of mediation fuels a polemical attack on liberal democracy by populists. Populists claim that liberal democracy does not do what the people want, and they then state what the people want in terms of content, in other words particular issues, and not in terms of bad procedure of decision-making. Populism opposes the politics of mediation in favor of direct connection between the popular will and collective decision-making. It gives primacy to the identity of rulers and ruled and therefore
rejects the procedural legitimation of lawmaking. As a result, many populist proposals in the fields of immigration, rights to asylum, human rights and European integration fail because they cannot be reconciled with the existing legal framework of states, so that their hostility is then turned against ‘Europe’.

Finally, there is intrinsic tension between the majority criterion for decision-making, which is deduced from the principle of popular sovereignty, and the constitutional rights and liberties of minorities. If majority rule is limited all people have the right to express their views and opinions. Limited majority rule implies changeable majorities, which means that various parts of the démos are able to wield political power. Changeable majorities may contribute to the establishment of ‘agonistic’ relations between conflicting parties, wherein both sides recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. Populism, with its presumption that the people is homogeneous and one, breaks with the logic of changeable majorities, opting instead to claim to articulate the will of the ‘proper’ people in opposition to a non-démos, the ‘improper’ people who are regarded as representatives of a sinister interests, such as ‘the Islamization of society’. If populist logic is shared by a political party having a majority in parliament, that could lead to a series of policies that tend to undermine toleration of minorities and negate pluralism.
Chapter 7

Bureaucracy and the Shrinking Power of the Dèmos

1. Introduction

The rule of law has been discussed in the previous chapter as a principle that secures individual liberty against arbitrary interference and enables minorities to express their views in the process of political will formation. The rule of law ensures, among other things, that the legislature must act according to standards and procedures set by pre-existing law. Laws established through the legislative process must, however, be put implemented. The enforcement of law requires a robust executive and effective bureaucratic authority. Government bureaucracy is thus a central feature of any legal order.532

Government bureaucracy translates laws into operational rules and regulations, and it allocates resources (money, personnel, offices) to functions.533 Moreover, government bureaucracies enforce standards and rules, which requires an understanding of what specifically falls within and what outside the bounds of the rule. Government bureaucracy does not simply implement and enforce the law, it also identifies political problems and initiates decision making procedures. Bureaucracy is often conceived as a ‘fourth power’, which makes policies, monitors broader policy goals in the light of existing regulations and formulates new purposes within the boundaries of the law, insofar as experience with monitoring leads to ways of improving or modifying policies.534 The power of government bureaucracy to interpret, implement and prescribe policy and law

532 In his voluminous book on the origins of political order, Fukuyama has shown that bureaucracy has its roots in pre-modern times. One of the first bureaucracies appeared in China in the sixth century B.C. Government bureaucracy emerged unplanned in response to the necessity of extracting taxes to pay for war. The collection of taxes requires a permanent civilian bureaucracy of officials who have specific knowledge of techniques for population registration, accounting, land reform, and property rights. The emergence of government bureaucracy led to decline of patrimonial officeholders appointed on the basis of their kinship or personal ties with the ruler(s), and replacement of officials chosen on the basis of technical competence. In Europe, one of the first models of modern bureaucracy was created in the twelfth century when the Roman Catholic Church developed into a hierarchical, law-governed institution. When the church tried to legitimize itself by formulating a systematic canon of law, it needed competent officials to set the law in motion. Fukuyama, F. (2011), The Origins of Political Order. From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution, Profile Books, London, pp. 114, 270.
demonstrates that elected politicians cannot be separated from bureaucratic officials in terms of a dichotomy between the making and the execution of law.535

It is typical for a democratic regime to have in place a politically independent and strong ‘second-order bureaucracy’ to safeguard democratic procedure. A ‘second-order bureaucracy’ is required to organize and monitor free and fair elections at regular intervals, and to monitor the observance of required procedural standards of decision-making and implementation. A ‘second-order bureaucracy’ that fails to do its job can lead to an undemocratic process based on an exchange of material benefits for political support. In that case, political parties will compete for office on the basis of the resources they can deploy for the personal benefit of their supporters.536

While government bureaucracy is thus indispensable for modern representative democracy, the word ‘bureaucracy’ is often used as a pejorative label and is associated with multiple offences ranging from inefficiency and the alleged laziness of officials to its tendency to over-regulate social life. Popular grievances against bureaucracy are pervasive and are often activated by politicians who hold bureaucracy responsible for social problems that remain unresolved or who blame bureaucracy when things go wrong. The political articulation of the anti-bureaucratic sentiment, which is partly a continuation of pre-modern anti-government (or anti-ruler) sentiment, invites the application of the label ‘populism’. Polemical battles against bureaucracy are often discredited as ‘populist simplicity’ by the governing elite.537

The first part of this chapter will try to explain where the ‘populist’ criticism of bureaucracy comes from. The hypothesis is that the role of government bureaucracy within a democratic order is ambivalent. On the one hand, bureaucracy and modern representative democracy are inevitable companions (see above), but, on the other hand, the administrative power of bureaucracy to derive general rules from legislation poses three problems. First, bureaucratic rationality embodies the danger of encroachment upon individual freedom. Second, the ever-expanding power of bureaucracy acquires the potential to exempt itself from political accountability. Those two problems are potentially troubling for any political order once a bureaucracy is firmly in place. A

third problem, however, is typical of any democratic regime, which legitimizes itself in terms of popular sovereignty and self-government. In a democratic polity, bureaucratic rationality may give rise to a sense of alienation among citizens, which means that citizens no longer recognize themselves in the power under which they are ruled and which officially is theirs [section 3].

The three problems together generate popular grievances against bureaucracy and give rise to the political articulation of an anti-bureaucratic sentiment. Additionally, the third problem nourishes a democratic reaction by political agents, habitually labeled ‘populist’. As in other cases, I suggest that the label ‘populism’ will stick only if the political articulation of the anti-bureaucratic sentiment is organized by agents around the idea that the people is a single homogeneous whole. Drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire, I will discuss the ‘properly’ populist approach to bureaucracy.

Populist politicians are not, to be sure, the only ones who appeal to an anti-bureaucratic sentiment. Since the 1980s, neoliberals have criticized existing government bureaucracy because it produces poor results in terms of efficiency and responsiveness to ‘consumer needs’. More recently, deliberative approaches have criticized existing government bureaucracy for its lack of democratic legitimacy.\(^{538}\) The alternatives that are offered from a neo-liberal and deliberative point of view are, however, potentially troubling for democracy. Both the ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ of neo-liberalism and the political demand for ‘collaborative government’ from the deliberative perspective are at odds with the public ethos of bureaucracy with its adherence to procedures and norms of impersonality, and thereby anti-bureaucratic sentiment is fostered. As a result, new political articulations of popular grievances against bureaucracy can give rise to the application of the label ‘populism’ [section 4].

The second part of this chapter discusses the role of bureaucracy in contemporary democracies in the light of transformations that are taking place in political decision-making. The analysis will open a new perspective on populism. Shifts in political decision-making toward the supranational level and the turn to neo-liberal market approaches by national governments since the 1980s, have uncoupled administrative steering from democratic institutions. On the one hand, regulation has overflowed the domain of the nation-state, due to the important place taken by supranational authorities and the prominence of the market. On the other hand, traditional accountability regimes that depended on parliamentary institutions have become incapable of monitoring bureaucracies, whether national or supranational. New power-controlling practices only partly compensate for the decline in democratic accountability [section 5]. The decline of democratic control over bureaucracies has been responded to by political

parties and movements, many of them new and usually labeled ‘populist’. Such parties nearly always claim that democracy must be preserved at the national level [section 6].

2. Tensions between government bureaucracy and democracy

While government bureaucracy is indispensable to modern representative democracy, there are some problems with bureaucratic rule-making, which generate an anti-bureaucratic sentiment activated by the populist repertoire among other things. Such potentially negative aspects of bureaucracy have to do both with the tendency of the power of bureaucracy to expand and with bureaucratic rationality as such. The administrative power of bureaucracy is based on the specialized knowledge and experience of bureaucrats as well as on official information, which is available only through administrative channels.\(^{539}\) Given that administrative power, bureaucracies are seldom successfully dismantled nor eliminated, but tend to become a self-sustaining political force. The power of bureaucracies does not mean that bureaucracy is an autonomous power unto itself; rather, it is an instrument or tool of power. Moreover, the basis for autonomous power is missing because government bureaucracy is not a monolithic organization. In reality, there are numerous bureaus competing with each other and with institutions outside government, and that competition tends to realize a de facto system of checks and balances within government bureaucracy as a whole.

Bureaucratic rationality is a combination of two types of rationality: formal and substantive.\(^{540}\) Formal rationality manifests itself through striving for order by enacting regulative norms within a framework of general procedures. The goal is to maximize predictability and to exercise impartiality, as bureaucracy allocates public services by non-partisan criteria to ensure equal treatment of citizens in accordance with the law. Substantive rationality, on the other hand, manifests itself through behaving according to a set of ultimate values. Rather than with technical application of formal rules, government is concerned with the distribution of public services on the basis of a set of values. Government bureaucracy is thus also involved in explicit substantive decision-making. The combination of formal and substantive rationality means that bureaucratic officials engage in substantive decision-making under a rational framework of general rules and procedures.\(^{541}\)

541 Ibid., p. 461.
The power and rationality of bureaucracy implies, first of all, the danger of infringement upon individual freedom. While bureaucracies protect individual freedom by their impartial treatment of citizens, they also have the potential to invade the domain of the individual, because of their sophisticated devices for collecting and retrieving from the population large amounts of information, which they need to do their work.\(^{542}\) Moreover, formal and substantive rationality can come into conflict. If formal rationality becomes an end in itself, it inhibits substantive rational decision-making about the values that should be pursued and in effect limits individual freedom.\(^{543}\) On the other hand, substantive decision-making by government bureaucracy risks interference with the ‘mechanical’ and impartial application of decisions.

Second, the expanding power of bureaucracy allows it the potential to exempt itself from political accountability. While each bureaucrat has relatively little knowledge of overall policy, that person’s narrow expertise combined with the narrow expertise of other bureaucrats, creates an organized base of administrative power that political leaders find difficult to control since they do not have the time, energy nor expertise to master the details of policy making.\(^{544}\) The role of accountability is important, because it keeps political institutions legitimate. Every political order in which bureaucracy is firmly established has to deal with the potential threat to individual freedom and the potential lack of political accountability that are due to the power and rationality of bureaucracy itself.

Third, in a democratic regime the power and rationality of bureaucracy embodies the potential to alienate citizens, which means that citizens no longer recognize themselves in the power by which they are ruled. That is a problem specific to democratic regimes, because such regimes find their inspiration in the ideal that the \textit{dèmos} should govern itself. The ideal of popular self-government is frustrated by bureaucratic rule-making, because citizens are subjected to “violent abstraction,”\(^{545}\) where their personal well-being becomes depersonalized through administrative means. ‘Depersonalization’ is the price to be paid for ‘impartiality’, which means that bureaucracy acts according to general rules and without regard for individuals, thereby ensuring equal treatment of citizens before the law and enhancing individual liberty, which is crucially important as we have seen in Chapter 6 [§ 6.3]. However, by depersonalizing the relationships


between officials with their superiors and between officials and individual citizens, the growing formal rationality has also dehumanizing effects on society. As Weber notes, the more the bureaucratic apparatus develops its impersonal style, the more it becomes dehumanized, whereby it tends to approach people as a set of quantitative numbers and measures.\(^{546}\) In addition, an impersonal style underlies bureaucracy’s own official and specialized language, which is not necessarily the language of ordinary people.\(^{547}\) On the one hand, the development of formal rationality implies that when bureaucratic officials use their discretionary power, they tend to reason in formal terms. The language used by officials is often dictated by rules, regulations, procedures and forms. On the other hand, their specialized language enables bureaucrats to confuse outsiders and thereby to bolster their own power.

3. ‘Populist’ criticism of bureaucracy

Two of the above-mentioned problems of government bureaucracy – the threat to individual freedom and the lack of political accountability – are intrinsic to every political orderliness where bureaucracy is firmly in place, while a third problem – alienation – is typical of any democratic regime legitimizing itself in terms of popular sovereignty and popular self-government. The first two problems nourish an anti-bureaucratic sentiment while the third problem gives rise to a democratic reaction by political agents, usually labeled ‘populist’. ‘Populism’ is one of the political labels used by the governing elite to discredit those who express popular grievances against bureaucracy. Although the anti-bureaucratic sentiment may be pervasive, it is not uniform. I would suggest in fact that the label of ‘populism’ will stick or not stick depending on the specific political articulation of the criticism of bureaucracy. Drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire, I assume that the label will stick only if the political articulation of the anti-bureaucratic sentiment is connected with the idea that the people is a single homogeneous whole and that the elite is excluded from the \textit{dèmos}.

Drawing on the populist repertoire, I will discuss the ‘properly’ populist approach to bureaucracy. Populism detests the impersonal style of bureaucracy that can give rise to a sense of alienation. Rejecting the impersonal style of bureaucracy, populism celebrates a personal tie between populist leaders and their followers.\(^{548}\) In doing so, it approaches bureaucracy exclusively as an impersonal organized system ruled by formal rationality.


As noted, the framework of the general rules and procedures of bureaucracy is based on the formal rationality which provides for equal treatment of citizens. Against the formal rationality of bureaucracy, populism favors personalized leadership. Populist movements are often organized around vivid individuals who intend to make politics more personal and immediate instead of being ‘bureaucratic’, which does not mean that populists deny the impartiality involved in government bureaucracy nor advocate official arbitrariness. Populists despise bureaucratic jargon and pride themselves on the clarity, directness and simplicity of their language. Populists appeal to a popular desire for action in place of bureaucracy and routine. Charisma can be an important mobilizing factor of populist movements, as has been explained in Chapter 5 [§5.5]. The possessor of charisma is a leader who is regarded by his followers as having an extraordinary personality. A charismatic leader transcends the sphere of everyday bureaucratic routine and is expected to possess redemptive, magic powers.

Second, populism depicts bureaucracy as an erroneously organizational structure that relies too much on rules and procedures, thus becoming unwieldy and too rigid to be responsive to people’s interests. It wants to escape from regulation emanating from bureaucratic institutions which it sees as extraneous to the people’s needs and will. Populists maintain that supreme authority lies in the will of the people and thus would deny bureaucratic institutions the autonomy to make rules. Populism has, therefore, an aversion from any bureaucratic institutions and procedures that stand in the way of the direct expression of the popular will. Bureaucratic rule-making is legitimate only insofar as it is directly legitimized by the people, which is assumed to be always right. Because political wisdom resides in the people, populists distrust the expertise of bureaucrats which is supposedly needed for making important decisions and forming social policy. In the populist view, the people themselves are the experts.

Populists do not passively tap into existing levels of popular grievance about concerning government bureaucracy, but also feed the idea that government bureaucracy and its officials are alien to the people’s will. If populist aversion from bureaucracy is shared by a sufficient number of parties in a parliament, the danger of bureaucrats taking a defensive stance then looms, because parliament would be engaging in, what Weber calls, ‘negative politics’ with bureaucracy. That means that the relation between the two is one of constant hostility, as a result of which parliament is continuously excluded from important information. Consequently, officials tend to become more wary of taking bold political initiatives or of openly questioning government decisions. That kind of ‘negative politics’ thus undermines effective control of government bureaucracy by parliament. According to Weber, proper control of the simultaneously inevitable and

550 Ibid., p. 851.
powerful bureaucracy is possible only by maintaining a proper balance and relationship between bureaucracy and ‘well established parliament’, meaning that members of parliament must be competent and well enough informed to make ‘positive politics’ possible.\textsuperscript{551} Control is effective only if parliament is positively involved in policy making so that effective problem-solving and fairness in political decision-making can be guaranteed.

Third, populism simply claims that government bureaucracy must do what the people want. Since populism assumes that the people is a single homogenous whole, the content of the popular will is singular and government bureaucracy should simply execute the people’s will. The populist claim that government bureaucracy must do what the people-as-one wants, contrasts with the view that effective problem-solving must be balanced by fairness in political decision-making. The ultimate consequence of populist logic is that – in terms of Lincoln’s famous description – government for the people makes government by the people redundant; participatory and deliberative democracy become especially superfluous. Moreover, the proper execution of the people’s will makes the rule of law redundant, too.

Government for the people resembles what Fritz Scharpf has called an ‘output-oriented’ mode of legitimacy, as opposed to an ‘input-oriented’ mode of legitimacy.\textsuperscript{552} With input-oriented legitimacy political choices are legitimate if they reflect the ‘will of the people’ and in fact because they do so. From the perspective of output-oriented legitimacy on the other hand, political choices are legitimate if and because they effectively promote the common welfare of the constituency in question. With output-oriented legitimacy, democracy is seen as government for the people rather than government by the people. In the populist view of democracy, government must deliver services that the people-as-one will find valuable. Democratic legitimacy is not seen in terms of accountability but in terms of responsiveness, whereby government should be sensitive to people’s demands (government for the people). Moreover, democracy is seen as government of the people because the populist leader or movement is homologous with the people [see §4.4].

Since the populist ideal depicts the people as a homogeneous and united community, the relation between populism and bureaucracy is ultimately ambivalent. On the one hand, populism cultivates an anti-bureaucratic sentiment, rejecting the impersonal style of bureaucracy and downplaying the autonomy of bureaucracy to make general rules. Against the depoliticizing tendency of bureaucracy to turn political issues into matters of administration and to frame them in administrative terms,\textsuperscript{553} populism creates a political opposition between ‘the people’ and the bureaucratic elite.

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\textsuperscript{551} Ibid., p. 851.
On the other hand, the populist attempt to realize the people-as-one also entails a depoliticizing tendency as politics is reduced to a matter of technocratic problem-solving if both problems and solutions are clear and unanimously willed. If the people is really one, political deliberation about the public good is not needed and politics becomes, in the words of Hannah Arendt, a kind of making or fabrication, an instrumental activity dedicated to a pre-posed end. In the populist view, the pre-posed end of politics is identified with an enchantment of the popular will. Policy outcomes are legitimized by the people and only by the people. In that view the substance of politics becomes administration, and thereby existing social problems can be solved by technocratic means which seek no mediation, but of course that requires bureaucrats who possess specialized knowledge about certain matters. Hence, if politics is reduced to technocratic problem-solving, bureaucracy becomes the ally of populism.

The anti-bureaucratic sentiment is not, however, activated only by populist politicians. Neo-liberal approaches to bureaucracy – reflected by theories and doctrines of new public management that had emerged by about the mid-1980s – and more recently, deliberative approaches to bureaucracy have criticized existing government bureaucracy, too. Neoliberal critics depict bureaucracies as Molochs, out of control. They argue that government bureaucracy has tried to augment its own control over its environment’s society through more regulation, but that has produced ineffective and inefficient government. The neo-liberal approach suggests reforming bureaucracy along market-driven lines: existing bureaucracy ought to be replaced by flexible organizations controlled by market competition, customer focus, performance measurement and contractual relationships between agencies. It is assumed that the pressure of market competition will lead to better performance, meaning more responsiveness to consumer needs and greater efficiency. Seen in that light, it is also argued that privatization – the sale of state-owned enterprises to private companies – causes structural improvement in government bureaucracies.

One key feature of neo-liberalism is the crucial role it allocates to commercial enterprise as the preferred model for any form of organization whose function is to deliver goods and services. Enterprise refers to different characteristics such as initiative, risk-taking, and the ability to accept personal responsibility. A defining feature of that view is the generalized application of the enterprise form to all forms of conduct. Hence,

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556 Ibid., p. 455.
the neo-liberal approach encourages civil servants to cultivate an ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ and redefines citizens as ‘clients’ or ‘consumers’. From that angle, populism fits neo-liberalist ideals as the electorate then ‘hires’ a leader who does their job for them while they sit back and wait for the policy ‘output’ [see §4.3].

The neo-liberal approach to government bureaucracy aggravates the problem of individual freedom and democratic accountability. It stimulates an entrepreneurial disposition in civil servants, so that they will tend to focus more on ‘customer satisfaction’ and economic efficiency than on norms of impersonality and adherence to the procedures and ethos of responsibility. An entrepreneurial spirit is antithetical to the public ethos of bureaucracy and to the rule of law, because effectiveness and efficiency (and profit) are the criteria. The lack of a public ethos undermines bureaucratic rationality understood as the way in which bureaucratic officials engage in substantive decision-making under a rational framework of general rules, and it contains the potential for impediment of individual liberty.

Moreover, democratic accountability is effectively undermined by a policy of privatization. Privatization of state-owned enterprises has conferred power on regulators whose job it is to oversee service the contracts and activities of privatized service enterprises. The move away from direct ministerial provision of public services has weakened democratic accountability, which has made it more difficult to determine who is really responsible, and citizens may no longer have a clear conception of what government does.

From a deliberative perspective, it is argued that effective collaboration between bureaucratic officials and citizens may be able to reduce citizen alienation while creating solutions to administrative problems: “The best hope for democratic legitimacy of public administration comes from citizen participation in administrative decision

559 Du Gay, P. (2000), In Praise of Bureaucracy: Weber, Organization, Ethics, Sage Publications, London, p. 85. According to Du Gay, the ethos of office implies that an official must detach decision-making as far as possible from personal loyalties. In dealing with the population, it is expected that a bureaucracy communicates with the public in an impersonal manner, in which the personal values and attitudes of neither the official nor the people are taken into account. Officials must suppress their personal feelings or views and must have an ethical commitment independent of and superior to extra-official ties to kin, community or conscience. Thus, bureaucratic impersonality has two aspects: first, the separation of official and personal concerns, and second, the impersonal treatment of citizens, which secures equal treatment of equal cases. Ibid. pp. 120-121.
making.” From that perspective, the normative ideal of communicative rationality is often presented as a better means to create responsible and reflective bureaucratic officials focused on dialogue with citizens. The concept of communicative rationality is borrowed from Habermas, who distinguishes communicative rationality from instrumental (or strategic) rationality by the specific way individuals seek to communicate with one another. In the communicative understanding of rationality, what is crucial is not the efficient realization of stated aims but deliberation according to fair procedures. Proper procedures facilitate and secure a free exchange of views and opinions about problems and solutions, eventually leading to consensus. In such a deliberative setting, solutions to problems have to be worked out under procedural constraints that ideally make a domination-free-dialogue possible.

In Faktizität und Geltung, Habermas suggests that citizens and bureaucratic officials may each use communicative reasoning. According to Habermas, the practice of administrative decision making can never be strictly instrumental. Administrative decisions inevitably evoke normative questions which “[…] cannot be answered from the standpoint of effectiveness, but demand that normative reasons be dealt with rationally.” For those who propose a further democratization of bureaucracy, Habermas’s understanding of administrative decision-making allows for a more direct form of democratic deliberation between citizens and state administration. Kelly, for instance, links communicative power to government bureaucracy through two sources. On the input side of the decision making process, positive law is created through procedures that bring to bear political will formation from the public sphere on legislative deliberation. Such laws create the possibilities and set the limits of legitimate administrative action. On the output side, the discretionary power of bureaucratic officials can be linked to the public by direct participation of the citizens in administrative decision making. Ideally, deliberation on the output side will be based on justifications acceptable to those affected by administrative decision making.

The aim of the deliberative view of public administration is to seek a bottom-up form of legitimation by involving citizens at all levels of the policy-making process (policy development, planning and implementation). As Warren notes, the deliberative strategy “[…] amounts to generating legitimacy ‘locally’ – issue by issue, policy by policy, and constituency by constituency.” In that way, bureaucratic structures make it possible to produce results having public value. Kelly argues that over the past decades there has already been development in practice toward collaboration between citizens and administrators and that such development should be further encouraged. In collaborative government, bureaucracies are open and involve themselves in dialogue with citizens in a deliberative setting. That kind of collaboration between citizens and administrators, he argues, will make government bureaucracy more responsive and efficient. In addition, the deliberative perspective on public administration argues that the unequal power that follows from bureaucratic expertise, experience and information can and should be counterbalanced by citizen empowerment.

However, the deliberative perspective can be rebutted on four grounds. First of all, ‘collaborative government’ has the potential for the impediment of individual freedom because it deviates too much from the formal rationality of impartiality. As Bartels has argued, “[…] face to face interaction […] can promote inequality and constrain individual freedom through unconstrained substantive rationality.”

Second, there appears to be fundamental tension between administrative discretion and the democratic legitimacy of administrative power. In modern representative democracy the doctrine of ministerial responsibility means that the minister is accountable to parliament for the actions of his department, while the body of MP’s are accountable to the electorate or demos. The political demand for ‘collaborative government’ does seem at odds with an ethos in which officials are expected to be the disinterested and anonymous servants of democratically accountable ministers. The direct engagement of bureaucrats with citizens and social groups creates therefore a tension with democratic accountability.

Third, if solutions are worked out under procedural constraints that guarantee a fair deliberative setting, another problem emerges. In such cases, collaborative government does not necessarily enhance equality of power between citizens and bureaucrats. In a deliberative setting of collaborative government, solutions to problems have to be worked out under procedural constraints. Realizing a fair deliberative setting between

citizens and bureaucrats requires, however, new forms of supervision. There will be the need for a ‘second order’ bureaucracy which monitors the rule-following and actual fairness of the bureaucratic organizations that develop and implement policies in collaboration with social groups. What will be likely to happen is that bureaucrats develop a ‘second-order expertise and experience’ on deliberative procedures and relevant files. There will then be a furthering of communicative rationality in public administration. In other words, more contact and dialogue between bureaucrats on the one hand and social groups and citizens on the other hand might well make bureaucracy even more powerful. As a consequence, the problem of democratic accountability might even apply more strongly to a collaborative form of government.

Fourth, cooperative government will generate the danger of a new ‘citizen elite’, because it will tend to afford privilege to deliberatively strong, well-educated citizens with a lot of free time. Citizens who feel so alienated by government that they support populists will probably not participate in collaborative government, a hypothesis supported by empirical studies in political science which have shown that seemingly regardless of country or period of investigation, the better or more highly educated are more likely to vote and to participate in politics, and they will have higher levels of political engagement than the less educated.\(^571\) By way of illustration, in a recent study Bovens and Wille have called attention to developments in the Netherlands. They concluded that well-educated individuals dominate every political venue in the Netherlands: “Their voices resonate stronger in the ballot box, are heard more loudly in campaigns for participation and protest, and are absolutely dominant in interest groups, deliberative settings, Parliament and Cabinet.”\(^572\) They go on to show that “The less educated […] have virtually disappeared from most layers of the participation pyramid.”\(^573\)

To conclude, the neo-liberal approach to bureaucracy aims to reform it in the direction of market mechanisms, while the deliberative approach aims to reform bureaucracy in the direction of social engagement and public participation. Both proposals for reform suggest solutions to or at least, the alleviation of the above-mentioned problems of bureaucracy, but in fact might rather aggravate some of its problems, because both approaches can be in tension with the bureaucratic ethos of impartiality and both threaten the impediment of individual liberty and the lessening of democratic accountability. Additionally, the problem of democratic accountability will apply more strongly to a collaborative government due to the development of a ‘second order’ bureaucracy, and the deliberative approach will privilege the ‘citizen elite’ who participate in

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\(^{573}\) Ibid., p. 417.
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collaborative government. As a result, anti-bureaucratic sentiment will not be diminished, and might even increase. Both approaches could foster the new political articulations of popular grievances against bureaucracy, which could lead to the application of the label ‘populism’ to those expressing anti-bureaucratic sentiment.

4. The incapability of parliament to control bureaucracy

In modern representative democracy, traditional mechanisms of accountability have depended on parliamentary institutions. In that view, as Weber has noted, control of the inevitably powerful resulting bureaucracy requires a well-established parliament with the proper instruments to effectively control government bureaucracy. In contemporary democratic regimes however, parliamentary institutions have become incapable of effectively monitoring the services delivered by bureaucratic institutions. That development offers a new perspective on populism, as will be explained in section 6.

The weakness of parliamentary control is due to two developments, those being the shift in political decision-making from the national towards the supranational level and the choice of a concrete set of public policies advocated by neo-liberal ideology. The developments are interconnected. On the one hand, the proliferation of new information technologies, changes in transportation technology and the mushrooming of global interdependence fostered by transnational issues (e.g. environmental pollution, the drugs trade, terrorism, migration, currency crises) has contributed to a reallocation of political decision-making from national to supranational collectivities like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, or the European Union. The increasing global interdependence of economies, communication and transportation has often been covered by the word ‘globalization’.

On the other hand, national parliaments have been active participants in their own demise by adopting neo-liberal principles. Neo-liberal ideology views the globalizing


of markets as an indispensable tool for the realization of a better world. During the 1990s the neo-liberal commitment to the market as the key mechanism of economic and social regulation gradually became hegemonic throughout the world. There has since been a confluence of vested political parties that accept the principles of neo-liberalism, which does not mean that the ideologies of all parties are identical but does imply that the ideologies of the parties are functionally compatible, that they accept the common ideological points of neo-liberalism without dispute. Neo-liberalism’s dominance is reflected by the broad worldwide adoption of at least some part of the corpus of neo-liberal policies and the neo-liberal agenda of powerful economic institutions like IMF and World Bank, which have imposed so-called structural adjustment programs and international free-trade agreements in return for loans.577

Globalization is therefore, as Jacques Derrida has argued, an inherently ambiguous concept. On the one hand, globalization refers to modes of techno-scientific exchange – the Internet, academic research – that contribute to fundamental changes in the spatial and temporal contours of social existence. Technological developments of globalization reduce the time necessary to connect discrete geographical locations. Changes in the temporality of human activity also change experiences of space. According to Derrida, the circulation of individuals, commodities, and modes of production that is being opened up in a more or less regulated way, as well the practice of international law, seemingly point to an ideal of globalization.578 However, that euphoric image conceals a growing imbalance in wealth, and dissimates the appropriation of economic, technological and military power by a small number of states and corporations.

The doctrine of globalization has often been used by proponents of neo-liberalism to argue that ‘there is no alternative’ to free markets and free trade. According to Derrida, the neo-liberal hegemony “[...] promotes powers that are neither national and sovereign states, or supranational states, this time in the sense of corporations or new figures of the concentration of capital.”579 The capacity of national governments to act independently on social and economic matters is, therefore, severely limited. Corporations or ‘global firms’ as Colin Crouch calls them, are not rooted in a nation state but operate all over the world. Owners of global firms threaten to move investment or factories to other countries if government policy does not suit them. Therefore, global firms will have access to governments, and influence the policies pursued by them, more effectively than citizens.580 According to Noreena Hertz, the most effective way to keep corporations in check is thus not to cast one’s vote at the ballot box, but to do so at the super-

579 Ibid., p. 373.
market or at a shareholders meeting, because corporations tend to respond when they are provoked by consumer unrest and shareholder activism. Hertz concludes that consumers and shareholder activists have the power to demand that corporations deliver in a way that governments cannot, or choose not to do.581

Global interdependence of economies, communication and transportation has contributed to a shift in processes of decision-making. Institutions are developed which are above the nation-state level (supranational institutions), and they act together with the nation to develop policies. That change has led to a growing need for coordination among different agents and levels of decision-making, while at the same time conflicts arise between the different political communities, such as between the European and national levels. The reallocation of political decision-making from the national to the supranational level empowers powerful new bureaucratic institutions, which are non-democratic, and if it is not countered by democracy at its own supranational level, leads to an increase in the dominance of executive power in politics and of diplomatic channels in decision-making.

The shifts in processes of decision-making have a severe impact on national parliaments. In particular, membership of the European Union imposes severe constraints on the political autonomy of national parliaments. The European integration process empowers bureaucratic institutions like the European Commission, while each member state needs to take ever more account of the political positions of governments of other countries, the number of which is increasing. The European Commission is not an executive authority but a bureaucratic institution that applies, coordinates and arbitrates a whole ensemble of regulatory practices. The EU Commissioners who are charged with international negotiations act more as strong agencies of regulation than as agents of a relatively weak government.

The EU’s standard decision-making mechanism entails co-decision, wherein the directly elected European Parliament must work together with the Council of Ministers (governments of the EU countries) to approve EU legislation, while the Commission drafts and implements the legislation. A legislative act of the European Union is a directive, which should be transposed by member states into their national law. Apart from EU directives that require national transposition, national legislation can also be indirectly shaped or influenced by intergovernmental policy coordination.582 However, it must be emphasized that the famous ‘80 percent’ prediction made by the former Commission President Jacques Delors in the late 1980s, referring to the share of legislation that would flow from Brussels has proven to be wrong. Research has shown that the share is much lower. For example, the share of EU-inspired legislation enacted by the

German Bundestag has been doubled since the mid-1980s, but 39 percent of the laws in the period between 2002 and 2005 were influenced by a ‘European impulse’. In Sweden 20 percent of the Riksdag’s legislation in the period between 1998 and 2003 was related to binding EU legislation, with an additional 10 percent related to the EU in some way.\(^{583}\)

Moreover, the power of national parliaments has been hollowed out by the turn to neo-liberal policies of deregulation, liberalization and privatization, which has already been discussed here. Deregulation means the reduction or elimination of government regulations that constrain the free market, the dismantling of controls, the reduction of administrative formalities, and simplification of administrative procedures. Liberalization is a policy of breaking monopolistic or dominant market positions to encourage and facilitate greater contestability in the market.\(^{584}\) Additionally, the relative success of neo-liberal approaches to government bureaucracy has limited democratic control over bureaucracy.

Neo-liberal policies already indicate that the neo-liberal attempt to depoliticize the market is an illusion. The free market of neo-liberalism’s laissez-faire ideology is a political construct, neither originally given nor ever completely attained, although it must be intensively administered and managed. Michel Foucault notes: “Neo-liberalism should not therefore be identified with laissez-faire, but rather with permanent vigilance, activity and intervention.”\(^{585}\) According to Foucault, the novelty of neo-liberalism, in contrast to classical liberalism, consists in an interventionist state. The free competitive market must be constituted and kept alive by political intervention, that is, the state must govern for the needs of a competitive market, and that requires the devising of an active social policy to create the conditions for it. The aim to create free, or freer markets requires reregulation, which in turn empowers bureaucratic organizations. Governments may perform actual deregulation, but as Steven Vogel has argued, “[…] in most cases of ‘deregulation’, governments have combined liberalization [the introduction of more competition within a market, TH] with reregulation, the reformulation of old rules and the creation of new ones.”\(^{586}\)

The limits to democratic control at nation-state level, due to globalization, European integration, the turn to market-focused ideology, and the relative success of new public

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\(^{583}\) Ibid.


management, has been conceptualized by several scholars as a momentous shift from ‘government to governance’ and the possibility of ‘governing without government’. Governance as a particular style of governing refers to “[...] sustaining co-ordination and coherence among a wide variety of agents with different purposes and objectives and institutions, corporate interests, civil society, and transnational governments.” Governments are engaged in collaborative relations with various non-public bodies such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and firms. In particular, ‘multi-level governance’ – a concept originally coined to portray the different governing levels in the European Union (subnational, national and European) – implies cooperative rather than hierarchical relations between the different agents at different governmental levels.

According to governance theory, the passage from government to governance represents an attempt to supply answers to the mounting political problems faced by representative democracies imputed to the neo-liberal reforms of welfare institutions and globalization of markets. Thus, governance is not a value neutral concept. What is considered to be good governance refers to a particular normative framework. What has often been portrayed as a shift from ‘government to governance’ entails collaborative policy making by different technical bodies forming networks. From that perspective, ‘governance’ becomes the name of a form of government that could replace politics – deliberation and bargaining between the representatives of different interests – by widely disseminated techniques of management, and becomes, at best, governance for the people.

Some scholars have argued that the credibility of such bodies is justifiable because of their problem-solving expertise, their ability to deliver public goods and services effectively and efficiently. In their arguments, such scholars propose an alternative mode of legitimacy, namely ‘output-oriented legitimacy’. From a democratic point of view, conceiving of the legitimacy of governance arrangements in terms of the quality of outputs is problematic, because it denies citizens the opportunity to influence policies. It tends to replace the influence of the dèmos as exerted through the designation of elected representatives by influence tied to technical expertise. That style of governing depoliticizes political questions which implies that they are reallocated from the arenas of democratic

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contestation to arenas governed by technical bureaucratic bodies, like expert committees, or regulators of economic markets. The depoliticization of governance arrangements is due not only to elite behavior, but also to a general lack of publicity, which inhibits the identification of conflicting agents and their actions.\(^{592}\) It can raise important accountability problems too, because political accountability presupposes the ability to identify agents who can be sanctioned, whether positively or negatively.

While democratic accountability is in decline and parliamentary institutions are increasingly incapable of controlling bureaucratic organizations, the historian John Keane has argued that manifold power-controlling practices have developed rapidly beneath and beyond state borders since 1945. For Keane, that development means that the very structure of contemporary democracy is changing. A new form of democracy is emerging which he terms ‘monitory democracy’: “What is distinctive about this new historical type of democracy”, Keane proposes, “[...] is the way all fields of social and political life come to be scrutinized, not just by the standard machinery of representative democracy but by a whole host of non-party, extra-parliamentary and often unelected bodies operating within, underneath and beyond the boundaries of territorial states [Keane’s italics, TH].”\(^{593}\) Keane provides an enormous list of power-monitoring inventions to illustrate the shifting nature of democratic politics. Among power-monitoring practices are public integrity commissions, judicial activism, public interest litigation, citizen juries, independent public inquiries, ombudsmen, consumer councils, think tanks, novel forms of media scrutiny, human rights organizations, summits, democratic audits, and expert councils.\(^{594}\)

While I acknowledge the trends Keane identifies, I disagree that all such practices collectively constitute something coherent to be considered as a new form of democracy. Some of the practices covered by the concept of ‘monitory democracy’ have a genuine monitoring aspect. For example, independent public inquiries and ombudsmen make it easier for citizens to discover what governments are doing and therefore easier to control them. But other changes are quite different. Some of the practices mentioned by Keane have nothing to do with democratic monitoring at all but represent a simple transfer of power away from existing representative institutions to other bodies, most of them unaccountable. For example, intergovernmental summits (EU, G7/G8) are rather modes of administration and coordination between countries, based on institutionalized systems of regulation, than any extension of democracy. The concept ‘monitory democracy’ is, therefore, a misnomer. Some of its supposed practices are power-controlling


\(^{594}\) Ibid., p. xxvii.
and may function as compensation for the erosion of representative democracy, but other practices mentioned by Keane represent the regulatory practices of unaccountable, often bureaucratic bodies.

An alternative to Keane’s ‘monitory democracy’ is Rosanvall’s concept of ‘counter-democracy. Rosanvall assembles power-controlling practices as ‘counter-democracy’, a dimension of democracy which includes a range of more or less organized practices of the power of oversight, prevention and judgment by which society exerts pressure on its rulers. According to Rosanvall, the vitality of democracy rests both on institutionalized forms of political participation – especially elections – and on forms of counter-democracy through which citizens dissent, protest and correct [see also § 8.3]. However, the problem with his concept of counter-democracy is that it remains linked to the electoral system at the nation-state level. From a democratic point of view, Rosanvall’s notion of counter-democracy must be broadened to include power-controlling practices at the supra-national level too, because supranational authorities are taking an increasingly important place in the decision-making process. Power-controlling activities can be linked, for example, to Daniele Archibugi’s and David Held’s conception of ‘cosmopolitan democracy’. According to Archibugi and Held, the concept of cosmopolitan democracy comprehends the theoretic attempts and political experimentations aimed at expanding democracy beyond its traditional state-centered level. Among other things, their conception of cosmopolitan democracy envisages that every democratic political regime should accept monitoring from both internal and external sources. The external sources should include, for example, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) such as the United Nations, the Human Rights Council or the Council of Europe, and NGOs, such as Amnesty International. 

5. Populism: defending democracy

In contemporary democracy, the decline of traditional accountability mechanisms has only partly been compensated by new power monitoring practices at the supra-national level. The lack of democratic accountability combined with a lack of transparency in decision-making within bureaucratic institutions at and above the level of the nation-state opens the door for movements or parties which wish to reclaim the power of the démос. In Europe, such parties are often labeled ‘populist’ by those politicians who

embrace a furthering of the European integration process or who favor neo-liberal principles. The label ‘populism’ is then used by political agents to condemn those parties which criticize the European Union or neo-liberal reforms. The use of the label ‘populism’ is often connected with the political slogan ‘there is no alternative’. It is then argued that ‘the anti-EU rhetoric’, ‘Euro-skepticism’ or ‘the obstruction of reform of the labor market’ ascribed to the protesting parties is not ‘realistic’. By way of illustration, Alexander Pechtold, leader of the Dutch party D66, recurrently labeled specific political opponents ‘populist’. He argued that populism is ‘almost criminal’, because populist politicians “[…] dare not tell people the true story about their pensions, the labor market, Europe.”

Political agents who express ideas about such issues that are different from what D66 thinks are denigrated as showing ‘populist backwardness’. Those political agents who are labeled ‘populist’ do not remain indifferent but act in response to the labeler and reverse the rhetoric, saying that they are serving the interests of the people, which is what democrats should do, and that is why they are critical of the direction the European Union or various neo-liberal reforms have taken.

The label ‘populism’ can be attached to various political agents who criticize the European Union or who deprecate neo-liberal reforms, but the label sticks only in some cases, while it does not stick in others. In this study, I have offered a definition of populism to make sense of the ‘adhesive force of the glue’. The ‘adhesive force’ determines the duration of the adhesion of the label. I have suggested that the label will stick only if the utterances and practices of the agent labeled ‘populist’ are organized around the idea that the people is a single homogeneous whole. Drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire, I have differentiated three variants of populism in Chapter 3 [§3.4]:

national populism which identifies the people with a nation or ethnicity, protest populism which appeals to the ‘ordinary man’, and economic populism which identifies the people as economic and political underdogs, or ‘the working people’.

The shrinking power of the dēmos in contemporary democracies in terms of impact and scope opens an avenue for political agents who wish to mobilize combinations of the national, protest and economic variant of the populist repertoire. Processes of globalization, European integration and neo-liberal reforms have stimulated populist politicians to claim that national democracy must be defended in the sense that the will of the people-as-one should be the bearer of the political regime. In the view of such populists, the defense of the nation and the re-adopting of sovereignty by the people are understood as equivalent. Such political agents represent what I have called here ‘national populism’. It is national in the sense that it gives priority to defending the independence and integrity of the nation, while it is populist in that it seeks to mobilize

popular support by claiming to speak for the nation’s people against a corrupt, degenerate ruling elite. The people is supposed to have a shared national identity rooted in the past and inalienable for those who are included. The enchantment of the popular will is connected with a permanent pull of nostalgia for a heartland – a harmonious place, that it is maintained to exist at some time in the past, but has been betrayed in the present by ‘enemies of the people’.\footnote{Taggart, P. (2000), \textit{Populism}, Open UP, Buckingham, p. 95.}

In contemporary European democracies, the populist claim for a ‘strong national democracy’ is accompanied with criticism on the European Union, which is seen as a bureaucratic Moloch, and extraneous to the people’s needs and wills. Populists criticize EU institutions like the European Commission or European Parliament because, according to them, those institutions over-regulate areas of social life that were previously seen as entirely the business of individual nations. Nevertheless, populist protest has not always gone hand in hand with criticism of the European Union. In the 1970s, Scandinavian countries saw the rise of populist parties, often driven by tax revolts, while being mostly indifferent to the issue of European integration.\footnote{Ibid., p. 80.} As European integration proceeded and more of the power of national parliaments was transferred to EU institutions, then populist parties began to articulate criticism of the European Union. Currently, national populism is often combined with protest populism: the EU is characterized by populists as an undertaking perpetrated by political elites at the expense of the nation’s people (national populism) and the ‘ordinary man’ (protest populism). At the same time, vested political parties have embraced some of the criticism of populist politicians, using elements of the populist repertoire to win back electoral support and to strengthen their position in EU-level negotiations. Such parties too are therefore labeled as ‘populist’.

Populists who appeal to the economic variant of the populist repertoire often claim to protect strong welfare provision for ‘right people’ against the claims of immigrants, foreigners or social security recipients. In the populist view, social security provisions should be provided only to needy members of the right people. Populists maintain that ‘the hard working people’ are no longer willing to ‘pay’ for others who are viewed as ‘cheats’ and do not deserve benefits destined for community members only. ‘The hard working people’ is regarded as the victim of these ‘fortune-hunters’ or ‘profiteers’ who prefer to live off the state. Economic populism is often combined with protest populism, where it is argued that the alleged deprivation of ‘the people’ is the fault of ‘failing political elites’ who deprive ‘hard working people’ of their money by financing welfare provisions for people who should be excluded from the system to allow welfare provision to be reserved for those who really need it, namely the ‘ordinary citizens’ who have been made the victims of European and global markets. In such cases, the populist claim
of regaining the power of the demos is often accompanied with criticism of the increasing economic interdependence between countries. That does not mean that populists argue that the state should control all major economic interests, but for populists the economy should be at the service of the people and only the people. Therefore, populists hold a relatively positive view of the free market, but only within the nation state. Economic populism is thus often combined with national populism too, but that combination is not a principle of necessity. The development of bureaucratic institutions at the supranational level and the decline of traditional accountability mechanisms can also give rise to populist movements at the supranational level which claim to defend democracy at their own supranational level.

6. Summary

The first part of this chapter argued that government bureaucracy is indispensable for democracy, but that its power and rationality poses three problems. The first two problems, the danger of encroachment upon individual freedom and the threat of lacking political accountability, are intrinsic to every political order where bureaucracy is firmly entrenched. A third problem – alienation – is typical for any democratic regime which finds its inspiration in the ideal of popular self-government. Growing formal rationality may give rise to alienation as citizens become depersonalized through administrative means. As a result, the citizens of a democratic order might no longer recognize themselves in the power under which they are ruled.

Those three problematic tendencies of bureaucracy nourish an anti-bureaucratic sentiment. In addition, the third problem generates a democratic reaction by political agents, habitually labeled ‘populist’ by the ruling elite to discredit them. Only in certain cases will the label stick, namely only if the political articulation of the anti-bureaucratic sentiment is organized in accordance with the idea that the people is one. Drawing on the populist repertoire, I have discussed the ambivalent relationship between populism and bureaucracy. On the one hand, populism activates anti-bureaucratic sentiment, rejecting the impersonal style of bureaucracy and criticizing general rules and procedures that hinder the direct expression of the popular will. On the other hand, bureaucracy tends to become the ally of populism. The populist attempt to realize a homogeneous people reduces politics to a matter of technocratic problem-solving which requires bureaucrats who possess specialized knowledge of certain subjects. In the populist view, democracy is seen as government for the people whereby government bureaucracy must do what the people-as-one wants, with the result that government by the people becomes superfluous. Democracy is in fact seen as government of the people, since the populist leader is ‘one of us’.

The anti-bureaucratic sentiment is activated not only by populists. From a neoliberal and deliberative perspective formal rationality of bureaucracy has been criticized, too. Both perspectives make proposals for reform. While neoliberals encourage privatization of state owned enterprises and stimulate bureaucrats to see themselves less as guardians of the public good and more as self-interested agents of a ‘state enterprise’, the deliberative approach advocates direct deliberation and collaboration between bureaucratic officials and citizens. I have argued here that both approaches aggravate some of the problems of bureaucracy, which can increase the anti-bureaucratic sentiment. The political articulation of the anti-bureaucratic sentiment can give rise, once again, to the application of the label ‘populism’.

In the second part of this chapter, I have argued that the balance between bureaucracy and democratic institutions, which is required for proper democratic control of bureaucracy, is weakened in contemporary democracies by two interconnected developments. First, shifts in political decision-making toward the supranational level have occurred due to global interdependence fostered by transnational issues. Second, national parliaments have contributed to their own demise by the adoption of neo-liberal principles. Limits to democratic control at nation-state level have been conceptualized by several scholars as a shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’. The governance approach to political decision-making argues that bureaucratic policy-making bodies are justified on the basis of their problem-solving capacity. The view is problematic because that style of governing depoliticizes political issues and lacks publicity.

The developments described here open the way for movements, usually labeled ‘populist’, which claim that democracy, by which they often mean national democracy, must be defended. ‘Populism’ is used by political agents who variously embrace neoliberal principles and the European integration process, but I would suggest that the label will stick only if it is applied to political agents who maintain that the people-as-one should be the bearer of democracy. Drawing on the populist repertoire, I have argued that populist politicians often appeal to a combination of the national, protest and economic variant of the populist repertoire. Populists claim to speak on behalf of the people, national, ordinary and hard-working, people who have become the victims of vested politicians and parties advocating European and global markets.
Chapter 8

**JANUS-faced Populism**

1. Introduction

An internally differentiated dominant position in the academic debate on populism holds that populism constitutes a pathology in modern democracy and its success can be explained only by some form of related crisis. From that perspective, populism is seen as a symptom of crises in contemporary representative democracies. Authors working according to that paradigm often frame populism in psychological terms and regularly use medical and psychological metaphors. Seen in that light, various scholars have introduced the concept of *ressentiment*, coined as a technical term by Friedrich Nietzsche and developed sociologically by Max Scheler, to explain the particular mood of populism, its appeal to ‘the people’ and its antagonism to elites. Drawing on Scheler, it is argued that populist rhetoric is designed to tap into feelings of *ressentiment* and make use of them politically. Populists attract people who feel impotent and excluded from society by identifying enemies and aiming at revaluation, negating the established value order.

The feeling of *ressentiment* which Scheler describes should be distinguished from the more familiar emotion of resentment. Resentment is often a short-term reaction and relatively trivial to minor assaults that can occur in any situation of social interaction, but *ressentiment* refers to a chronic feeling of being under attack and is linked with a desire for revenge that cannot be readily accomplished. While resentment is as likely as not transitory, *ressentiment* is more likely to persist and to become intensified. Scheler sees *ressentiment* emerging when people react to a perceived injustice by repressing a complex configuration of emotions which can include feelings of resentment, revenge, hatred, envy and jealousy. Repression occurs because of the impotence and weakness of those

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604 Scheler, M. (1978), Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralität, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main.


unable to express their feelings openly because of their fear of the political authorities, and their impotence before an authority that has treated them unjustly generates in the victims a desire for revenge. Revenge, according to Scheler, becomes transformed into *ressentiment* to the extent to which it is directed against lasting circumstances deemed injurious but beyond one’s control. *Ressentiment* seeks outlets for personal outrage and the attribution of blame, even if in reality that ends up as little more than frustrated fantasies of revenge.

Drawing on Scheler, Betz argues that right-wing populist parties mobilize *ressentiment* against enemies of the people. Likewise, Hogett argues that populist politicians make strategic use of popular frustrations. According to Hogett, because the potential of *ressentiment* is the result of social and economic conditions, populist politicians do not themselves produce *ressentiment*, but seek to mobilize its effect, thereby giving it specific form. Populist politicians present themselves as standing for ‘the ordinary man’ or ‘silent majority’ in opposition to real or imaginary elites, whether the anti-Brussels elite in the case of the “United Kingdom Independence Party”, the ‘Left Church’ in the case of the Dutch PVV, or the East Coast liberal elites in the case of the US American “Tea Party”.

The association of populism with *ressentiment* is, however, problematic. To interpret populism in terms of *ressentiment* is an ideological maneuver which makes *ressentiment* into what Fredric Jameson has termed an ideologeme, the smallest intelligible unit of ideology. For Jameson, an ideologeme can project itself variously in the form of a “value system” or a “philosophical concept”, or in the form of “a protonarrative, a private or collective narrative fantasy.” According to Jameson, Nietzsche’s theory of *ressentiment* – its unmasking of ethics and the ethical binary opposition of good and evil – is an ideologeme that operates as a particular unit of political thinking.

According to Jameson, the theory of *ressentiment* was mobilized by the European bourgeois and intellectual elite in the nineteenth century to explain away the phenomenon of revolution in Europe by attributing it to “[...] a ‘psychological’ and non-materialistic sense for the destructive envy the have-nots feel for the haves.” Those who revolted against the dominant order did not do so because of serious political analysis, but because of psychological disorder. According to Jameson, the bourgeoisie wanted to preserve its power by explaining away as psychological imbalance the socialists’ resistance to the

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608 Ibid., p. 7.
612 Ibid., p. 189.
dominant order. Thus, the bourgeoisie’s reference to *ressentiment* contained a political message to socialists: “stay in your places!”

According to Jameson, the theory of *ressentiment* unavoidably has an autoreferential structure: “[...] We are perhaps now far enough distant from this particular ideologeme to draw a corollary: namely, that this ostensible ‘theory’ is itself little more than an expression of annoyance at seemingly gratuitous lower-class agitation and the quite unnecessary rocking of the social boat. It may therefore be concluded that the theory of *ressentiment*, wherever it appears, will always itself be the expression and the production of *ressentiment*.”613 Autoreferential *ressentiment*, the *ressentiment* of *ressentiment*, produces a particular form of ‘abjected others’ whom the dominant order criticizes and condemns. Jameson’s argument is, however, a logical fallacy that tries to discredit the opponent’s position by showing that the criticism applies equally to the person making it. His comment about the autoreferential structure of *ressentiment* is a *tu quoque* argument, in which a person accused of *ressentiment* turns the charge back on his or her accuser. The fact that the accuser is imbued with *ressentiment* himself does not have any bearing on the specific argument that he is advancing.

I agree with Jameson that *ressentiment* operates as an ideologeme, but that does not exclude the possibility that *ressentiment* can also be a real emotion extending across the entire breadth of class structure. The implication of that is twofold for scholars who interpret populism in terms of *ressentiment*. On the one hand, it is itself an ideological maneuver to associate populism with *ressentiment*. Most scholars who provide a psychological interpretation of populism in terms of *ressentiment* tend to deny the ideological dimension of their own position. On the other hand, scholars who associate the mood of politicians who are labeled ‘populist’ with *ressentiment* may have a point, because *ressentiment* is a real emotion. However, even if the association does make sense, it does not really explain the historical and political context that gives rise to the labeling. More specifically, it does not clarify what kind of political problems underlie the criticism that those labeled ‘populist’ raise against the elite.

This chapter will try to explain first, the origin of the ‘populist’ elite criticism and then will study its effect on modern representative democracy. The first question is relevant to the study of populism because political elite formation is a feature of any form of government. Moreover, it is important to study the impact of elite criticism on modern representative democracy, since populist politicians, those who connect anti-elitism with the idea that the people is a single homogeneous whole, are not necessarily political outsiders aiming to overthrow democracy.

Populism alludes to political opposition between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’, whereby the former is seen as a united, homogeneous and virtuous community and the latter depicted as a pathological entity, serving its own partisan interests. Populist antagonism to elites suggests a problem with political representation in modern democracies, that

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613 Ibid., p. 190.
political representatives of the people are not interested in the basic needs or interests of ‘the man in the street’ and have become detached from the ‘ordinary citizen’. But where does that suggestion come from? My hypothesis is that modern representative democracy is based on a relatively fragile balance between the people and political elites. That opens another perspective on representative democracy. In Chapter 7 [§7.4], I have argued that the modern construct of representative democracy is in transformation through processes of globalization, European integration, and the turn to market-focused ideology. This chapter will explore representative democracy as a mixed regime, a representative form of government that little by little has been democratized. The result is a compromise between the democratic ideal of self-government, and good government by political elites, who make up the group which predominantly produces collective binding decisions [section 2].

In modern representative democracy, a balance between the power interests of the political elite and the democratic impulse of self-government is established by different democratic repertoires. General election is one of the institutions – a crucial one in fact – that facilitates that balance because it corresponds with the normative principle that legitimate political power stems from the consent of those over whom it is exercised.\footnote{Manin, B. (1995), \\textit{Principes du gouvernement représentatif}, Flammarion, Paris, p. 113. The political idea of consent can be found in the social contract theories of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau.} A balance between the power interests of the political elite and the democratic ideal of self-government is, however, inherently fragile and must constantly be reinvented and re-established by different democratic repertoires [section 3].

In representative democracy, electoral accountability and a wide variety of power-monitoring practices, or what Rosanvallon calls ‘counter-democracy’,\footnote{Rosanvallon, P. (2006), \\textit{La contre-démocratie. La politique à l’âge de la défiance}, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, p. 297.} exert pressure on ruling elites. In spite of power-controlling practices there is an inherent tendency even for elected political elites to disregard the interests and needs of the people, because the elites are partially independent from people’s wishes and are always driven by power interests. Asymmetry brought about by elite formation gives rise to elite criticism. ‘Populism’ is one of the political labels used either by the political elite to debunk its critic, or as a badge of honor used by the elite’s opponent. As noted, the label will stick only if the elite’s criticism is connected with the idea that the people is a single homogeneous whole. Since the mid-1980s, the label has frequently been used in reference to European parties which claim to be ‘for the people’, while ‘they’ (the elites) are for themselves and for the powerful. The rise of ‘populist’ parties can be seen as a response to elitism [section 4].

Some scholars have argued that populist parties generate a democratic impulse and work as a corrective to elitism, while others have argued that populism can turn out to be a destructive force. I will argue that populism is two-sided and that both sides are at work simultaneously. Populists signal the danger that ruling elites may disregard the
interests of the people, but they also feed the idea that elites are alien to the popular will by permanently stigmatizing them, which can erode understanding that elites are in fact necessary to the stability of modern representative democracy. Hence, the fragile balance between the power interests of the political elite and the democratic impulse inherent in self-government can be threatened by both elitism and populism [section 5].

2. Elite formation

Contemporary democratic regimes have little to do with the pure direct democracy of the Ancient city states or the popular assembly defended by Rousseau [see §5.1]. Contemporary democracy is a mixed regime combining the democratic principle of universal suffrage with institutional forms of political representation. The mixed regime of contemporary democracy is a form of representative government, which was perceived as the opposite of pure democracy by its theoretical founders and has been gradually redirected by democratic struggle. Despite its democratization however, representative government is still an ‘elected aristocracy’, which always generates new governing elites.616 By ‘governing elite’, I mean the group that predominantly produces collective binding decisions.617 The governing elite comprises those individuals who actually exercise political power, such as political agents in government and parliament, and includes agents beyond government and parliament such as civil servants, who do not really exercise political power but produces authoritative general rules for the whole of society [see §7.1].

Political elite formation is a feature of any form of government, whether democratic or not.618 As Rancière sees it, societies are always governed by a minority who – because of their birth, wealth or competences – claim the natural right to exercise authority over the majority of the people, which is predisposed to submit them. That is why Rancière argues that democracy is not a specific form of government but a principle, based on the absence of any natural right to govern.619

In modern representative democracy, rulers are appointed by free general elections at regular intervals. The electorate’s vote produces a government, though in most cases only indirectly. In presidential systems like one established in the United States the general vote produces governors directly, but in parliamentary systems the electorate’s vote produces a parliament (an intermediate organ), upon which a government is designated and which carries a vote of confidence by a majority of seats in parliament. The method of

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619 Rancière, J. (2005), La haine de la démocratie, La fabrique éditions, Paris, p. 44.
an open competition for legislative and, in some countries, executive positions is a recent innovation in history. Under Athenian democracy most political tasks were entrusted to citizens selected by the drawing of lots, and in the Italian republics of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance magistrates were often chosen by lot, too. The passage from selection by lot to election is a crucial turning point in the establishment of modern representative government.

Bernard Manin has powerfully demonstrated that election necessarily means selection. More specifically, elections select people possessing distinguishing characteristics that are judged positively by voters. General elections are partly of a ‘meritocratic’ nature because it is likely that candidates with ‘distinctive qualities’ will be selected. The election method involves an elitist element, as voters will always privilege those they judge to be the best, even though their criteria for ‘the best’ may vary from the possession of statesmanlike qualities to being the best orator. The qualities voters want to see in their representatives are strongly determined by the circumstances of society and culture. Some distinctive traits will be more likely to attract favorable judgment in a given context than in others.

Manin discusses the electoral context by distinguishing three consecutive forms of representative democracy. The first, nineteenth century ‘classic parliamentarianism’ was followed by the second form, ‘party democracy’, which was the effect of extended suffrage and the emergence of mass political parties. ‘Party democracy’, which has prevailed in Europe and elsewhere through the twentieth century, has evolved into the third form, ‘audience democracy’. In audience democracy, political parties are less dependent on traditional party bureaucracies and activists, being able to establish direct links between the party leaders and their electorate through new forms of political communication such as television, radio, internet, social media. In the context of audience democracy, political leaders must have the capacity to communicate directly with the electorate at large, rather than communicating mainly to and through their core supporters, which privileges politicians who are media-enhanced and explains the extensive media-training of politicians.

Manin’s argument about the elitist aspect of elections has been criticized by Nadia Urbinati, who argues that Manin overestimates the electoral choice of individuals and underestimate the choices of policies and ideas that a candidate represents. Citizens look not only at the personal qualities of candidates but also at the commonalities in ideas and ideology between candidates – before and after election – and themselves. In

621 Ibid., p. 259.
622 According to Urbinati, two evaluative criteria determine the choice of a candidate: advocacy and representativity. What makes a representative an advocate is not that she reasons as an impartial judge but, rather, she speaks as a passionate partisan on behalf a part of the people, putting her claims in accordance with the principles and procedures of representative
response to Manin, Urbinati concludes that: “[...] the qualities of a candidate are always judged in relation to the ideas that she has or does not have in common with the voters.”\footnote{623} Urbinati’s criticism of Manin does not hold good, however. Even if she is right that voters chose someone with similar views, because voters have some view of how law should be improved and they want their views to be heard, the election procedure remains partly non-egalitarian. Political ideas and policy positions will play an important role in the election process but, as Manin indicates, not everyone with the same political ideas as are preferred by most voters is equally likely to be elected.\footnote{624} Even in that case, election leads to selection of elites in that people who are outstandingly able to expound their ideas possess a competence that most people sharing them do not possess.

Manin’s argument, however, does not amount to taking an elitist position. Elitism as a value holds that it is desirable that people who are objectively superior to others should occupy ruling positions. Elections do not, however, select people who are objectively superior, but select those candidates who are best at being elected – a necessary feature of representative government. A further democratization of government and parliament, like certain supplementary devices of direct democracy, may balance the process but will never be able to stop the continual selection of governing elites. Moreover, governing elites include civil servants, who are not elected but selected through expert training in the field of their specialization. The specific standards and regulations developed by government bureaucracy require technical expertise and knowledge of sophisticated administrative procedures, forms of knowledge acquired only after sometimes lengthy specialized training, and, usually certified by technical examination.\footnote{625}

The election procedure entails two democratic and three non-democratic components. The first democratic aspect is marked by the principle that citizens are politically equal


\footnote{623} Ibid. p. 247, n. 118.


\footnote{625} Weber, M. (1976), Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundrisse der verstehenden Soziologie, Mohr, Tübingen, p. 952. Specialized training is, however, not always sufficient to ensure recruitment to the civil service. There is enormous variation in recruitment patterns for higher civil servants across European countries. In most European countries, civil servants are molded by a common or predominant education, but in some countries (e.g. Belgium, Austria and Italy), party membership or at least personal connections to a party leader is an important precondition for recruitment and promotion of bureaucratic officials. In other countries, partisan appointments to civil service post are limited to the most senior positions. In Germany for instance, top officials are appointed by a minister (and may be suspended by a minister), often with the intention of exerting control over the activities of the bureaucracy. Page, E. and V. Wright ‘Introduction’, in: Edward C. Page and Vincent Wright (eds.), Bureaucratic Elites in Western European States, Oxford UP, Oxford, pp. 6-8.
in the sense that all are equally entitled to candidates for election and to elect those who should govern. The second democratic aspect includes the opportunity for all citizens to hold their political representatives accountable for their deeds and actions and to dismiss them from public office by further elections if their performance should be judged unsatisfactory. The first non-democratic element is the elitist aspect of the election procedure. Despite the right to universal suffrage, election privileges particular candidates. As noted, that privilege depends on the subjective preferences of voters who do not treat all candidates equally. Second, in the electoral competition to attract voters, candidates put forward electoral campaigns designed to promote their ideas and qualities among the electorate. However, not all citizens can afford the cost of such campaigns, although that particular non-egalitarian feature of the election process could be eliminated by having campaigns publicly subsidized and electoral expenditure regulated. The third non-democratic component is that elected representatives of the people enjoy some measure of independence in the policy decisions they make while they are in office. The partial independence from people’s preferences allows that an exact congruence between political representatives and their voters is not mandatory, and that representatives are not liable to discretionary revocability (recall).

There are at least three normative reasons to allow political representatives partial independence from the preferences of individual citizens. First, representatives of the people should not be bound by the will of the electorate because they have to judge the common interest and to promote the long-term benefit of society as a whole. Common interest goes beyond the specific preferences and needs of voters, so the representatives of the people should not simply try to follow the opinion of the public at any given moment, even when it acts against its own longer term interest, but should have the freedom to act according to their own judgment. Second, if politicians do not represent the particular interest of some group or constituency, but the people as a whole, it means that a tyranny of the majority becomes a priori illegitimate. The prevention of such a tyranny must be constitutionally secured, as has been explained in Chapter 6 [§6.3].

Third, political representatives have to deal with problems facing society and with a plurality of views concerning their solution and need to make political compromises among the different interests and values of the bargaining parties. At the same time, politicians have to solve political problems in an effective way, even though the compromise nature of any decision can be in tension with effective problem-solving. Political representatives have to deal with that tension and look for creative solutions to complex political problems. Therefore, the political activity of representatives requires certain competences and skills, which sets professional politicians apart from the rest of the citizens. That view of political representatives is sustained by a belief

that politics is not just a vocation, but a genuine profession, which some are better able to follow than others.⁶²⁸

At the same time, the electoral method of selecting representatives, as Rancière notes, will call forward those politicians who have a desire to govern.⁶²⁹ Political representatives are driven by partisan power interests and personal ambitions, which might conflict with the general interest of the people. Conflict of interest between political elites and the people was already referred to by Machiavelli when he demarcated the grandi [elite] from the popolo [people]. The grandi have a strong desire to rule, whereas the popolo do not want to be ruled.⁶³⁰ While the grandi are motivated by power interests and wish to maintain their directing capacity, the popolo aims at collective self-determination. Machiavelli argued that the conflict of interest between the grandi and the popolo is ineradicable, since their differences are irreconcilable. Dissension must therefore be made productive for society, which means that mechanisms have to be found to strike a balance between the desire for power of the grandi and the drive for collective self-determination of the popolo. By way of illustration, Machiavelli shows that in the case of the Roman Republic, discord between the plebs (popolo) and patricians (grandi) so far from causing the ruin of the republic in fact, contributed to the durability and balance of it by forcing the patricians to alleviate the plebs’ grievances.⁶³¹

In modern representative government, a balance between the democratic impulse of collective self-determination of the people and the power interests of the elite is established by different democratic repertoires, which amount to recognizable claim-making performances guided by the principle of popular sovereignty [see §3.3]. In representative government, the elections of political rulers is only one procedure that facilitates such a balance, but it is a crucial one because, as noted, it corresponds with the normative principle of consent. The separation of a group of professional politicians from the rest of the citizens balances, ideally at least, the principle of consent from below with the effectiveness of elite decision-making from above.

3. Balance between political elites and the people

Balance between the interests of political elites and the people is never guaranteed and is inherently fragile, needing to be continually reinvented and reassessed through countervailing forces. The roots of its fragility lie primarily in the fact that political struggle

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⁶²⁸ This distinction is borrowed from Weber who describes that a politician can either live ‘for politics’ or ‘of politics’ [see also §5.5]. While a politician who lives ‘for politics’ is devoted to a particular cause (Sache), a politician who lives ‘of politics’ strives to make politics as a source of income. Weber, M. (2007), Political Writings, Cambridge Up, Cambridge, p. 318.


⁶³¹ Ibid., I. 6, p. 115.
in representative democracy entails uncertainty about the outcome of any single political contest, including any single election.\footnote{Eisenstadt, S.N. (1999), Paradoxes of Democracy. Fragility, Continuity, and Change, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, p. 66.} A problem that arises from the openness of representative democracy and the uncertainty of political outcomes is the possibility that those in positions of relative power will not be willing to give up their places. That chance increases insofar as they might come to believe that such loss is only temporary and may be regained later by the same political process.

Trust plays an important role. Fair electoral competition at regular intervals facilitates trust in central governmental and representative institutions, and encourages citizens, politicians and political parties to accept that an electoral loss does not signify the end of their participation in political power. By trust, I mean the following, quoting Claus Offe: “Trust is the belief concerning the action that is to be expected from others. The belief refers to probabilities that (certain categories of) others will do certain things or refrain from doing certain things, which in either case affects the well-being of the holder of the belief, as well as possibly the well-being of others or a relevant collectivity.”\footnote{Offe, C. (1999), ‘How Can We Trust Our Fellow Citizens’, in: Mark E. Warren (ed.), Democracy and Trust, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 47.} Offe goes on to explain that trust is inherently fragile because it includes a strong element of risk: “This risk indicates the fact that the trustor is unable to make sure or know for certain that the trusted person(s) will actually act in the way the trustor expects them to act.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 47.} The fragility of trust is aggravated in any large society where large numbers of people do not know each other personally. At the same time, however, the development of trust-based relationships need not always start with personal familiarity or individual relationships. In modern societies, the range of trust can be extended through symbols and reliance on institutions. Institutions perform the function of mediating and generalizing trust insofar as they are trusted by a sufficient portion of the population. But trusting institutions means something different from trusting individuals. To trust an institution, as Warren argues, means “[…] that the trustor knows the normative idea of the institution, and has some confidence in the sanctions that provide additional motivation for officials to behave according to this idea.”\footnote{Warren, M.E. (1999), ‘Conclusion’, in: Mark E. Warren (ed.), Democracy and Trust, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 349.} The normative idea refers to people’s expectations of how institutions should treat people and what they should deliver. From that angle, electoral institutions can contribute to institutional trust by guaranteeing that elections will be regularly held and fair. Political parties and politicians will be willing to accept electoral loss, and then to give up their positions of power, only if they believe that the elections were fairly organized this time and that they will have the chance to win next
time. The predictable recurrence of fair general elections is therefore important because it teaches citizens that they can rid themselves of unpopular governments peacefully.

Institutional trust presupposes linkages of trust among political elites. As Highley and Gunther argue, “A key to the stability and survival of democratic regimes is [...] the establishment of substantial consensus among elites concerning the rules of the democratic political game and the worth of democratic institutions.”\(^636\) While such elite consensus is itself trust-sensitive – there must be a reasonable measure of mutual trust among political elites –, the political process of conflict solution itself generates trust, too. Much of any elite consensus will depend on different forms of bargaining and practical compromises between political elites arrived at behind closed doors rather than through public debate or via legislative assemblies.

Second, the balance between the interests of political elites and the people is potentially undermined by an ‘elitist attitude’. The relative independence of political representatives combined with their power interest means that there is an inherent tendency for political elites to exercise political power without connection to the will of the electorate. According to Joseph Schumpeter, the tendency is a political reality in representative democracies. Elections do not express the will of the people concerning public policies. In a representative government, he claims, the people do not govern indirectly “[...] through the elections of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will.”\(^637\) The people merely select, from a range of candidates, those persons who are to make political decisions. Hence, Schumpeter suggests defining democracy as the “[...] institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”\(^638\) In such a view of democracy elected representatives are not charged with executing the popular will expressed in elections.

Schumpeter’s view can be rebutted on two grounds. Elections allow citizens to influence the actions and policies of those who govern.\(^639\) While elected representatives are not strictly bound to carry out the preferences of the electorate, they are, as noted, accountable to it for their deeds and actions, as long as elections are organized at regular intervals. Elected representatives therefore have an incentive to avoid sanction by the electorate at the end of their terms of office, which leaves some room for the influence of the preferences of voters over the decision-making process.

Second, in liberal democracies where institutional rights and liberties are secured and checks and balances are well developed, citizens have the freedom to articulate political


\(^{638}\) Ibid., p. 241.

opinions and may at any time express their preferences to their representatives in office. Freedom of public opinion ensures that the partisan wishes of the people can be brought to the attention of those who govern them. Moreover, freedom of thought allows people to organize, in the words of Urbinati, ‘negative power’ which enables them “[...] to investigate, judge, influence, and censure their lawmakers.”640 According to Urbinati, that power is negative because its aim is to stop or change the course of actions taken by elected representatives. The negative power of the people can function as what Rosanvallon calls ‘counter-democracy’, an assemblage of various power-monitoring practices [see §7.4]. Such political practices go beyond electoral accountability and include among others things demonstrations, ombudsmen, public integrity commissions, evaluation bureaus, reports by experts, the internet and other novel forms of media. While certain of such devices for monitoring power have been developed by social movements (Tilly’s notion of political repertoires), others are designed by governments themselves such as citizen panels, citizen polls, and deliberative forums. According to Rosanvallon, such practices are forms of organized political mistrust which nevertheless remain dependent on a basic faith in electoral institutions.641 Hence, the vertical linkage of trust between citizens and elected governors is based on periodic contested elections, the freedom of public opinion and power-controlling practices. Citizens can trust elected governors because they have been continuously exposed to practices of institutionalized mistrust. The trust that elected governors enjoy derives from those multifarious practices of organized mistrust.

4. The rise of a political class

Since the representatives of the people are partially independent from their wishes and are always driven by their own power interests, there is an inherent tendency for them to neglect the interests and needs of the people. Electoral accountability and a wide variety of power-monitoring practices are countervailing forces against elitism, but there remains the risk that political elites will exercise political power without connection to the will of the electorate. The tendency is enhanced, first of all, if there exist excessively high levels of ‘elite reproduction’. According to the German sociologist Michels, elite reproduction is based on a dialectic which leads political elites to protect themselves from potential rivals, and a dynamics which leads them to create willing internal elite groups, for example by means of the appointment of insiders.642 In order to counter opposition, political elites often devolve only a limited amount of ruling power to potential

rivals. According to Michels, by using such inclusive political strategies potential rivals are rendered innocuous. The result of their political strategy is “[…] not so much a circulation des elites as a réunion des élites, an amalgam, that is to say, of the two elements.”

Elite unification amalgamates with elite circulation. By educating potential rivals and then transforming them into their anointed successors political elites retain the power to choose future leaders according to their own criteria. The resulting circulatory trajectory of elite reproduction increases the distance between political elites and the people.

Second, an alliance between the power interests of political elites and the interests of other elite sectors increases the tendency for political elites to neglect the interest and needs of the people. An alliance between political elites and other, unelected elites primarily motivated by their own social and economic interests can merge such groups into a political class, a closed minority who neglect the interests of the people. A political class encompasses both people who take collective binding decisions (political elite) and people without formal positions who nevertheless are able to dominate the political process, such as big business people, retired officials, people who hold key positions in social and economic networks, ‘embedded’ journalists, or spin doctors. Rancière uses ‘oligarchy’ as a collective term to denote all members of a small ruling group in society. Oligarchy is, however, less appropriate for describing the whole top layer of society, because the term refers to a system of government. I prefer the concept of political class to describe the ruling group in society, because that concept refers to social stratification rather than to a form of government.

The tendency of political elites to exercise political power without connection to the will of the electorate and to turn eventually into a political class is the major problem for representative democracy. The rise of a political class practically limits access to democratic power to social agents and pressure groups. It is, therefore, incompatible with polyarchic democracy, which ensures diverse centers of powers and influence [see §6.3].

In addition, the rise of a political class is a ground for political corruption. Political corruption is a deeply contested concept, because as Mark Philp has indicated, any identification of political corruption presupposes the notion of ‘non-corrupt’ politics. Any definition of political corruption implies the making of normative judgments about the proper nature of politics while the meaning of political corruption can vary with the nature of the political system in question. Political corruption can take different forms in representative democracies from what is seen in other polities. Most approaches to

political corruption in representative democracies rest on the distinction between some formal obligation to pursue the public interest, and conduct in elected politicians which is construed as unduly furthering private interest such as bribery, nepotism, misappropriation.\footnote{646} Drawing on such approaches, I shall view political corruption as the abuse of public power, office or resources by elected politicians for personal gain, or for party benefit. Such acts of abuse will more likely occur during prolonged periods of rule by the same governing coalition. Insufficient circulation of elected governors allows them to use public office for partisan and private interests. Moreover, a close relationship between political and economic elites can give rise to political corruption, too. In that case, political corruption is expressed in a dual way, as the close relationships between political and economic elites and as the connection between political power and different social groups who must be induced to give their electoral support.\footnote{647} For instance, economic elites might finance electoral campaigns, but then demand something in return, such as favorable business contracts.

Both limited access to democratic power for citizens or social groups, and political corruption form an open invitation to criticism of the elite which involves the reclaiming of power for the people. ‘Populism’ is one of the political labels used by the political elite to stigmatize those who express anti-elitist sentiment, although in many cases the charge is routinely dismissed by those so labeled. Sometimes they defiantly adopt the very label that is meant to disqualify them: Marine Le Pen, party leader of the “Front National”, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the Dutch politician Rita Verdonk went on record saying that, yes, they were populists – if populism meant defending the will of the people. In their cases, the label would only stick if the elite’s criticism of them is connected with the idea that the people is one and homogeneous [see § 3.6].


text:

Illustration: populism in Europe

Since the mid-1980s, the label ‘populism’ has frequently been used in reference to European parties that express anti-elitist sentiments and maintain that the people are the embodiment of virtue and, unlike the elites, uncorrupted by power or wealth. The rise of such parties can be seen partly as an effect of the failure of vested political elites to mediate between the basic needs of the people and political decision-making. The label ‘populism’ has stuck in many cases because there has been an intrinsic connection between that failure and the core of the ‘adhesive force’ of the label ‘populism’, namely the people-as-one. Political agents to which the label ‘populism’ sticks have responded to this failure by appealing to the popular will and giving primacy to the identity between rulers and ruled.


The lack of mediation by vested political parties between citizens and political power has been accompanied by fundamental changes to the party system since the 1970s, when so-called ‘party democracy’ was developed into what Manin has called ‘audience democracy’. Party democracy was the effect of the emergence of mass political parties based mainly on pre-existing religious and class cleavages and which positioned themselves as the most important locus of political identification. Cleavages of public opinion were structured around party cleavages. Mass parties organized electoral competition and dominated the articulation of public opinion outside voting, such as demonstrations and petitions. Voting was not so much the expression of individual preference as the expression of membership of a collective political identity.

Parallel with the development of mass parties, the period since the 1970s witnessed the emergence of large interest-group organizations such as trade unions and business corporations. While interest groups were organized around a functional logic, they were often linked to one of the parties. In many European countries, cleavages of public opinion were recognized and legitimized by providing institutional autonomy for certain social groups, which meant that every social segment or ‘pillar’ had its own social institutions such as political parties, newspapers, trade unions, labor unions, sports clubs, banks, schools, or universities. In party democracy, mass parties with their networks were the essential link between political elites and citizens. Party networks were the agencies through which social groups, and hence their individual members, participated in politics and made social demands on the political representatives of the people.

In the 1960s, stable partisan allegiances and loyalties began to decline. The fixed ties between political parties and segments of society were loosened as voters increasingly identified themselves with any particular party, and channels of public communication (newspapers, radio, television), labor unions and trade associations were no longer structurally associated with political parties. Various factors were conducive to the erosion of stable partisan allegiances. First of all, mass political parties became the victims of their own success. The battles for political and social rights which had united the constituencies underpinning the mass parties had been won. The state began to provide many welfare and educational services that were previously the prerogative of a mass party or their affiliated organizations. Moreover, rising living standards and increased social mobility confronted parties with the shrinkage of previously well-defined social constituencies.

Politicians who have embraced neo-liberal reforms have at least encouraged the dismantling of the structure of party democracy. Reforms were intended to replace institutions that mediate between the interests of individual citizens and the public good by ‘self-responsibility’ and individual ‘entrepreneurship’, such as when former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher drastically diminished the power of labor unions, which from a neo-liberal perspective violated the principles of the free market. Her slogan, “There is no such a thing as society: there are only individual men and women, and there are families”, paved the way for the credo of neo-liberal politics: if everyone takes care of him- or herself, then ‘all individuals’ are taken care of. The neo-liberal commitment to the market became hegemonic in the 1990s, when there was a confluence of liberal and social-democratic parties accepting neo-liberal principles.652

A third point is that the erosion of stable partisan allegiances interacted to a very significant extent with media-driven processes. Mass media (television, radio, the internet) have become an increasingly important vehicle for politicians to communicate directly with the electorate at large, rather than to and through their core supporters. New forms of political communication between political leaders and the electorate have contributed to the growing personalization of electoral politics whereby party leaders are recruited to a large extent on the basis of their media skills.653 The personal qualities of a party leader have always been promoted by his or her supporters, but in media-driven politics personality tends to become central to the election campaigning. The growing focus on personality is illustrated by the way electoral competition partly takes the form of a search for politicians who can display character and integrity.654

The decline in the strength of party loyalties does not mean that political parties are becoming obsolete, for they continue to play an important role in the organization of parliament and government.655 Parliamentary votes are still determined by partisan allegiances, party discipline is often still the rule in the political arena of parliament, and government is organized by political parties. Political parties continue to be dominant in

structuring electoral choice and continue to recruit political leaders, attract finance and prepare and organize electoral campaigns, although they have become less meaningful intermediaries between the interests of citizens and public policies.

With the decline in the strength of party loyalties, all political parties increasingly need to appeal to the same voters and mobilize a much more diffuse electorate made up, moreover, of voters who are increasingly regarded as ‘consumers’ with their individual motivations. In that view, the electorate appear primarily as an audience, which responds to the particular terms offered at each election by party leaders. Party democracy is transformed into an ‘audience democracy’, where parties seek for votes in the pool of the general electorate on the basis of opinion polls and electoral marketing. Political parties and individual politicians try to ‘market’ or to ‘sell’ their messages and ‘products’ (party programs) to the public. Parties are then less guided by ideological or programmatic projects that prioritize preferences, instead mediating the particular interests of social groups and general public policy. As political parties increasingly activate personality campaigning and use opinion polls to discover the opinions of the electorate, political leaders increasingly turn to professional experts like pollsters, advertising consultants, marketers, and media experts.

In his explanation of ‘audience democracy’, Manin rejects the metaphor of the market and argues that the characterization of citizens as consumers is inappropriate. The core of his argument is that a consumer who enters the economic market knows what he wants independently of the products that are offered, whereas in politics, preferences do not exist prior to the actions of politicians. I do not find Manin’s argument convincing, because neither consumer preferences nor political demands are exogenous. Just as in an economic market consumer preferences are shaped partly through commercial advertisements, in an audience democracy political preferences are formed partly through the sales messages of politicians.

A consequence of such developments is that political parties need external funding in order to meet their organizational and campaigning costs. Political parties are less able to rely on the unpaid services of party activists and financial contributions and fund-raising by both activists and members. The decline in levels of party membership precipitated by the use of capital-intensive campaign methods like the use of mass media rather than leafleting or the employment of professional experts has led to the need for political parties to look elsewhere than their party members for their resources.

Political parties have been inclined to resort to wealthy business donors or trade unions that can offer the money needed for electoral campaigning, or they have sought

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state funding.\textsuperscript{659} External funding of political parties by donors attracts much attention because it can imply corruption. Where there is a mismatch between the ideological or policy stance of a party and the assumed preferences of its sponsors, the possibility of political corruption increases. According to Crouch and Hayward, the close connection between political and economic elites has been one of the factors in political corruption scandals in Europe in the 1990s, first notably in Italy, Greece, Spain and France, but soon repeated in North European countries like Belgium, Germany and the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{660} Political corruption signals the emergence of a political class which no longer acts in the public interest. Corruption scandals have been an open invitation to anti-elitist parties, often labeled ‘populist’, to step in to counteract political elites who have lost connection with the popular will.

Political parties, in their role as governors and law-makers, have also turned to the state for their resources. Katz and Mair have argued that a principled strategy has been the regulation of state subventions to political parties, which these days often constitute one of the major financial resources. Such regulations encompasses the use of substantial amounts of public money to fund party organizations, various party laws which have often accompanied the introduction of state subventions, and rules regarding public service broadcasting and sometimes commercial media, which have become more important for electoral campaigning.\textsuperscript{661} Reliance upon state subventions is not directly under a party’s control because changes of those in power may take place. Since the problem would be shared by all governing parties, the arrangement of what would effectively be a cartel might be formed, “[...] in which participating parties serve their joint interest in providing for their own security and survival.”\textsuperscript{662}

Since the decrease in ideological differences among vested parties has led to restriction and de-politicization of policy competition, electoral failure often makes little difference to parties’ political objectives. According to Katz and Mair, a cartel may be formed in which vested parties in and out of office exploit their control over the state to generate resources. Party organization becomes more dependent on rules laid down by government, and there ceases to be a direct link between citizens and the state. Katz and Mair describe it as a sort of public ‘brokering’ by which parties aggregate and present to the government bureaucracy the preferences and needs of the electorate, while

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acting as agents of the same bureaucracy in defending policies to the public. The result is a depoliticizing tendency, whereby political questions are turned into matters of government administration. Moreover, because of the increasing integration of opposition parties into the policy process, voters are no longer offered a party that offers political alternatives.

It is within that context that anti-cartel parties, usually labeled ‘populist’, have sought to break into the system. Such parties appeal directly to the perception that the vested political parties are indifferent to the needs of ordinary citizens and that the lack of ideological and programmatic projects among political parties has created a void that is mobilized by the populist repertoire, among others. Populist politicians offer collective forms of identification based on the political opposition existing between ‘the people’ and ‘the political establishment’. Against the vested parties which ‘represent their own interests’, populists reclaim power for the people from the political establishment.

5. The role of populism

‘Populist’ criticism of the elite is a response to the imbalance between the power interests of political elites and the general interest of the people. So far, little has been said about the role of the populist repertoire and its impact on modern representative democracy. For some scholars, populism works as a cleansing operation that makes representative democracy vibrant again. Hayward argues that populism works as a corrective for political elites that have lost connection with the popular will. He concludes that no matter how unpleasant populism may be for some, “[...] representative democracy has to live with the countervailing forces of elitism and populism.”

Canovan expresses a similar view, although instead of speaking about elitism and populism she refers to speak of the pragmatic and redemptive faces of democracy. Drawing on Oakeshott’s distinction between ‘politics of faith’ and ‘politics of skepticism’, Canovan distinguishes the redemptive and pragmatic sides of politics, which are opposed yet interdependent. The pragmatic face views democracy “[...] essentially as a way of coping peacefully with conflicting interests and views under conditions of mass mobilization and mass communication.” The redemptive face meanwhile views democracy as “[...] the promise of a better world through action by the sovereign people.”

667 Ibid., p. 11.
According to Canovan, pragmatism without the redemptive impulse is a recipe for corruption. For Canovan, the populist mobilization is a response to an asymmetry brought about by a deficit in redemption. It invokes the redemptive face of democracy as a corrective of the excesses brought by the pragmatic face. For both Hayward and Canovan, populism generates a democratic impulse and works as a corrective for the forces of elitism (Hayward) and pragmatism (Canovan).

However, populist politicians do not only passively tap into existing levels of distrust of political elites and the political institutions that the incumbent elite utilize. Because of their anti-establishment stance and their rhetoric against both elites and elite values, populist politicians also nourish the idea that the incumbent political elite is incompetent and untrustworthy. While I agree with Hayward and Canovan that populists may depart from relevant and justified criticism of representative democracy, populists tend to generalize perceived shortcomings of democratic elitism (or pragmatism) into a permanent criticism of incumbent political elites and even a rejection of the institutions of representative democracy.

Since populism advocates a direct relation between the will of the people and collective binding decisions, it considers autonomous political elites as undemocratic. Populist politicians distrust the different forms of bargaining and compromises between political elites. While ‘politics behind closed doors’ often generates trust among the political elites themselves, it is the kind of politics that is detested by populist politicians. According to the populist credo, ‘politics behind closed doors’ means that political elites heavily promote certain legislation and force it upon the law-abiding people. On that basis, populists present themselves as outsiders who can drive out the incumbent political elite, clean up government corruption, and deliver what the people really want.

However, by permanently criticizing and rejecting ruling authorities, populist criticism of the elite tends to develop into a destructive form of counter-democracy. According to Rosanvallon, counter-democracy is destructive if it becomes purely negative and non-political, by which he means “[…] a failure to develop a comprehensive understanding of problems associated with the organization of a shared world.” For Rosanvallon, populism is not a countervailing force nor a counter-democratic practice, because of its inherent negative appreciation of ruling elites. Counter-power of the people degenerates into negative sovereignty: the people asserts its sovereignty not by proposing coherent projects, but by its permanent stigmatization of ruling authorities and denigration of supposed enemies. The permanent rejection of ruling authorities and misleading discourse


about the identity of rulers and ruled may increase the level of distrust in political elites, and thereby erode the idea that political elites, being to some extent independent from the popular will, are crucially important for the stability of representative democracy.

From that angle, populism is an ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, populist mobilization is one of the countervailing forces that avoids the tendency of political elites to forget how far they can go. Populism can therefore be seen as a mirror of representative democracy. In spite of its inherently negative appreciation of political elites it draws attention to a specific weakness of representative government, namely the potential rise of a political class that loses connection with the will of the people. In that case, citizens no longer recognize themselves in the power under which they are ruled and which, nominally at least, is theirs. The populist invocation of the sovereign people embodies a democratic impetus, for it brings to mind the democratic pretence that the people are sovereign and should collectively decide about public affairs. Populism invokes the promise of a better world wherein politics is redeemed from fraud, corruption, and oppression by the action of the sovereign people. It may therefore increase the scope of the citizen’s involvement by proposing democratic reforms, be that the reinstitution of the democratic system by referendums, elections of mayors, or popular initiatives.

On the other hand, populism maintains that the redemptive action of the sovereign people is possible only in a united homogenous community, thereby excluding part of the population from the dèmos. The recurrent invocation of the people-as-one may be used as a mean to disperse pluralism and toleration of minorities.

Second, the recurrent stigmatization of political elites combined with a misleading discourse claiming that rulers and ruled are identical can create a dynamic process in which existing political institutions like parliament gradually lose their legitimacy in terms of popular support, even while legitimacy in terms of consent is still present. For populists, the existing democratic institutional framework has only instrumental value and is not treated as an end in itself. As noted, such an instrumental view empties political institutions of their normative principles [see §6.3]. If the instrumental view is shared by a majority of political parties, the legitimation of political institutions becomes meaningless.

Third, democratic accountability tends to become irrelevant to a populist politician who claims to be homologous with the people. For example, former Italian prime minister Berlusconi told Italian citizens demonstrating against his government: “[...] since you have chosen me in a free electoral competition, you must now be quiet, and let me do the job.”

A populist leader who claims to incarnate the popular will is accountable only to himself, and not to others.

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Fourth, the lack of democratic accountability could spill over into authoritarian behavior by the populist. Beyond the apparent egalitarianism of populist ideology there is a potential authoritarian element. Authoritarian behavior is reflected in the structure of some populist movements or parties, which generally have a low level of party institutionalization [see §3.5]. Populists demand loyalty from their followers and that demand is incompatible with democratic internal party procedures. Because populists claim to embody the will of the people they may demand strong leadership rather than citizen participation. There is an intrinsic tension in populism at that point. On the one hand, populists claim to broaden the scope of citizens’ involvement through devices of direct democracy, but on the other hand the populist leader claims to embody the will of the people [see §4.4]. The populist demand for strong leadership can result in despotism, whereby the populist rules by decree, with disagreement and opposition downplayed, although a democratic façade is maintained. The despotic dimension comes to the fore in Chavismo [see §4.4]. Seen in that light then, populism can be said to favor of an elitist democratic system, in which there should be almost no constraint on the leader and his or her group of confidants.

In sum, populism is Janus-faced or two-sided, with both sides at work simultaneously. To conceptualize populism as a Janus figure preempts the argument that it is either always a countervailing force against elitism, or a degenerated form of counter-democracy. Contrary to those conventional accounts, I would argue that populism is neither always democratic nor always divorced from democratic politics. Populism points to a ‘creative crisis’, a critical moment in democracy, and is as such part of the permanent self-contestation of democracy.⁶⁷² The actual valence it adopts is impossible to predict, as changes in two directions are possible, leading to the decline of modern democracy or to its creative adaptation. In saying that it is impossible to predict I do not allude to an oscillation between two different perspectives or norms of populism, but share Arditi’s idea that such unpredictability is inbuilt in populism.⁶⁷³ The actual valence populism will adopt cannot be determined by mechanically applying a list of criteria of what populism is and deriving from it a set of consequences that will necessarily follow. This is, because populism is first of all not a ‘thing’ or ‘essence’. Moreover, there is no inevitable connection between the phenomenon labeled ‘populism’ and its actual political performances. Since the connection between the criteria and the consequences is intrinsically imponderable, the actual valence of populism cannot be settled as it were by conceptual fiat.

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This intrinsic imponderability built into populism also explains why vested political parties often struggle with the question of how to deal with populism. Should they isolate it or incorporate elements of the populist repertoire, or should they aim to find a balance between exclusion and incorporation? Those agents who maintain that populism is an internal threat to modern representative democracy may opt for an exclusive political strategy. Such a strategy against populism involves legal repression for example, which forces populist parties to reinvent themselves by setting limits to political legitimacy. As a case in point, in 2004 the “Flemish Bloc” was condemned on charges of discrimination and racism, which forced the party to transform itself with a legally acceptable agenda in order to keep receiving state subsidies as a legitimate political party. The party changed its statutes and party program, cleansing it of the more extreme positions, and changed its name to “Flemish Interest”.  

Another repressive strategy is the development of a cordon sanitaire or principled non-cooperation which excludes parties from participation in executive power.⁶⁵ A strategy of containment is not undemocratic, because populists can still participate in elections and their seats in parliament are still legitimate. In Belgium and France, political actors have pursued a repressive strategy whereby parties such as FN and VB are delegitimized and treated as genuine enemies of democracy. From a strategic point of view, critics have argued that a cordon sanitaire has negative counter-effects because it allows populists to maintain and even strengthen their anti-establishment image.⁶⁶ Moreover, it is argued that established parties, by adopting the strategy, tend to avoid the concerns and issues voiced by populist parties.

According to those critics, it is actually much more effective to cooperate with populists and allow them to participate in coalition government. If populists strike political compromises and start to do business with their alleged enemies (political elites), their own political claims will become ‘corrupted’ [see § 5.5]. According to proponents of inclusive strategy, it will eventually lead to a moderation of populists’ political views.⁶⁷ The disintegration of the FPÖ in 2002, it is argued, proves that participation in government forces populists to make policy concessions and political compromises. However, critics have argued that cooperation in coalition government does not necessarily lead to

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moderation, and that populists in government will have an impact on policy.\textsuperscript{678} In government, populists have the opportunity to pursue a monistic vision of society.\textsuperscript{679}

An intermediate strategy of ‘toleration’ has been tried in Denmark and The Netherlands. In Denmark, the DF stayed out of coalition, but supported the minority Liberal-Conservative government from 2001 until 2011. DF gave its parliamentary support in exchange for the implementation of some of its key policy demands, especially stricter policies on immigration.\textsuperscript{680} The Netherlands followed the ‘Danish model’ in 2010 when the PVV ‘tolerated’ the minority government of Liberals and Christian Democrats. While Denmark has experienced long periods with minority governments, this was a novelty in Dutch politics. Like DF in Denmark, the PVV had a severe impact on the government policies pursued. The PVV were not given control of any ministries, but their agreement with the government included elements the PVV pushed for, such as ban on burqas. At the same time, the political constellation still allowed the party to continue its anti-establishment rhetoric. Besides their impact on policies, the inclusive strategy of cooperation and the intermediate strategy of ‘toleration’ may also have an impact on the political system itself. As noted, populists adopt an instrumental view of political institutions. If the instrumental attitude becomes commonplace in democratic politics, it will lead to a loss of legitimacy of political power.

A fourth option is to combine inclusive elements (listening to the people) and exclusive strategies. For example, established political parties might prepare to track the concerns of populist voters and take them into account when devising their policies but without actually cooperating with the populist party itself.\textsuperscript{681} That strategy avoids the negative impact that actual cooperation or a strategy of ‘toleration’ could have on the political system, while it seeks an inclusive strategy with respect to the people who might vote for populist parties. It aims to take the wind out of the populist sails and to take electoral advantage of their concerns. The inclusive element of a combining strategy will have an effect on the polemical force of the label ‘populism’, since if elements of the populist repertoire are increasingly adopted by established parties, it becomes much more difficult for them to discredit populists as non- or anti-democratic [see § 2.5]. If you choose to sleep with the enemy, you have to stop calling him the enemy! The exclusive part of the strategy still allows populists to cultivate and even to strengthen their outsider image, because the vested parties not only exclude them, but even steal their issues. Moreover,

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\item \textsuperscript{679} Mudde, C. (2009), \textit{Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe}, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 139.
\item \textsuperscript{681} Cf. Rummens, S. and K. Abts (2010), ‘Defending Democracy: The Concentric Containment of Political Extremism, \textit{Political Studies}, vol. 58, no. 4, p. 656. The two authors propose this combining strategy with respect to ‘extremist parties’.
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the effect of the strategy depends partly on whether or not it acquires and reconfirms ‘issue ownership’. Its impact decreases if the populist party has already managed to gain issue ownership of its preferred topics.\textsuperscript{682} If, however, a combining strategy proves to be successful, it forces the populist party to transform itself.

A long-term strategy with respect to populism is to try to reinvent or ‘re-calibrate’ the democratic system itself. For example, in order to curtail the rise of new populist parties, some political agents have proposed increasing the electoral threshold to make it harder for them to enter the legislature. According to critics, increasing the electoral threshold would be damaging to prospects for parliamentary representation of minorities.\textsuperscript{683} Other political commentators have argued in favor of taking anti-elite criticism by populists seriously and propose to establish forms of direct democracy, such as referendums, and direct elections of mayors and the Prime Minister, in order to intensify the interaction between professional politicians and the electorate.\textsuperscript{684} It is important to realize, however, that such institutional reforms would not bring about an ‘ideal’ democracy which would no longer give rise to political phenomena or agents which could be labeled ‘populist’. As has been noted, modern representative democracy is based on certain intrinsic dilemmas for which perfect solutions do not exist.

A final long-term strategy is to educate the people to be ‘good’ citizens. Civic education, whenever and however undertaken, aims to prepare the people of a country for carrying out their roles as citizens. As mentioned in Chapter 5 [§5.2], civic education – the teaching of a public ethos, good morals and customs – was the main task of Rousseau’s lawgiver. That way lies danger, however, for those in charge of such education might wish to indoctrinate people rather than to educate them. Moreover, the matter of civic education addresses the old problem of democracy as a contested ideal. If arguments about democratic citizenship are merely a way of advancing democratic repertoires, then as Kymlicka writes, it may be “[…] a matter of putting old wine into new bottles.”\textsuperscript{685}

6. Summary

In this chapter I have argued that modern democracy is a representative form of government which has been democratized through political struggle. The result is a mixed regime, a compromise between the democratic ideal of self-government and good government by political elites, being the group that predominantly produces collective binding decisions. In modern democracy, electoral institutions and power-monitoring practices are crucial mechanisms for striking a balance between the power interests of the political elite and the democratic ideal of self-government. Balance is never guaranteed,

but has to be reinvented through countervailing forces. The fragility of the balance is rooted, first of all, in the fact that political agents are uncertain about the outcome of any single political contest. Second, the balance between the interests of political elites and the people is potentially undermined by elitism. The relative independence of political representatives, combined with their power interest, means that there is an inherent tendency for political elites to exercise power without connection to the will of the electorate and eventually to turn into a political class. The rise of a political class is the main problem for representative democracy because it limits the access of social agents and pressure groups to democratic power, and because it is the basis for political corruption. Both limited access to democratic power for citizens and social groups, and political corruption create fertile ground for the growth of anti-elitist parties, usually labeled ‘populist’, which reclaim power for the people.

‘Populists’ do not simply passively tap into existing levels of distrust in political elites, but through their rhetoric against elites feed the perception that the incumbent political elite is incompetent and trustworthy. The role of populism in representative democracy is therefore ambivalent. On the one hand, its mobilization is one of the countervailing forces that avoid the tendency of political elites to lose connection with the will of the people. Seen in that light, populism is a mirror of representative democracy: it is a wake-up call for political elites that ‘the people’ is the source of legitimate political power. On the other hand, the permanent stigmatization of ruling authorities and misleading discourse about the identity shared by rulers and ruled can increase the level of distrust in political elites and thereby erode the idea that political elites are crucially important for the stability of representative democracy. The actual valence populism adopts cannot be foreseen, as it could go in either direction.

A corresponding unpredictability is built into the choice of best political strategy with respect to populism. I have discussed here seven strategies – an exclusive strategy of legal repression, the development of a cordon sanitaire, an inclusive strategy of actual cooperation in government, an intermediate strategy, where the populist stays out of government but supports a coalition, a combination of listening to the people and exclusive strategy, a reinvention of the democratic system itself, and education of citizens. I have analyzed their impact on populists, public policies and the political system itself. The last two can be seen as long-term strategies, which address the problem of democracy as a contested ideal. Legal repression too is a long-term strategy, which marks the constitutional boundaries of tolerance. The other four strategies focus on short-term goals. While the intermediate strategy seems to privilege populist politicians, it remains to be seen whether or not a cordon sanitaire, actual cooperation or the combining strategy leads to any moderation of populist views. Besides their impact on public policies, however, actual cooperation and the intermediate strategy could have a negative impact on the political system itself.
The aim of this dissertation was conceptually to grasp the meaning of populism and how it is related to modern representative democracy. Four main questions have been addressed to increase our understanding of populism: Why are some political phenomena or agents labeled ‘populist’, while others are not? What is the normative conception of democracy displayed by those agents to which the label ‘populist’ will stick? How are the intrinsic tensions of modern representative democracy, deepened by certain contingent factors, connected with the increasingly frequent application of the label ‘populism’? What is the precise role in modern representative democracy of political phenomena and agents to which the label ‘populist’ sticks? Combining empirical and historical knowledge with a reflexive and concept-focused mode of thinking, the first part of the study investigated what agents do when they use the label ‘populism’ and what the content of the label ‘populism’ is. The second part explored the political context of modern representative democracy and its relationship with populism, both as a label and a political phenomenon.

A basic assumption of this study has been that democracy, like populism, is a contested concept. Rather than accepting an ideal or normative model of democracy, I have viewed democracy as always precarious and subject to a process of continuous adaptation to ‘creative crises’, crises which are symptoms of democracy’s recurrent self-contestation. My aim has not been to refute theories which approach the link between populism and democracy from a strongly normative perspective, but to undermine their apparent self-evidence – ‘populism is always democratic’ or is ‘always divorced from democratic politics’ – by adopting an alternative approach to democracy, which sheds a new light on populism and its relation to democracy. The perspective of democracy as a contested concept views modern representative democracy as a polity characterized by intrinsic dilemmas about the values, forms and limits of democracy, which concern four intrinsic tensions – between the principles of popular sovereignty and political representation, between the precariousness of the popular will and rule of law, between democratic legitimacy and government bureaucracy, and between the democratic ideal of popular self-government and the power interests of governing elites [see Chapter 5-8] – whence people construct the label ‘populism’.

Populism is an exponent of these intrinsic tensions, one that comes to the fore in the interaction between users of the label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena and agents labeled ‘populist’. Within the political setting of modern democracy, ‘populism’ is a convenient label in polemical struggles. However, although the label ‘populism’ is widely applied to various political phenomena and agents, it sticks only in certain cases, not all. This study has, therefore, taken a middle course between two dominant types
of approach to populism in academic literature. The first of those take populism as a pre-
existing political phenomenon and define it as a party type, party family or political ideol-
ogy, classifying it on the basis of empirically observable attributes. That type of approach,
often employed by political scientists, is not concerned with the performative dimension
of labeling. The second approach takes a ‘constructivist’ perspective and views populism
exclusively as a political label, thereby denying that the label ‘populism’ describes ‘real’
political phenomena and agents also. Taking the best from the two dominant but one-
sided types of approach to populism, I have stressed the interaction between the use of the
label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena or agents labeled ‘populist’.

Recurrence of populism (first main question)
Populism is not a given object, but has to be instituted, has to be made visible either
as a political label or a political phenomenon. The institution of populism is a political
intervention and is often affected by value judgments of the labeler. To apply a label
to a political phenomenon or agent is not merely a descriptive act; users of the label
populism either praise or condemn ‘populists’, thereby creating a political opposition
between ‘us, good democrats’ and ‘them, false democrats’. In many cases, the charge of
‘populism’ does not keep agents unmoved. They act responsively, either by dismissing
the label (and returning it to the messenger) or incorporating it and using it as a badge
of honor, like Jörg Haider, Jean-Marie Le Pen, Rita Verdonk. They therefore alluded to
the positive meaning of ‘populism’ that explains its popularity in the United States [see
§1.5]. Populism has either a pejorative or a positive connotation, because it acquires its
expressive force in polemical encounters, thereby creating a concrete political opposition
between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

The recurrence of the label ‘populism’ is the effect of its polemical force, which
increases if it is supplied by the broad social practice of labeling in public debates, which
has a strong impact on the effect of a single, particular labeling, but decreases if the label
is used with abandon, for then there arises the risk of over-use. Furthermore, the polemi-
cal force of the label decreases if the label becomes acceptable or respectable. The label
becomes acceptable if vested political parties adopt an inclusive strategy with respect to
populist agents, stealing their issues or adopting elements that were previously associ-
ated with populist politicians or parties. If that happens, it becomes more difficult for
self-styled ‘populists’ to use that term as a powerful honorary nickname for themselves.
Conversely, the activation of exclusive strategies against populism, like a cordon sanita-
taire, increases the polemical force of the label, effectively treating ‘populists’ as genuine
enemies of democracy [see §2.6 and §8.5].

The polemical nature of populism means that academic interpreters of it, includ-
ing me, are inevitably placed on the conceptual battlefield. That is important to note,
because populism’s deeply embedded hostility to elites and intellectuals is often mir-
rored by elitist disdain for populists [see §2.4]. My own discourse about populism
Conclusion

creates two oppositions. First of all, I inevitably create a political opposition with populists, for whom my analysis represents just another elitist position. Consequently, like any discourse about populism, my analysis is not immune to political conflict and struggle. At the same time, my conceptualization of populism opposes two types of approach to populism in academic literature, which I have already mentioned.

The recurrence of political phenomena and agents that are ‘successfully’ labeled ‘populist’ refers to ideologemes and practices of the populist repertoire. By that I mean the invocation of the people, the critique of elites and other supposed enemies, the participatory imaginary, and the role of strong leaders, all of which are connected with the idea that the people is a single homogeneous whole [see §3.5]. The idea of the homogeneous people-as-one is the litmus test for the ‘adhesive force of the glue’, meaning that it determines whether the label will stick or not. The suggestion of a core idea means that a certain essentialism is implied in my conceptualization of populism. However, that core is historically relative and is made visible only in and through the interaction between users of the label ‘populism’ and political phenomena and agents labeled ‘populist’. If their interaction comes to an end, the core disappears. The ‘relative essence’ that is involved in my conceptualization of populism is a contradiction in terms, in that intrinsic tensions in modern representative democracy give rise both to the label ‘populism’ and the various political phenomena and agents to which the label sticks.

The populist repertoire allows room for difference within essentialism, suggesting that populist agents can activate various ideologemes and practices from the populist repertoire. Which elements are mobilized by populist agents is related to the specific political context. Additionally, the people-as-one can take on many forms. I have suggested a distinction should be made between national, protest and economic variants of populism. That trichotomy does not fit easily into the habitual left-right divide, because the populist appeal to the people-as-one goes, in fact, beyond it [see §3.4]. I have paid more attention to the national and protest variants of populism, as most empirical examples used to illustrate my case can be categorized under those two rubrics. Arguably, future research should pay more attention to the economic variant of populism – as distinct from the other variants – and explore its relation to modern representative democracy more specifically.

Populist agents mobilize various ideologemes and practices with different corresponding democratic justifications. Like any other political party under conditions of modern representative democracy, populist ones substantiate the legitimacy of their claims by invoking the principle of popular sovereignty, but they do so in three different ways. First, some of them refer to a proper insight into the will of the people, when the populist agent claims to articulate what ‘the people’ thinks and to do what ‘the people’ wants. Second, populist agents might seek legitimacy for their claims by mobilizing popular masses. Third, populists seek legitimacy for their political claims by organizing forms of acclamation, such as mass rallies, referendums, and opinion polls [see

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§4.3]. Their different claims to legitimacy allow for my conclusion that two opposed approaches to populist leadership are conceivable [see §4.4]. On the one hand, populist agents can claim that the popular will is expressed through devices of direct democracy, while on the other hand populists can claim to embody the will of people. The ultimate consequence of the latter view is that government for the people makes government by the people redundant. Moreover, if the people is really one, and both problems and solutions are clear and unanimously willed, political deliberation about the public good is not needed and politics is reduced to technocratic problem-solving [see §7.3].

The populist repertoire and the corresponding claims of legitimacy can be transposed into various political environments. The transfer of a populist repertoire always involves translation (adoption of some ideologemes and practices, while rejection of others) so that it fits in with the national habits and mores of a particular country [see §3.4 and §3.6]. An inquiry into political transfer is a much more fruitful way of looking at the connections between populist agents than is the common argument of a ‘populist Zeitgeist’. The latter suggests that apparently the ‘time was ripe’ for a new democratic repertoire, thereby disregarding that political innovations have to fit the specific political context of a political community. Moreover, political transfer draws attention to the transnational dimension and forces us to look beyond the national development of politics. Future research could examine more specifically the way transfers of the populist repertoire actually operate, taking into account the similarities and differences between the sender and the receiver, and could demonstrate, for example, that the rise of ‘populist’ parties in Europe and elsewhere in the past two decades not only happened at the same time or resembled each other, but also that those parties were connected and influenced by each other.

As noted, the label ‘populism’ can either become acceptable and respectable, or saturation-usage of the label may occur (see above). In that case, the ‘glue’ of the label ‘populism’ may dry up, and the label will likely be replaced by some new label, which is used then as an epithet by ruling and intellectual elites to discredit would-be representatives of the people making popular demands. However, the new label will not be just another term of abuse, because it will also describe certain ‘real’ phenomena and agents. Moreover, because political labels partly constitute political beliefs, actions and practices, the content of the new label will not be identical with the content of the label ‘populism’. That is, political agents to which the new label sticks will organize their political utterances and practices around another key idea.

**Populist conceptions of democracy (second main question)**

The various democratic justifications of the populist repertoire correspond with the ‘thin’ and ‘broad’ ideology that is presupposed in the populist repertoire. Populist ideology is ‘thin’ because it does not provide a comprehensive view of society or a vision of the good life with a corresponding general plan of public policy, and ‘broad’ because the
Conclusion

distinct set of ideas about democracy and the people implies a specific kind of politics on all kinds of issues. Taking into account the thin and broad ideology of populism, the relationship between populism and liberalism is complex. On the one hand, populists share the presumption of liberalism that all preferences or comprehensive doctrines of people are in principle equally legitimate. Since the populist ideology is thin, populists do not formulate a notion of what is good for people. They assume that whatever people (‘the common man’) think, or say they want, is ‘okay’. On the other hand, populists negate the political relevance of all comprehensive doctrines, thereby denying the political problem that liberals like Rawls want to solve: How is it possible that incompatible though equally legitimate comprehensive doctrines can live together peacefully and all affirm the same constitutional democratic regime? Given the presumption that the people is a single homogeneous whole, populists assume that an ‘overlapping consensus’ is simply a given. From that angle, citizens are free to adopt their comprehensive doctrine (to be Muslim, Christian, liberal, and so on) as long as they subscribe to the ‘overlapping consensus’, meaning the actual dominant culture of the people [see §4.5]. Populists claim both negative individual liberty ‘within’ the dèmos and positive liberty as collective self-determination of it. However, because populists identify the dèmos with the ‘proper’ people, demands for freedom (or equality) are made for ‘our’ people only, not for all [see Balibar’s concept of égaliberté §6.4].

The liberal aspect of populism indicates a crucial ideological difference between populism and seemingly closely related ideologies like communism and fascism [see the introduction to this book]. While populism emphasizes the virtuousness of the people, communism and fascism maintain that people are ‘alienated’ (communism) or have become ‘decadent’ (fascism) and must, therefore, be transformed into some ‘new man’ through social engineering and education. Both communism and fascism are therefore strongly anti-liberal. Another ideological difference concerns the populist idea of the united homogeneous people. Communism shares the homogeneity that is presupposed in populism, thereby recognizing the democratic condition of equality, but denies the idea of ‘this people’, because it is oriented toward the collective emancipation of mankind as a whole. Fascism shares the populist idea of a united people, but rejects the homogeneity of the people, because it believes in organic and organizing differences between people.

Rise of populism (third main question)
The recurrence of populism, both as a political label and as a political phenomenon is the effect of intrinsic tensions in established modern representative democracy. In Europe, populism became the internal challenger of representative democracy after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when parliamentary democracy became the hegemonic regime [see §1.5 and §4.5]. Explaining some of the intrinsic tensions, my orientation has been primarily, though not exclusively, towards established European parliamentary democracies.
Modern representative democracy is a political system in which the *dèmos* does not participate directly in the sovereign authority, but through elections delegates its power to representatives who are then authorized to act in the people’s name [see §5.3 and Chapter 8]. The *dèmos* itself is not, however, simply given but is the effect of claims to represent the people. The people-as-*dèmos* emerges from the interaction between would-be representatives who claim to speak on behalf of the *dèmos* and the people-as-population who have to decide repeatedly whether or not they see themselves reflexively as ‘this’ or ‘that’ *dèmos*. Drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire, it can be concluded that populists make use of the logic of inclusion and exclusion: they argue that democracy assumes a bounded *dèmos*, but add that its boundary is fixed once and for all, thereby denying that the self-definition of the *dèmos* is a recurrent dimension of popular sovereignty. Additionally, some populists maintain that the boundaries of the *dèmos* are marked internally by its identification with a selected people, thereby differentiating between a true ‘core’ people and a ‘peripheral’ fake people.

In modern representative democracy, the *dèmos* is the basis of political authority in whose name electoral candidates and elected representatives make representative claims. The logic of political representation creates a tension with that principle, for on the one hand, the principle of popular sovereignty has a unifying, integrating force through which individuals recognize themselves as member of a democratic polity, while on the other hand the *dèmos* cannot be fully represented, because political representation has an aesthetic side. Claims to represent the *dèmos* lead, therefore, to the paradox that what is rendered present by particular forms of mediation is not what existed prior to the representation. The paradox of political representation is only seemingly relaxed at moments when the people-as-sovereign appears as a collective powerful being that is seemingly present through its actions (the people-as-event). In revolutionary moments, for example, the people-as-sovereign can be identified with the collective power, the *potentia*, of the people-as-population acting against a common enemy [see §5.4]. When the people-as-event is recaptured by an institutionalized democratic collectivity, the paradox of representation comes alive again.

Representations of the people are necessarily selective and exclude or marginalize certain interests within the *dèmos*. Marginalization of particular interests within the political community is a necessary effect of the logic of political representation, and creates room for populists to activate the paradox of political representation by mobilizing or appealing to the marginalized or excluded part of the people in the name of the people as such, not just a part of it. Populists do not accept the logical consequence of political representation, but claim ‘full’ representation, arguing that any mediation of the popular will is falsehood. In doing that, populist agents activate the paradox of political representation as a contradiction: the people-as-sovereign cannot be at simultaneously one and divided, general and particular. From the populist perspective, the very idea of a plurality of political parties which can articulate various considerations
within the plural self-determination of the popular will, must be rejected on principle [see §4.2 and §5.5].

The logic of political representation implies, however, the illusoriness of the populist claim that they themselves, or forms of direct democracy, simply express the will of the people. Like any representation, the populist representation of the people renders present only a part of the démos. Therefore, the tension between popular sovereignty and political representation strikes back on populism itself, whereby its claim of ‘full’ representation is undermined. Populists conceal the lack of ‘full’ representation by inventing enemies of the people, referring to ruling elites, immigrants, foreigners, security recipients, and so on. The populist claim of ‘full’ representation is thus politically effective only as a counter-claim, which will be undermined if populists start to do practical business with their declared enemies, like those political elites. That does not mean that the populist illusion is negated. Because the paradox of representing the people cannot be overcome, another populist politician or movement will probably stand up and appeal to the marginalized groups and the unmet demands.

From an agonistic perspective, the gap between the principle of popular sovereignty and the concrete particularization of the people has to be made productive for democratic politics, so that excluded or marginalized interests and values of the people can always be rendered present through new representative claims. That requires that majoritarian decision-making rule is limited by minority rights, so that all people have a possibility to participate (directly or indirectly) in the sovereign authority. Self-limiting majority rule implies ‘changeable majorities’, which defuses the potential antagonism in social relations [see §5.5 and §6.6]. More generally, the extent to which democracy succeeds in preserving political pluralism depends both on the presence of the rule of law sustained by constitutional rights and liberties, and legal checks and balances, and on a shared commitment by the majority of citizens to preserve the political rights of all citizens and to adhere to common political institutions. That commitment presupposes an ethos of ‘dual partisanship’: citizens are engaged partisans in the world and adopt particular ideals and preferences that may exclude other ideas and preferences, and should be partisans of a shared set of political institutions as a way to fight out their political conflicts (‘second order partisanship’) [see §4.2].

The preservation of political pluralism implies that legitimate decision-making in liberal democratic polities takes place through procedural standards and formal rules. The legality of the decision-making process leads to several levels of mediation and a powerful government bureaucracy to carry the law into effect. Moreover, the formal rationality of bureaucracies – enacting regulative norms within a framework of general rules – can give rise to a sense of alienation among citizens, which means that citizens no longer recognize themselves in the power by which they are ruled and which officially is theirs. Such negative counter-effects widen the gap between government administration and citizenry, and give rise to a polemical attack against liberal democracy by populists,
who claim that democracy does not do what the people want [see §6.5 and §7.1]. From that angle, populism can be seen as an exponent of a ‘popular democratic’ perspective which views the people as the supreme authority in lawmaking, as opposed to any other source of authority [see §6.3]. Armed with the idea that the people has a single will, populists do not have to search for compromises between different interests and values and break through the logic of ‘changeable majorities’.

In modern representative democracy, political representation of the démos partly takes on an institutional form. In this study, electoral democracy has been considered as the main institutional form of representation. A broad range of institutional forms still fit under that rubric: presidential systems too like the one in the United States where the executive is led by an elected head of state are representative, while in semi-presidential systems like France, the elected president and the appointed prime minister are both active participants in the government administration, and then there are purely parliamentary systems like that of Switzerland. My orientation has primarily been toward parliamentary democracies. Future research could expand the analysis to (semi-)presidential systems. It could investigate, for example, what kind of impact, if any, a parliamentary or (semi-)presidential system might have on the rise of populist politicians.

Electoral institutions are important to facilitating the balance between the power interests of the ruling elite (political agents in government and parliament and civil servants) as the group that predominantly produces collective binding decisions, and the democratic ideal of self-government, because elections correspond with the normative principle that legitimate political power stems from popular consent. Electoral institutions are supplemented by various power-monitoring devices, which can function as what Rosanvallon calls ‘counter-democracy’, a form of democracy that both creates possibilities and sets limits for rulers on what they can do [see §7.4 and §8.3]. Io however, n spite of electoral accountability and the wide variety of power-controlling practices, there is an inherent tendency for elected political elites to disregard the general interest of the people and to turn eventually into a political class. The rise of a political class is a main problem for representative democracy, because democracy finds its inspiration in the ideal that the démos should govern itself. The asymmetry brought about by the formation of elites gives rise to criticism of them, so anti-establishment parties, which are then often labeled ‘populist’, step in to counteract the political elites who have lost their connection with the popular will.

The rise of anti-establishment parties – usually labeled ‘populist’ – in Europe since the mid-1980’s is partly an effect of that asymmetry between ruling elites and the people. The asymmetry is accompanied by changes in the party system, the evolution of so-called ‘party democracy’ into ‘audience democracy’. That shift is the effect of the changing role played by both the older and newer norms of mass media (television, internet, social media) in communication among individual politicians and between politicians and the general electorate; and of neo-liberal reforms intended to replace
institutions that mediate between the interests of individual citizens and public goods by ‘individual responsibility’ and private ‘entrepreneurship’. In ‘audience democracy’, political parties try to ‘sell’ their messages to the public while the electorate responds to proposals offered by politicians at each elections. The political setting of audience democracy also partly explains why European populists rarely seek legitimacy and support by mobilizing the people [see §4.3].

‘Audience democracy’ privileges politicians who possess strong media skills, and forces political parties, less able to rely on the unpaid service of party activists to seek external funding in order to meet their organizational and campaigning costs. Political parties have turned to wealthy business donors or trade unions, something which has created the basis for political corruption in some countries; or they have been inclined to seek state funding which has led to the formation of cartels between parties in order to keep control over the state to generate resources [see §8.4]. Both effects are responded to by parties, often labeled ‘populist, which appeal directly to the perception that the vested political parties are indifferent to the needs of ordinary citizens and merely represent their own interests. What has remained underdeveloped in this study is the link between populist leaders and elite groups that are supportive of them or emerge once populist leaders come into power. Future research could explore that link in theoretical terms as well as comparatively.

The rise of ‘populist’ parties in Europe is also an effect of the current extension of the geographical scale of political decision-making. Parliamentary institutions and related accountability mechanisms have become incapable of effectively controlling the services delivered by bureaucratic institutions, because of shifts in political decision-making toward the supranational level and the turn to neo-liberal market approaches by national governments. ‘Cosmopolitan democracy’ pretends to be the answer to the decline of traditional accountability mechanisms, but in contemporary democracy, the decline has been only partly countered by new power monitoring practices at the supranational level. The decoupling of administrative steering from democratic institutions combined with new bureaucratic institutions both at the national and supranational level has opened the way to political parties, habitually labeled ‘populist’, which claim that national democracy must be defended. Moreover, lack of democratic accountability could in principle open the door to European or global ‘populist’ movements making pleas for democracy at the supranational level [see §7.5].

Role of populism (fourth main question)
Political agents to which the label ‘populism’ sticks are neither always purely democratic nor always non- or even anti-democratic. On the one hand, populists may depart from relevant and justified criticism of representative democracy. With their appeal to marginalized interests and values within the dēmos, and their criticism of bureaucracy and ruling elites, populists do draw attention to forgotten interests, intrinsic tensions
and even to the vulnerabilities of representative democracy. The populist appeal to the people-as-sovereign brings to mind the democratic pretence that the people should rule and collectively decide public affairs. Seen in that light, populism is a mirror of representative democracy and its claim-making performance is part of democracy’s self-contestation [see §8.5].

On the other hand, populists maintain that the redemptive action of the sovereign people is possible only in a unified political community. As noted, the populist idea of a single homogeneous people does not allow for a logic of changing majorities. If populist parties take a majority position in parliament or Congress, or if their views are shared by other parties having a majority of seats, that circumstance can lead to public policies that negate political pluralism [see §6.6].

Moreover, populists do not passively tap into existing levels of popular grievance about ruling elites and government bureaucracy, but also feed the idea that elites and bureaucratic institutions with their armies of officials are alien to the popular will. By generalizing the perceived shortcomings of democratic elitism into a permanent criticism of incumbent ruling elites, populist criticism of elites tends to become a destructive form of counter-democracy which is no longer oriented to the organization of a shared world, and may even contribute to an increasing level of distrust of politicians. Permanent stigmatization can further erode the idea among the public that perhaps partially autonomous ruling elites are necessary for the stability of representative democracy [see §8.5]. If populist aversion from government bureaucracy is shared by a sufficient number of parties in parliament, parliament engages in ‘negative politics’ with bureaucracy. In that case, relations between them will be hostile as a result of which the bureaucracy will tend to adopt a defensive stance, so that officials become more wary of taking bold political initiatives or of openly questioning government decisions, and conceal important information from parliament. Consequently, parliament’s ability to exert effective control over government bureaucracy is undermined [see §7.3].

Finally, populism advocates a direct relation between the will of the people and collective binding decisions, so it denies autonomy to mediating political institutions. It is the people that directly legitimizes political institutions. Law courts or parliament have only instrumental value and are not treated as ends in themselves. The consequence of that instrumental attitude is that political institutions are stripped of their normative principles and become merely strategic means to pursue political goals. The misleading claims of populists that they themselves embody the popular will, or forms of direct democracy that give expression to it, have the potential to be destructive to existing political institutions, because they can create a dynamic process by which existing political institutions lose their legitimacy in terms of popular support [see §6.3]. Moreover, opinion polls as a contemporary form of ‘acclamation’ can become an instrument of particular or specific interests if they are organized and guided by the populist leader or movement, as has been illustrated by the Berlusconi case. The claimed embodiment of
the popular will opens the door to a kind of despotism, the tyranny of the alleged will of the people, as has been illustrated by Chávismo [see §4.4].

In sum, populism as a recurrent feature of modern representative democracy is two-sided and both sides are at work simultaneously. Presenting its Janus face, populism points to a ‘creative crisis’, a critical moment in democracy. The ‘populist crisis’ is part of the permanent self-renewal of democracy. It is impossible to predict in which direction the crisis will go – towards modern democracy’s decline or its creative adaptation – because populism is not a ‘thing’ or given object but is instituted in the interaction between users of the label ‘populism’ and political phenomena and agents called ‘populist’.

To conclude my argument then, political phenomena and agents are labeled ‘populist’ because first of all, populism is a convenient label for debunking political opponents in polemical battles. In polemical encounters, the label ‘populism’ sticks only in certain cases, not in others. It sticks if the beliefs, utterances and practices of agents are connected with the idea that the people is a single homogeneous whole. The normative conception of those agents to which the label ‘populist’ sticks corresponds with the ‘thin’ and ‘broad’ ideology that underlies the populist repertoire. Taking the populist ideology into account, populism has a complex relationship with liberalism and crucially differs from the seemingly closely related ideologies of communism and fascism. Populism, both as a label and a phenomenon, is an exponent of intrinsic tensions in modern representative democracy. Those tensions, deepened by some contingent factors, give rise to anti-establishment parties and movements usually labeled ‘populist’ by ruling and intellectual elites in order to discredit them. In modern representative democracies the role of those political phenomena and agents to which the label sticks is two-sided: populism both signals the forgotten interests and vulnerabilities of representative democracy, and negates pluralism. It contributes to an increasing level of distrust in politicians and strips political institutions of their normative principles. Both sides are at work simultaneously.
# List of abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANPRL</td>
<td>American National Progressive Republican League</td>
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<tr>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>British National Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Christen Democratisch Appèl / Christian Democratic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>D66</td>
<td>Democraten ’66 / Democrats ’66</td>
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<tr>
<td>DF</td>
<td>Dansk Folkeparti / Danish People’s Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDL</td>
<td>English Defense League</td>
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<td>EPP</td>
<td>European People’s Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fidesz</td>
<td>Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alliance of Young Democrats – Hungarian Civic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>FrP</td>
<td>Fremskrittspartiet / People’s Party (Norway)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Fremskridtspartiet / People’s Party (Denmark)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FPÖ</td>
<td>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs / Freedom Party of Austria</td>
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<tr>
<td>FN</td>
<td>Front National / National Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDPR</td>
<td>Liberal’no-Demokraticeskaya Partiya Rossii</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia</td>
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<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>Linkspartei / Left Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>LPF</td>
<td>Lijst Pim Fortuyn / Pim Fortuyn’s List</td>
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<tr>
<td>LN</td>
<td>Lega Nord / Northern League</td>
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<tr>
<td>LNe</td>
<td>Leefbaar Nederland / Liveable Netherlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>MVR</td>
<td>Movimiento V República / Fifth Republic Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>Österreichische Volkspartei / Austrian People’s Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>PASOK</td>
<td>Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima / Panhellenic Socialist Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>PdL</td>
<td>Popolo della Libertà / People of Freedom</td>
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<tr>
<td>PJ</td>
<td>Partido Justicialista / Justicialist Party</td>
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| PON          | Populistische Omroep Nederland /
|              | Populist Broadcasting The Netherlands |
| PP           | Partido Popular / People’s Party |
| PPI          | Italian Popular Party / Partito Popolare Italiano |
| PS           | Parti socialiste / Socialist Party |
| PvdA         | Partij voor de Arbeid / Labor Party |
| PVV          | Party voor de Vrijheid / Freedom Party |
| SP           | Socialistische Partij / Socialist Party |
| SVP          | Schweizerische Volkspartei / Swiss People’s Party |
| ToN          | Trots op Nederland / Proud of the Netherlands |
| UMP          | Union for a Popular Movement |
|              | Union pour un Mouvement Populaire |
| VB           | Vlaams Blok / Flemish Bloc |
| VBe          | Vlaams Belang / Flemish Interest |
| VVD          | Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie |
|              | People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy |


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Summary

Over the past 20 years anti-establishment parties, often called ‘populist’, have emerged in many European countries and have enjoyed electoral success at national, regional, and local levels. The rise of those parties has generated an intense and lively debate among scholars and political commentators in all European countries about the meaning of the concept of populism and its relation to democracy. Populism has been rendered, among other things, as being by default a non- or even anti-democratic performance, a purely democratic expression of political life, or an unpleasant by-product of democracy. The aim of this book is to grasp the meaning of populism as a concept and to provide an understanding of its relationship with democracy.

The book is a political philosophical study of populism in two senses. At a metareflexive level, it reflects on the analysis itself, making explicit how discourse about populism is part of, and interacts with a social reality in which ‘populism’ is strongly discussed. The analysis of populism is inherently ‘political’. Populism is a polemical notion, the use of which creates a political opposition between ‘true democrats’ and ‘false democrats’, which implies that academic interpreters of populism such as the author are inevitably situated somewhere on a conceptual battlefield.

At a reflexive level, it is a conceptual study of populism and democracy. The conceptual analysis entails a critical reflection because it does not take for granted the appearance of populism as either a political phenomenon or a political label, but rather explores the interaction between users of the label ‘populism’ and various political phenomena or agents labeled ‘populist’. That particular interaction remains underdeveloped in the academic literature, in which populism is examined usually as either a political label or a political phenomenon, but not as both. Additionally, this study views democracy as a contested and historicized concept, meaning that different conceptions of democracy coexist and change over time. Rather than taking a normative model of democracy, the perspective of democracy as a contested concept views modern democracy as a polity characterized by intrinsic dilemmas about its substance, forms and limits. There are then four intrinsic tensions: between the principles of popular sovereignty and political representation, between the precariousness of the popular will and rule of law, between democratic legitimacy and government bureaucracy, and between the democratic ideal of popular self-government and the power interests of the governing elites. Those dilemmas and tensions are structural in every system of representative democracy, some of which are deepened by contingent factors, such as the personalization of politics, globalization, European integration and the current neo-liberal hegemony.

In order to help understand what populism means and what its relation to democracy entails four central questions are investigated. First, why are some political phenomena
or agents labeled ‘populist’, while others are not? Second, what is the normative conception of democracy displayed by those agents to which the label ‘populist’ will stick? Third, how are the intrinsic tensions of modern representative democracy, deepened by certain contingent factors, connected with the increasingly frequent application of the label ‘populism’? Fourth, what are the precise roles of political phenomena and agents, to which the label ‘populist’ sticks, in modern representative democracy? The first two main questions constitute the first part of this book (Chapters 1-4), while the second part (Chapters 5-8) explores the last two main questions.

Chapter 1 discusses the academic literature on the concept of populism with a focus on the historical context in which the term has been used. The historical background, which is often disregarded by scholars who wish to define populism, is important to take into account in order to understand why the concept assumes different political meanings at different times and in different places. The chapter draws on three insights from the field of conceptual history. First, it explores the concept of populism both in a synchronic and diachronic manner. Synchronic analysis studies the concept, in this case ‘populism’, in its semantic field. The concept of populism is explored in relation to other concepts such as ‘the people’, ‘popular’ and ‘democracy’, as well as its relation to the user of the concept and to the dominant ideological view, in the given context, of democracy and economics. Diachronic analysis traces shifts in the meaning of the concept of populism and links those shifts to social developments. It mostly analyzes information from the United States, Latin America and Europe because the academic literature on populism is primarily concerned with political phenomena and agents in those regions.

Second, populism is viewed as an ‘appraisive term’, meaning that it is not only used for its definitional contribution, but also for the attitude it conveys. To call a political phenomenon or agent ‘populist’ is at once to describe it and to express approval or disapproval. Accordingly, shifts in the meaning of the concept of populism occur whenever changes take place in the following features of that concept: the criteria of application, its frames of reference, and its attitudinal expressiveness. Third, in spite of all the differences, it is shown that the sense of the concept of populism is centered on the asymmetric counterconcepts of ‘the besieged people’ as opposed to ‘the elite’ or other supposed enemies. The first chapter examines changes in the nature of that conceptual pairing through time and space.

Chapter 2 concentrates on the first main question of this study and conceptualizes the interaction between users of the label ‘populism’ and the political phenomena and agents who are labeled as ‘populist’. The conceptualization of that interaction involves five aspects: the concept of populism (logic of difference), the political act of naming and labeling (logic of equivalence), the labeler, the ‘glue’ so to speak on the back of the label, and the ‘adhesive force’ of that glue. First, populism is a political concept the meaning of which is defined in and through mutual difference from other political concepts, but which also yields a correspondence – a logic of difference. For example, populism is
defined by its difference from liberal democracy or a sophisticated style of politics. At the same time, defining the concept of populism yields a correspondence between populism and the extreme right for instance or populism and demagogy. The specific association and difference between populism and other political concepts hinges on the specific historical contexts in which the concept is used. Second, the application of ‘populism’ to a specific political phenomenon or agent is itself a political act. The political moment of equivalence in labeling is important to recognize because it indicates that populism is not something that exists ‘somewhere out there’. The performative dimension of labeling is often disregarded or remains implicit in the approach used by political scientists, who think of populism as a pre-existing political phenomenon by distinguishing it from other forms of politics, but are less concerned with the very way in which populism is instituted, either as a political label or a political phenomenon.

The political act of labeling is affected by value judgments made by the labeler, thereby creating a political opposition. Because populism is a polemical notion it needs some kind of ‘glue’ to become effective, and the ‘glue’ consists of academic, media and political discourses about populism and corresponding political strategies with respect to populism. The number of discourses and corresponding political strategies is an indicator of the ‘adhesive force of the glue’, which determines the duration and persistence of the label once it has been applied. ‘The adhesive force’ increases if the number of political discourses and corresponding political strategies increases, although it is also true that the application of the label ‘populism’ must be plausible. That plausibility is partly intersubjectively determined by a subset of members of society: the adhesive force increases if the generated discourses about populism are to a large extent shared by the public. Given the presumption that the label will not be applied to enormously different political phenomena and agents, its plausibility cannot however be merely intersubjectively determined, but is settled by some core idea too.

Chapter 3 investigates the phenomenon of populism and analyzes it precisely as an ideology with a specific democratic repertoire in an attempt to make explicit and underpin the ordinary, commonsense understanding of the term. The populist repertoire is defined as a set of ideologemes (meaning the smallest intelligible units of ideology) and practices organized by political agents around the idea that ‘the people’ is seen as a single homogeneous whole. The description of the populist repertoire is ideal-typical and serves to explain why some political agents are labeled ‘populist’. It is argued that political agents are repeatedly or permanently labeled as ‘populist’ if and only if their political actions are organized in accordance with the idea of the homogeneous people-as-one. Populism depicts the people as a homogeneous entity, consisting of equal and ordinary citizens, thereby recognizing the democratic condition of equality: every citizen is formally equal to every other and has an equal right to self-rule. Additionally, it sees the homogeneous whole of ‘ordinary citizens’ as united and indivisible and maintains that its voice has an indivisible message.
Chapter 4 explores the normative conception of democracy adopted by those political agents to which the label ‘populist’ will stick. The aim of the chapter is not to provide a single populist understanding of democracy, but to investigate populism as a generic concept encompassing various populist politicians and movements. Populist agents mobilize different sets of ideologemes and practices with different corresponding democratic justifications. Populists try to seek legitimacy for their political claims by invoking the principle of popular sovereignty, but they do so in three different ways. The populist claim to legitimacy can be based on the ‘insight’ of the populist leader who claims to be the true spokesman of the people, on mobilization of the popular masses, or on the organization of direct democracy/acclamation. It is argued that the claim of populist agents that they themselves or devices of direct democracy merely express the popular will is ‘fake’ because it denies that the interests and values of the people are shaped through political representation.

Populist conceptions of democracy are further explored by comparing them with both contrasting agonistic and liberal interpretations of democracy that ascribe value to pluralism and, according to some scholars and many political commentators in public debate, seemingly closely related conceptions of democracy such as fascism and communism. Populism excludes agonistic conceptions of democracy which hold the principle that pluralism is constitutive for the nature of democracy. The type of pluralism defended by agonism requires an ethos of dual partisanship, meaning that political agents are both adversaries and partisans of the common political institutions and procedures, which is not shared by populists. The relationship between liberalism and populism is a complex one. Populism shares with liberalism the idea that the people are right in wanting what they want, meaning that all preferences of the people are equally legitimate, but in contrast to liberalism, it denies the political relevance of all comprehensive doctrines. The populist assumption that the people are essentially good differs from both fascism and communism, both of which claim that the people are not simply right in wanting what they want, and aim at the creation of a ‘new man’ through education and social engineering. Another ideological difference concerns the populist idea of the united homogeneous people. Like populism, communism recognizes the democratic condition of equality, but it denies the populist idea of a single united people as distinct from other peoples. Fascism, by contrast, denies homogeneity, but shares with populism the idea of a single people.

Chapter 5 discusses the principle of popular sovereignty, one of the main principles of modern representative democracy and crucially present in the populist repertoire. ‘The people-as-sovereign’ has an ambiguous meaning. On the one hand, popular sovereignty is understood as the ultimate source of legitimacy, meaning that power-holders legitimize their political actions in the name of the people-as-đemos, the whole political community. On the other hand, popular sovereignty is identified with the collective power, i.e. potentia, of the people-as-population or multitude that, on occasions,
appears as a powerful collective entity. Drawing on that ambiguity, three arguments about popular sovereignty are made in Chapter 5. First, the people-as-đemos is not just a given, but the effect of political representation, understood as the interaction between those who claim to speak on behalf of the đemos and the people-as-population who have to decide whether they see themselves reflexively as ‘this’ or ‘that’ people. Second, the sovereign people is a constitutive political fiction in modern representative democracy in whose name elective candidates and elected representatives of the đemos make political claims. While the đemos must be represented as the ground of political legitimacy, the performative side of political representation means that the presence of the people is both mediated and impure. Third, on specific occasions, during revolutions for example, the people-as-sovereign appears as a collective mass of concrete individuals that is powerful and seemingly present through its actions (the people-as-event). Drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire, it is argued that like any conception of democracy, populism maintains that democracy assumes a bounded đemos, but it adds that its boundary is fixed once and for all. Second, it rejects the second argument in the name of the third: it claims that every form of mediation is deceitful and only ‘full’ representation of the đemos is truly democratic.

Chapter 6 focuses on liberal democracy and aligns with the minority of political thinkers who argue that liberal democracy is not the expression of a natural affinity, but the historically contingent articulation between two different traditions: a democratic and a liberal one. Those traditions have articulated together in the course of history, but they represent different perspectives on liberal democracy. Liberal democracy combines the principle of the rule of law and popular sovereignty, which gives rise to a potential conflict crystallizing around the principle of sovereignty and three interrelated tensions. The rule of law, which is often sustained by constitutional rights and liberties as well as legal checks and balances, places limits on the discretion of political authorities who exercise power in the people’s name. It ensures, among other things, that the legislature must act according to standards and procedures set by preexisting law. The principle of the rule of law contains a potential conflict with the popular democratic perspectives of which the populist repertoire is an exponent, and which view the people as the only true sovereign authority in lawmaking excluding any other source of authority. Three intrinsic tensions are related to that conflict. First there is the complex relation between liberty and equality, the underlying values of liberal democracy. It is shown that there are tensions between negative and positive liberty, and between political and socio-economic equality. The twin demands for the maximum realization of both equality and liberty are well captured in Balibar’s notion of égaliberté (a contraction of ‘equal liberty’). Populist claim-making is inconsistent with the twin demands of liberty and equality for all because it makes the demand for freedom (or equality) only for ‘its own’ people, not for all. Second, there is potential tension between the legality of the decision-making process occasioned by the principle of the rule of law and the substance of the popular
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will. The legal system of formal rules and procedures protects individual citizens from arbitrary oppression, but gives rise to a complex and very indirect decision-making process also. The legislative process of mediation among different individual opinions occasions a polemical attack on liberal democracy by populists who advocate a direct connection between the will of the people and collective binding decisions. Third, there is an intrinsic tension between the majority criterion for decision-making, which is deduced from the principle of popular sovereignty, and the constitutional rights and liberties of minorities. If majority rule is limited by minority rights, then various parts of the dèmos are able to alternate in the wielding of power. Populism, with its presumption that the people is a single homogeneous whole, breaks with that logic of changeable majorities.

Chapter 7 discusses the role of government bureaucracy within and outside the context of modern representative democracy. The first part of the chapter argues that the role of government bureaucracy within a democratic order is ambivalent. On the one hand, government bureaucracy is indispensable to democracy, but on the other hand its administrative power and rationality poses three problems. The first two problems – the danger of encroachment upon individual freedom and the threat of limited political accountability – are potentially troubling for any political order once a bureaucracy is firmly in place. A third problem is typical for any democratic regime which legitimizes itself in terms of popular sovereignty and self-government. Growing formal rationality may give rise to alienation as citizens become depersonalized through administrative means, which means that citizens no longer recognize themselves in the power under which they are ruled and which nominally is theirs. The three problems together generate popular grievances against bureaucracy, while the third problem nourishes a democratic reaction by political agents, usually labeled ‘populist’. Drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire, the ‘properly populist’ approach to bureaucracy is explored. On the one hand, populism feeds an anti-bureaucratic sentiment, rejecting the impersonal style of bureaucracy and downplaying the autonomy of bureaucracy in making general rules, but on the other hand it tends to reduce politics to a matter of technocratic problem-solving, so that bureaucracy then becomes populism’s ally.

The second part of Chapter 7 discusses the role of bureaucracy in contemporary democracies in the light of transformations that are taking place in political decision-making, those being the shift in political decision-making from the national towards the supranational level, and the turn by national governments and transnational organizations toward neo-liberal market approaches. Those two developments, which are interconnected, have weakened traditional accountability mechanisms that depended on parliamentary institutions to monitor both national and supranational bureaucracies. The decline of democratic accountability is only partly compensated for by new power-controlling practices, and has been responded to by political parties and movements, usually labeled ‘populist’, which claims that nationally-based democracy must be preserved.
Chapter 8 explains the origin of elite criticism of those agents labeled ‘populist’. It is argued that modern democracy is a representative form of government which, little by little, has been democratized. The result is a mixed regime wherein a balance between the power interests of the political elite, being the group that predominantly produces collective binding decisions, and the people’s democratic impulse to collective self-determination must be recurrently reinvented and re-established by different democratic repertoires. General elections are one form of such institutions, albeit a crucial one that facilitates the political balance because it corresponds with the normative principle that legitimate political power stems from popular consent. That balance is potentially undermined by elitism. In spite of electoral accountability and a wide variety of power-monitoring practices that exert pressure on ruling elites, there is an inherent tendency for political elites to exercise power without connection to the will of the electorate and eventually to turn into a political class, which is the major problem for representative democracy because it limits the access of social agents and pressure groups to democratic power, and because it is the basis for political corruption. The rise of a political class tends to create fertile ground for the growth of anti-establishment parties, and then ‘populism’ becomes an effective political label, used either by the political elite to discredit their critics or as a proudly worn nickname used by the elite’s opponent.

Moreover, drawing on the idea of the populist repertoire, Chapter 8 examines the impact on democracy of ‘populist’ elite criticism. It is argued that populism is two-sided and both sides are at work at the same time. On the one hand, populism is one of the countervailing forces preventing the tendency of political elites to lose their connection with the will of the electorate. From that perspective populism can be seen as a mirror of representative democracy. On the other hand, populists do not passively tap into existing levels of popular grievance about ruling elites, but also feed the idea that the incumbent elite is incompetent and untrustworthy. Permanent criticism of ruling authorities, combined with a misleading discourse about the identities of rulers and ruled can increase the level of distrust of political elites and thereby undermine the idea that political elites are crucially important to the stability of representative democracy.
De afgelopen 20 jaar zijn er in veel Europese landen tal van anti-establishment partijen opgekomen die veelal worden omschreven als ‘populistisch’. De opkomst van deze partijen heeft geleid tot een verhit publiek debat over de betekenis van populisme en over de verhouding van populisme en democratie. Zo is populisme beschouwd als een antidemocratisch fenomeen, maar ook als een zuivere vorm van democratie. Volgens sommigen is populisme een tijdelijke aberratie, terwijl anderen populisme zien als een noodzakelijk bijverschijnsel van de democratie. Deze studie beoogt vanuit politiek-filosofisch perspectief tot een conceptuele verheldering te komen van het begrip ‘populisme’ en de verhouding van populisme met democratie.

In deze studie is gekozen voor een kritische begripsanalyse van populisme, dat wil zeggen dat het niet naïief vertrekt vanuit de gegevenheid van populisme – hetzij als een politiek label, hetzij als een politiek fenomeen –, maar de interactie articulateert tussen gebruikers van het label ‘populisme’ en de verschillende politieke verschijnselen en actoren die als ‘populistisch’ worden omschreven. Deze interactie is toentrotse onderbelicht in de wetenschappelijke literatuur waarin populisme enkel als een politiek label of politiek verschijnsel wordt geanalyseerd. Daarnaast kiest deze studie voor een specifieke benadering van democratie: de analyse gaat uit van het omstreden karakter van democratie, de praktijk dat democratie nooit gegeven is maar altijd opnieuw gedefinieerd en betwist wordt. Democratie kent een aantal ingebouwde dilemma’s waarvoor geen perfecte oplossing bestaat. Deze dilemma’s worden uitgewerkt aan de hand van vier intrinsieke spanningen, te weten de spanning tussen het principe van volkssoevereiniteit en politieke representatie, tussen volkssoevereiniteit en rule of law (rechtstaat), tussen democratische legitimiteit en bureaucratische regelgeving en tussen het democratisch ideaal van zelfbestuur en de (machts)belangen van een politieke elite. Deze intrinsieke spanningen worden op scherp gezet door hedendaagse contingente factoren zoals de personalisering van de politiek, globalisering, Europese integratie en de huidige neoliberaal hegemонie.

De begripsanalyse wordt in deze studie gecombineerd met metareflexieve bespiegelingen. Op metareflexief niveau articulateert deze studie de politieke dimensie van haar eigen vertoog. Populisme is immers een polemisch begrip waarmee een politieke tegenstelling wordt gecreëerd tussen ‘goede’ en ‘slechte’ democraaten, wat betekent dat ik mij als interpretator van populisme onherroepelijk in het polemische krachtenu impedieveld bevind.

Om de betekenis van populisme en de verhouding van populisme met democratie conceptueel te verhelderen poogt deze studie antwoord te geven op vier centrale vragen. Ten eerste, waarom wordt het label ‘populisme’ aan sommige politieke verschijnselen of actoren toegeschreven en aan anderen niet? Ten tweede, wat is de normatieve
democratieconceptie van die actoren waarbij het label ‘populisme’ blijft plakken? Ten derde, hoe zijn de intrinsieke spanningen in de moderne democratie, waarvan sommigen op scherp worden gesteld door contingente factoren, gerelateerd aan het frequente gebruik van het label ‘populisme’? Ten vierde, wat is de specifieke rol van de politieke verschijnselen en actoren, waarbij het label ‘populisme’ blijft plakken, in de moderne democratie? De eerste twee vragen staan centraal in het eerste deel van dit boek (hoofdstukken 1-4), terwijl het tweede deel (hoofdstukken 5-8) ingaat op de laatste twee hoofdvragen.


Hoofdstuk 2 concentreert zich op de eerste hoofdvraag van deze studie en conceptualiseert de interactie tussen gebruikers van het label ‘populisme’ en de politieke verschijnselen en actoren die als ‘populistisch’ worden omschreven. De conceptualisering van deze interactie omvat vijf aspecten: het concept ‘populisme’, de politieke handeling van het label, degene die het label plakt, de ‘lijm’ van het label en tenslotte de ‘plakkraft’ van de zogenaamde lijm. Het concept populisme ontleent zijn betekenis in de eerste plaats aan de positie die het inneemt ten opzichte van andere concepten. Het semantische veld dat wordt opgeroepen is afhankelijk van de specifieke historische context waarin
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het begrip wordt gebruikt. De toeschrijving van het label ‘populisme’ is, in de tweede plaats, een politieke handeling. Populisme is niet een gegeven maar moet als verschijnsel of label (in)gesteld worden. Degenen die het label ‘populisme’ hanteren brengen verschillende partijen en politici binnen één gemeenschappelijk vertoog. Het performatieve karakter van het label blijft vaak onbesproken in politicologische benaderingen die simpelweg vertrekken vanuit de gegevenheid van populisme als politiek verschijnsel.

Het (in)stellen van populisme is, ten derde, nooit neutraal maar altijd verbonden met waardeoor delen. Populisme is, zoals gezegd, een polemisch begrip. Het polemische karakter van ‘populisme’ betekent, ten vierde, dat het label niet zelfklevend is maar een bepaalde ‘lijm’ nodig heeft om werkzaam te kunnen zijn. De ‘lijm’ bestaat uit de verschillende wetenschappelijke, journalistieke en politieke vertogen over populisme en politieke strategieën met betrekking tot populisme. Het scala aan vertogen en corresponderende politieke strategieën is, ten vijfde, een indicator van de ‘plakkkracht van de lijm’ die bepaalt of en de mate waarin het label blijft plakken op bepaalde politieke verschijnselen. De ‘plakkkracht’ neemt toe wanneer het aantal vertogen en strategieën toe neemt, maar het is ook zo dat het toeschrijven van het label aan bepaalde verschijnselen en actoren enigszins plausibel moet zijn. De mate van plausibiliteit wordt deels inter subjectief bepaald: de ‘plakkkracht’ neemt toe naarmate de vertogen over populisme en corresponderende strategieën in grote mate worden gedeeld door leden van de samenleving. Anderzijds wordt het label ‘populisme’ niet op volstrekt verschillende partijen en politici wordt geplakt. Het hoofdstuk sluit daarom af met de gedachte dat een specifiek kernide bevallen is voor de ‘plakkkracht van de lijm’.

Hoofdstuk 3 borduurt voort op de eerste hoofdvraag en onderzoekt populisme als politiek verschijnsel. Populisme wordt geanalyseerd als een specifiek democratisch repertoire, gedefinieerd als een constellatie van ideologemen (de kleinste mogelijke kenbare eenheden in een ideologisch vertoog) en praktijken door politieke actoren georganiseerd of bijeengebracht rondom het idee dat ‘het volk’ een homogene eenheid is. Het populistisch repertoire is een ideaaltype omschrijving en maakt het mogelijk de relatieve ‘plakkkracht van de lijm’ te bepalen. De populistische idee van het ene homogene volk is het onderscheidende criterium en vormt de lakmoespriep voor de ‘plakkkracht’. Alleen wanneer gedragingen, uitingen of praktijken worden gevoed door dit specifieke idee blijft het label ‘populisme’ plakken. Populisten stellen het volk voor als een homogene (gelijkssoortige) entiteit, bestaande uit ‘gewone burgers’ en onderkennen daarmee de ‘democratische conditie’ dat burgers, bij alle verschillen, geacht worden elkaar als ‘gelijk’ te benaderen en ook door hun overheid zo benaderd moeten worden. Ten tweede stellen ze het homogene volk voor als een eenheid met een ondeelbare politieke wil.

Hoofdstuk 4 explooreert de normatieve democratieopvatting van de politieke actoren waarbij het label ‘populist’ blijft plakken. Het doel van dit hoofdstuk is niet om één populistische visie op democratie uit de doeken te doen, maar om populisme te onderzoeken als een generiek begrip dat diverse populistische politici en bewegingen
omvat. Populisten geven immers verschillende democratische rechtvaardigingen voor hun politiek handelen. Onder condities van representatieve democratie, onderbouwen populisten, evenals andere politici, hun politieke claims als legitieme claims met een beroep op het principe van volkssoevereiniteit. De populistische aanspraak op legitimiteit kan gebaseerd zijn op 1) het ‘inzicht’ van de populistische leider die beweert de ware woordvoorder te zijn van het volk, 2) mobilisatie van de volksmassa, en 3) vormen van directe democratie (acclamatie). Het hoofdstuk neemt de populistische aanspraken vervolgens kritisch onder de loep en laat zien dat de claim van populistische politici dat zij zelf of vormen van directe democratie slechts de volkswil weerspiegelen misleidend is, omdat ze daarmee ontkennen dat de belangen en waarden van het volk altijd tot stand worden gebracht via politieke representatie.


Hoofdstuk 5 gaat in op het principe van volkssoevereiniteit, een belangrijk democratisch principe en eveneens een wezenlijk bestanddeel in het populistisch repertoire. Het ‘soevereine volk’ heeft een ambigue betekenis. Enerzijds is volkssoevereiniteit begrepen als een bron van legitimiteit: politici legitimeren hun handelingen in naam van de démos, de politieke gemeenschap als geheel. Aan de andere kant wordt volkssoevereiniteit geïdentificeerd met de collectieve macht, dat wil zeggen potentia, van een menigte of bevolking. Op basis van deze dubbelzinnigheid worden in hoofdstuk 5 drie argumenten over volkssoevereiniteit naar voren gebracht. In de eerste plaats wordt gesteld dat
de constitutie van een *dèmos* vereist dat zij zich representeert. De *dèmos* is niet een vooraf bestaande groep, maar bestaat pas als zodanig met die representatie. Representatie van een democratische gemeenschap wordt reflexief voltrokken vanuit de gemeenschap zelf en vindt plaats van dag tot dag. Met het veelvuldig spreken dat ‘de’ gemeenschap sticht wordt een grens getrokken tussen degenen die deel uitmaken van de *dèmos* en degenen die daar niet toe behoren. Ten tweede, in de moderne representatieve democratie regeert het volk zichzelf niet in strikte zin, maar delegeren burgers via verkiezingen de beslissingsmacht aan politieke vertegenwoordigers die namens het gehele volk macht uitoefenen. Omdat politieke representatie een performatief karakter heeft moet ‘volledige representatie’ evenwel noodzakelijk mislukken. Ten derde, het ‘soevereine volk’ verschijnt op sommige momenten, ten tijde van een revolutie bijvoorbeeld, als een collectieve massa van concrete individuen dat ogenschijnlijk als eenheid aanwezig is (‘het volk-als-gebeurtenis’). Met behulp van het populistisch repertoire wordt beargumenteerd dat populisten gebruik maken van de waarheid dat een democratische gemeenschap zelfbegrenzing veronderstelt maar daaraan toevoegen dat een grens nu eenmaal een grens is en daarbij dus suggereren dat het ter discussie stellen van grenzen illegitiem is. In de tweede plaats verwerpt populisme het tweede argument over volkssoevereiniteit in naam van het derde argument: populisten beweren dat iedere vorm van bemiddeling bedrog is en alleen ‘volledige’ representatie echt democratisch is.

Hoofdstuk 6 richt zich op de liberale democratie, waarbij aansluiting wordt gezocht bij een minderheid van politieke denkers die menen dat democratie en liberale democratie geen synoniemen zijn, maar stellen dat liberale democratie de historisch contingente articulatie is van een democratische en liberale traditie. Beide tradities zijn nauw met elkaar verbonden, maar vertegenwoordigen verschillende perspectieven op democratie. Liberale democratie combineert het principe van volkssoevereiniteit en het principe van de *rule of law* dat in de liberale traditie is verbonden met de constitutionele bescherming van individuele rechten en vrijheden en scheidingsder machten. Deze combinatie creëert een mogelijke conflict rondom het soevereiniteitsprincipe, waarmee ook een drietal intrinsieke spanningen verbonden zijn. Inachtneming van de *rule of law* stelt grenzen aan de discretionaire bevoegdheid van politieke autoriteiten aangezien zij zelf aan de wet zijn gebonden. Het principe van de *rule of law* creëert een mogelijke conflict met ‘volksdemocratische’ perspectieven, waarvan het populisme een exponent is, die het volk beschouwen als het enige ware gezag in wetgeving.

Drie intrinsieke spanningen zijn gerelateerd aan dit potentieel conflict. Allereerst is er sprake van een complexe verhouding tussen vrijheid en gelijkheid, de onderliggende waarden van liberale democratie. Het hoofdstuk beschrijft spanningen tussen negatieve en positieve vrijheid, en tussen politieke en sociaaleconomische gelijkheid en laat zien dat deze waarden geen vaststaand gegeven zijn maar (permanent) bevochten dienen te worden. De aanspraak op vrijheid en gelijkheid is door Balibar omschreven als ‘gelijkvrijheid’ (*égaliberté*) voor iedereen. Populistische aanspraken op vrijheid en gelijkheid
richten zich enkel op ‘het eigen volk’ en zijn daarmee in strijd met Balibar’s emancipatiorisch principe. In de tweede plaats is er een mogelijke spanning tussen de legaliteit van het besluitvormingsproces en de substantiële inhoud van de volkswil. Het rechtssysteem beschermt individuele burgers tegen willekeurige machtsuitoefening maar leidt ook tot een ingewikkeld besluitvormingsproces, waarbij de pluraliteit en heterogeniteit van de samenleving vertaald moet worden in wetgeving via een complex stelsel van formulieregels en procedures. Populisten verzetten zich tegen de diverse lagen van bemiddeling in het besluitvormingsproces en stellen daar een logica van de onmiddellijkheid – een directe relatie tussen de volkswil en collectief bindende beslissingen – tegenover.

Ten derde is er een intrinsieke spanning tussen besluitvorming bij meerderheid van stemmen en de constitutionele rechten en vrijheden van minderheden. Wanneer de meerderheidsregel op enigerlei wijze wordt beperkt kunnen verschillende maatschappelijk groeperingen hun opvattingen in het besluitvormingsproces inbrengen en is er ook sprake van wisselende meerderheden. Populisten doorbreken de logica van ‘wisselende meerderheden’ met hun bewering dat het volk één is.

Hoofdstuk 7 gaat in op de rol van de overheidsbureaucratie binnen en buiten de context van de moderne representatieve democratie. Het eerste deel van dit hoofdstuk beschrijft de ambivalente rol van de overheidsbureaucratie binnen een democratische orde. Enerzijds is een overheidsbureaucratie onmisbaar in een democratie, maar anderzijds geeft de bureaucratische macht en rationaliteit aanleiding tot een drietal problemen. De eerste twee – de inbreuk op de individuele vrijheid en het tekortschieten van politieke verantwoording – zijn twee potentiële problemen voor iedere politieke orde met een sterke overheidsbureaucratie. Een derde probleem is specifiek voor een democratisch regime dat zich legitimeert in termen van volkssoevereiniteit en zelfbestuur. De formele rationaliteit dat eigen is aan bureaucratie leidt mogelijk tot ‘ontmenselijking’ en daarmee tot vervreemding, waardoor burgers zich niet meer kunnen herkennen in de macht waaraan ze zijn onderworpen. De drie problemen samen geven aanleiding tot structurele ontevredenheid over de bureaucratie, terwijl het derde probleem voeding geeft aan een democratische reactie van ‘populistische’ politici. Met behulp van het populistisch repertoire wordt geconcludeerd dat de ‘populistische’ visie op bureaucratie ambivalent is. Enerzijds voedt het populisme een antibureaucratisch sentiment waarbij het de onpersoonlijke stijl van de bureaucratie verwerpt. Anderzijds neigt de populistische realisering van de ene volkswil de politiek te reduceren tot het technocratisch oplossen van maatschappelijke problemen wat weer specifieke expertise en kennis van een overheidsbureaucratie vereist.

Het tweede deel van dit hoofdstuk gaat in op de rol van bureaucratie in hedendaagse democratieën. In de afgelopen decennia zijn veel politieke vraagstukken dermate complex geworden dat een groot deel van de besluitvorming plaatsvindt in supranationale bureaucratische organisaties en netwerken van bestuurlijke experts en deskundigen op het betreffende beleidsterrein. De gevoelde bureaucratisering van de politiek wordt nog
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eens versterkt doordat de overheidsbureaucratie als gevolg van neoliberaal beleid de afgelopen decennia deels is verzelfstandigd, waardoor het bewindslieden aan middelen ontbreekt het feitelijke functioneren van die organisaties effectief te controleren en te beïnvloeden. Het ontstaan van nieuwe bureaucratische instellingen en het gebrek aan democratische verantwoording is slechts deels gecompenseerd door nieuwe democratische praktijken die de bureaucratische en politieke macht op nationaal en supranationaal niveau controleren en hebben de deur geopend voor ‘populistische’ partijen en bewegingen die eisen dat de (nationale) democratie moet worden beschermd.

Hoofdstuk 8 poogt een verklaring te bieden voor de ‘populistische’ elitekritiek. Vertrekpunt voor de analyse is een historische terugblik op het ontstaan van de moderne representatieve democratie. De moderne democratie is een representatieve regeringsvorm die beter bij beter is gedemocratiseerd. Het resultaat is een gemengd regime waarbij er via verschillende democratische repertoire voortdurend een evenwicht moet worden gezocht tussen de machtsbelangen van een politieke elite (de groep die grotendeels collectief bindende beslissingen neemt) en de democratische impuls van collectieve zelfbeschikking van het volk. Algemene verkiezingen zijn een van de vele, maar cruciale vormen die dit politiek evenwicht faciliteren aangezien ze corresponderen met het heersende normatieve principe dat legitieme politieke macht berust op instemming. Verkiezingen brengen echter steeds weer politieke elites voort en deze elitevorming bevat een permanent gevaar. Hoewel gekozen politici electorale verantwoording moeten afleggen en ‘indirecte machten’, zoals NGO’s en volksjury’s, een democratische controle vormen op de regeringsmacht (Rosanvall’s ‘tegendemocratie’) bestaat er altijd het gevaar dat politieke elites losraken van hun democratische basis en er een politieke klasse ontstaat dat weinig oog meer heeft voor de noden en wensen van het electoraat. Het ontstaan van een in zichzelf gekeerde politieke klasse ontstaat niet zelden in verschillende gradaties van politieke corruptie en onoorbare vormen van belangenverstrengeling en is een vruchtbare voedingsbodem voor anti-establishment partijen. In dergelijke gevallen is ‘populisme’ een effectief politiek label dat enerzijds door de politieke elite wordt gebruikt om de uitdagers te desavoueren en anderzijds door de critici juist als geuzennaam wordt ingezet.

Het hoofdstuk bestudeert verder de impact van de ‘populistische’ elitekritiek op de democratie. Op basis van het populistisch repertoire wordt geconcludeerd dat de rol van populisme tweeledig is. Populisten signaleren gemarginaliseerde belangen, houden een ‘ontworstelde’ elite bij de les en herinneren de democratie aan haar fundamentele maar niet te realiseren pretentie, namelijk dat alle burgers meeblussen over de gang van zaken in de maatschappij. Populisme is een spiegel van de democratie dat tot een herbezinning bij het politieke establishment en tot vernieuwingen in het politieke bestel kan leiden. Tegelijkertijd claimen populisten dat er een zuiver en transparant beeld van het volk ten grondslag ligt aan de uitoefening van politieke macht en sluiten daarbij alles uit wat vreemd is aan het ‘gewone volk’. Populisten claimen zelf een
rechtstreekse spreekbuis te zijn van wat er onder het volk leeft en neigen ertoe het heersend gezag permanent te stigmatiseren. Met hun misleidend vertoog over de identiteit tussen regeerders en regeerden en de inherent negatieve appreciatie van politieke elites ondermijnen ze mogelijk het idee dat politieke elites nodig zijn voor de stabiliteit van de representatie democratie.
Curriculum Vitae

Tim Houwen was born at Sevenum, in the Netherlands, on 20 January 1982. In 2000 he began his study of political science at Radboud University in Nijmegen, graduating in 2006. His MA thesis was on political membership. During his study in 2003, Tim spent a semester visiting Agder University at Kristiansand and then once back at Radboud, he combined his study in political science with the study of philosophy, graduating cum laude in 2007, this time with an MA thesis on political utopias. During his final year, he fulfilled a work placement at the Dutch daily newspaper Trouw and in 2007, now a PhD candidate, joined the department of social and political philosophy at Radboud as a junior researcher. He was a member of the research program ‘Repertoires of Democracy’, financed by the Dutch Organization of Scientific Research (NWO), and worked on his PhD thesis under the supervision of prof. dr. Van der Zweerde and prof. dr. Van Tongeren. Tim then published papers on populism and democracy and taught courses on political philosophy. With the help of a grant from the EU-Life Long Learning Programme (Erasmus) he spent the fall of 2010 at the University of Sussex, finally finishing his thesis in September 2012. Tim is married to Saskia van Opstal and they have a son, Teun.