Halkçılık and *Popülizm*: "Official-Rational" versus "Popular" in the context of "Turkish Exceptionalism"

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Abstract

Although the concept of populism is widely used in the literature on Turkish politics, except for in a few studies, it is hard to come across a rigorous theoretical-conceptual approach to the term. The existence of two equivalents for the word "populism" in Turkish, halkçılık and popülizm, exacerbates this ambiguity. This paper discusses the reasons for these two usages in Turkish, explores the academic debates over the lack of rigorous conceptual-theoretical approaches to the concept, and compares these with the uses of the concept in the literature on Turkish politics. It is argued that the distinction between halkçılık and popülizm is based on the field of binary oppositions embedded in the social sciences in the Turkish context, grounded in turn on a wider "enframing" differentiating "model" from "reality". Since Turkish politics is often evaluated as a unique realization of the Western ideal, few incentives remain for evaluating it either from a comparative perspective or as an incidence of a wider universal political phenomenon. Such enframing has caused a particularistic approach to Turkish politics and an underdevelopment of conceptual-theoretical discussions of populism/halkçılık/popülizm. Nevertheless, the use of populism as a signifier of "Turkish exceptionalism" is no coincidence; it is implicit in the fundamental dichotomy between the "Western liberal-democratic representative ideal" and the "derivative reality of populism" developed in most of the general theoretical literature on populism. It is therefore argued that, particularly in the Turkish context, the analytical leverage provided by the concept of populism creates more problems than it promises to solve and has become a hindrance to understanding.

Halkçılık and *Popülizm*: "Official-Rational" versus "Popular" in the context of "Turkish Exceptionalism"[1]

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1. Introduction

Social scientists interested in politics of Turkey over the last century cannot fail to notice the super-abundance of the concept of populism in the literature, or its application to seemingly very different phases and actors. Compounding this conceptual ambiguity is the existence of two synonyms for the word "populism" in modern Turkish: *halkçılık* (from *halk*, meaning public/community, derived from the Arabic) and *popülizm* (a Latinate loanword from the French).[2] This range of uses of the term in such divergent contexts may be explained by the difficulties and ambiguities already inherent to the concept itself, explored below. Nevertheless, this fact does not excuse the rarity—or in most of the cases absence—of adequate theoretical-conceptual discussion of the term or its implications for analyses of Turkish politics.

In this essay, I briefly introduce my theoretical tools for the examination of the concept of populism and give a brief account of general academic approaches to it. In order to provide a case-specific historical context, I follow this with a brief account of the main outlines of modern Turkish politics. Afterwards, I examine the *halkçılık* of the early-Republican period, political and economic approaches to the concept, and the relationship between centre-right, patronage and populism in the literature on Turkish politics. In the final part, I locate the distinction between *halkçılık* and *popülizm* in a wider social-scientific rationality constructed upon certain binary oppositions. In conclusion, I draw attention to the location of the concept of populism in Turkish politics as an indicator of a wider process of epistemological

[2] In the online dictionary of the official Turkish Language Institution (*Türk Dil Kurumu*), the term *halkçılık* is defined as "the point of view and stance which sees no difference between individuals in terms of their rights and rejects privilege within society, *popülizm*". Nevertheless, the definition of the *popülizm* by the same dictionary has other, more negative connotations: "1. Politics implemented through the dramatization of the political situation to appeal to the people; 2. To flatter the people." See http://www.tdk.gov.tr/ (accessed: 29.6.2014).

"enframing," as understood by Timothy Mitchell (1989, 1990, 1991). The "enframing" which emerges around two equivalents of the concept in the Turkish context also strongly highlights the problem of "enframing" embedded in the majority of the conceptualizations of populism in general academic debates. In conclusion, I argue that the supposed analytical leverage provided by the concept of populism actually creates more problems than it promises to solve; particularly in the context of the Turkish social sciences, where applications of the concept tend to reproduce a belief in "Turkish exceptionalism" and a problematic normative and analytical bias.

2. Theoretical approach and the concept of populism

Enframing in social sciences

Mitchell defines enframing as "a variety of modern practices that seem to resolve the world's shifting complexity into two simple and distinct dimensions. Such practices give rise to the effect of a purely material world, opposed to and given order by what now appears as a free-standing, non-material realm of meaning" (1990, 566). He defines these techniques as "method[s] of order and truth" (1989, 236). He also analyses the distinction between state and society as the "structural effect" of various practices of enframing and reveals the contribution of social scientific literature to producing this effect (1991). As we shall see, enframing or differentiating "meaning" and "reality" has been, implicitly or explicitly, the essential dynamic behind the uses of the concept of populism in Turkey as well as in general academic discussions.

Conceptualising populism: from Shils to current attempts

Of course, a large body of literature deploys the word "populism" rather unsystematically to describe political actors' opportunistic, pragmatist, and demagogical styles and tactics.[3] The first systematic evaluation of the concept of populism, however, belongs to Edward Shils. His analysis of the American security policies of the Cold War era, first published in 1956, defines the essential tendency of populism as the belief that "the will of the people as such is supreme over every other standard, over the autonomy of institutions and over the will of other strata" (1996, 98). For Shils, populism also "identifies the will of the people with justice

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[3] See Tim Houwen (2011, 26–33). Houwen reveals a comprehensive history of the concept, illustrating the descriptive and pejorative uses of the concept by politicians, the media, and social scientists.

and morality" (98), and he defines one of its main characteristics as hostility towards parliamentary-representative politics (101–103).

Students of populism usually acknowledge the constitutive centrality of Ernest Gellner and Ghita Ionescu's edited book, an outcome of a 1967 conference on the concept at the London School of Economics, which illustrates the diversity of the social and historical contexts and political actors that scholars have identified with the term. According to the editors, "no one is quite clear just what [populism] is. It bobs up everywhere, but in many and contradictory shapes" (1969, 1). The second part of the book deals with the theoretical issues around the concept, and indeed reveals a striking diversity. According to Peter Worsley, for instance, it is preferable to understand populism "as an emphasis, a dimension of political culture in general, not simply as a particular kind of overall ideological system or type of organization" (245). Worsley also underlines the importance of the tendency towards "direct participation" in the identification of populism (246–7). On the other hand, Peter Wiles, while also listing many minor empirical properties of populism (1969, 167–168), defines it chiefly "as any creed or movement based on the following major premise: virtue resides in the simple people, who are the overwhelming majority, and in their collective traditions" (166). Another treatment of the concept again argues that populism is a response to the particular problems of modernization (Stewart 1969, 180).

This diversity and discord among the theoretical approaches to the concept in its first and prominent systematic elaborations has, more or less, persisted. A later systematic and comprehensive study of the concept by Margaret Canovan demonstrates the persistence of the difficulties and highlights the hurdles in defining some limited common characteristics out of the divergent political manifestations of populism. Canovan argues that we need not a "single essentialist definition but a typology of populism" (1981, 13). Nevertheless, she cannot avoid defining two "universally present" characteristics of populism although she admits the vagueness of these components: "exaltation of the people" and "anti-elitism" (294). She also underlines populists' tendency to "direct popular democracy" and their distrust of politicians (292). She argues that populism can be encountered as an ideology, movement, or political technique (298–299).

Paul Taggart's later, oft-cited, and systematic evaluation of the concept has also underlined the lack of a consensus on the universal properties of populism and the difficulty of agreeing

on an authoritative definition. Nevertheless, he identifies several features of the concept and defines it as "a reaction against the ideas, institutions and practices of representative politics which celebrates an implicit or explicit heartland as a response to a sense of crisis; however, lacking universal key values, it is chameleonic, taking on attributes of its environment, and, in practice, is episodic" (Taggart 2000, 5).

It seems possible at this point to separate the main body of the literature into two main divergent approaches. The first eclectic and "multi-domain" approach evaluates populism as the political outcome of the overlap of certain social and economic conditions, and this approach can be clearly seen in the contributions to and influence of Ionescu and Gellner's book. A second, narrower, "single-domain" approach tends to confine its understanding of populism to the study of political discourses and strategies.

Kurt Weyland's position, for example, is somewhat exceptional in the literature and derives from the study of Latin America, focusing on the organisational-strategic dimension of politics. Weyland underlines the weaknesses of the multi-domain approaches to the concept, highlighting in particular the insufficiency of associating populism with import substitution economies (2001, 10) and the unexpected implementation of neoliberal policies by populist leaders in Latin America after the 1980s (17). Weyland thus tries to decouple the concept from its economic and discursive implications; "populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers" (14). It is interesting that Weyland also associates populism with the absence of representative, organisational mechanisms between leader and followers and emphasizes the importance of direct relationships for populist strategies.

Another example of a single-domain approach to populism stems from the study of the radical right in Europe. Cas Mudde (2004) has defined populism as "an *ideology* that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (543). Mudde argues that populism is what Freeden (1996) calls a "thin-centered ideology," usually found in combination with other, perhaps fuller, ideologies like communism, nationalism, and socialism (Mudde 2004, 544). However, he also defines populism in contradistinction to two persistent adversaries:

"elitism" and "pluralism" (543–544). Similar to Shils, Mudde also notes that "populism is inherently hostile to the idea and institutions of *liberal* democracy or *constitutional* democracy" (561).
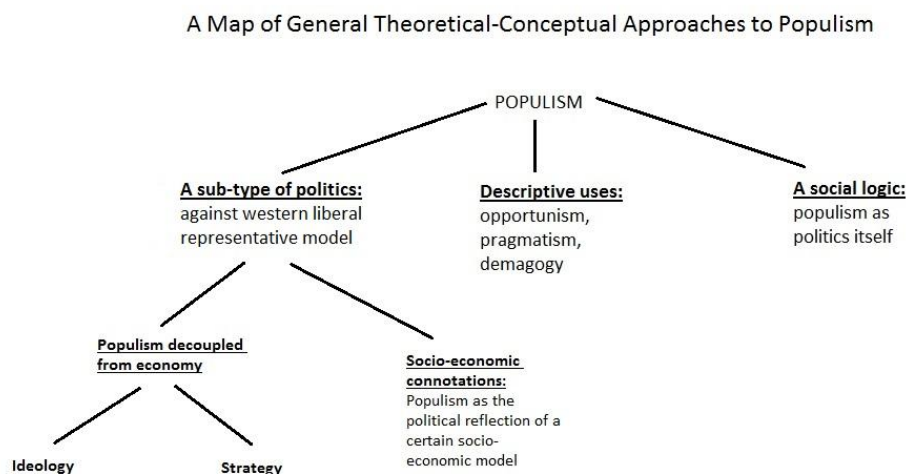
While it should be underlined that attempts to decouple populism from its economic implications are not theoretically uniform—Weyland treats populism as a special organisational strategy while Mudde evaluates it as an ideology, for example—it is nevertheless possible to identify what seems to be a common feature of both the multi- and single-domain definitions of populism examined so far; most define populist movements, ideologies, actors, and contexts as manifestation of a "sub-type" of politics in opposition to the Western liberal representative democratic model.

This duality reveals the widespread enframing process in the literature on populism. To a certain extent, populism has always been seen as a derivative form of politics, a deviation from the Western European ideal of representative democracy. This is why populism has always been diagnosed either on the geographical and cultural margins of Europe or in the internal political periphery of Western European democracies. Populism has been seen as the "slightly disturbing" realization of the Western European ideal of representative democracy in the margins of European influence such as America, Russia, Latin America and the Middle East, or on the internal political fringes of Western European democracies, namely on the radical right. In short, on the one hand there is the orderly and rational Western European ideal of representative politics (meaning) and on the other the grotesque and popular deviation from this meaning: populism (reality). According to the narrative, populism is not the antagonistic other of representative democracy but the deviation from the norm; it is the name given to the unintended consequences of the diffusion and consolidation of the ideal of representative democracy in the political, geographical, and cultural margins of Western Europe.

In opposition to the exclusive definition of "populism as a subtype of politics," however, Ernesto Laclau has, in his recent work, adopted the more inclusive stance towards "populism as politics itself." Laclau's analysis aims not to define a limited concept but to illustrate how populism corresponds to a "social logic" which can be observed across many different phenomena (2007, xi). For Laclau, all political interventions are to a certain extent populist (154); indeed, the simplification and imprecision of populism are no worse than that inherent

in other sedimentary/institutional rationales called politics by a certain kind of social scientific rationality, and such "distortions" are in fact what distinguishes "politics" from "administration" in Laclau's own vocabulary (17–18). Thus, adopting the perspective of Laclau's work, populism as the articulation of differences and re-interpretation of these articulated differences as simple antagonisms defined by imprecise boundaries is politics *par excellence*.

A Map of General Theoretical-Conceptual Approaches to Populism

POPULISM

A sub-type of politics:
against western liberal representative model

Descriptive uses:
opportunism, pragmatism, demagogy

A social logic:
populism as politics itself

Populism decoupled from economy

Socio-economic connotations:
Populism as the political reflection of a certain socio-economic model

Ideology   Strategy

Figure 1: A map of theoretical-conceptual approaches to populism

It seems, then, that the theoretical-conceptual sophistication of the definition of populism increases as one diverges from the unsystematic, eclectic, and in-between positions and adopts a perspective which takes populism to be clearly either a "sub-type of politics" or as "politics itself." Of course, it is important to be aware of the danger of being overly schematic, and there are also many insightful approaches to the populism in between the abovementioned poles. Nevertheless, whether the concept is used to denote the opportunistic, demagogic and pragmatist inclinations of politicians, the political regimes or actors of a certain socio-economic model and historical era in the underdeveloped world, or to imply a universal dimension of representative politics in general, it should also be noted that the studies with more theoretical-conceptual strength tend to be either comparative works or evaluations of single incidents contextualised as a part of a more generalizable socio-political experience.

However, even if we avoid the theoretically-conceptually weaker positions in between the two more rigorous approaches, it should be clear that the use of the concept of populism as a special sub-type of politics entails a strong normative implication in favour of Western European liberal representative politics. Nevertheless, a fundamentally critical perspective has its own lacunae too. As underlined by Ben Stanley, Laclau's use of the concept as identical to politics itself leads to the disappearance of the analytical particularity and operational usefulness of the concept (2008, 97). In the following sections, I will present the various uses of the term in literature on Turkish politics and point out their convergences as well as divergences with the general academic debates on populism.

3. Historical overview[4]

After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the World War I, only the Anatolian peninsula remained under the control of the non-Arabic Muslim majority of the Empire. However, even this territory had been divided into regions of political influence and shared among the Western powers. Occupation of the western parts of this territory by the Greek army in 1919 was a decisive moment in the post-World War I history of the region. The occupation encountered an organized resistance which was led by the nationalist military and bureaucratic cadres and provincial landed and commercial power holders. The decisive victory of the nationalist forces over the Greek army in Anatolia brought Mustafa Kemal to the leadership of a nationalist coalition. After the war, he became the founding figure of the new Republican regime in Turkey in 1923. Subsequent years brought the emergence and consolidation of the one-party state of the Kemalist Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, or CHP). This Kemalist ruling elite carried out drastic political, cultural, and social reforms giving new momentum to the modernization process begun in the late-Ottoman period. Until İsmet İnönü's decision to transition to multiparty politics in 1945, the CHP regime remained an authoritarian and modernizing political engine without significant mass support. In economic terms, this era was characterised by statist policies, particularly after 1930. This era between 1923 and 1945 has been usually called the "early-Republican period" by students of modern Turkish politics and society.

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[4] For general outlines of modern Turkish history, see Sina Akşin (2007), Feroz Ahmad (2003), and Erik Zürcher (2004). For the economic aspects of the same period, see Korkut Boratav (2005) and Çağlar Keyder (2003). The following general framework of modern Turkish history mainly relies on these works.

As a consequence of the unpopularity of the ruling CHP, the transition to multiparty politics brought with it the rule of Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, or DP) between 1950 and 1960. The economic policies of the era were characterised by limited liberalisation which relied on the loosening of import regulations and heavily subsidized rural development. The first significant experience of Turkey with multiparty politics came to a bitter end when the army seized the power on the 27th of May 1960 on the grounds of the worsening economic situation and the authoritarian tendencies of the government. After the military coup, the period until 1980 had been characterised by rising leftist movements and unstable coalition governments between centre-right and left parties, such as the Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, AP) and CHP, particularly in the second half of the 1970s. In economic terms, the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by import substitution accompanied by widespread implementation of redistributive policies.

The military coup on the 12th of September 1980 was viewed as a response to rising economic problems and political instability. The coup was followed by the reinstitution of electoral politics in 1983 which led to the rise of the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, or ANAP) with a liberal economic and political agenda. The 1990s in particular brought the rise of political Islam. In these years, Turkish politics produced various weak coalition governments of the Islamist, centre-right and left parties until the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, or AKP) in 2002. Since then, Turkey has been ruled by a single-party government of the conservative, post-Islamist AKP and its neoliberal economic agenda.

4. Populism in the literature on Turkish Politics: Defining "Turkish exceptionalism"

This section of the paper will evaluate three main themes of Turkish politics in which the use of the term populism is a more-or-less well-established pattern and demonstrates some stability. These themes can be classified as i) early-Republican ideological engineering, ii) the political framework of the import substitution regime in the multi-party era, and iii) patronage and the centre-right. At first glance, these themes sound quite distinct, particularly the analyses of the early-Republican and multi-party eras in Turkey. Nevertheless, as I will illustrate, apart from the common use of the term populism, there is considerable similarity in the different works' analytical approaches to their problematic and the binary oppositions they use. As I will illustrate, all these works, implicitly or explicitly, define some form of "Turkish

exceptionalism" by positioning political experience in Turkey in contradistinction to the Western European liberal representative model.

i. *Halkçılık* in the early-Republican period

In his illustration of the emergence of populist ideas in the pre-republican period, Zafer Toprak (1977) refers to the anxieties of Ottoman intellectuals about emerging social distinctions. He draws attention to the solidarist-corporatist ideas of the intellectuals of the late-Ottoman period as a panacea to widening social fissures (14). He also underlines how these tendencies were inherited by the early-Republican elite and intellectuals. According to Toprak, for early-Republican elite, the principle of *halkçılık* referred to the idea and project of creating a homogenous nation without social classes (27–29). According to him, the solidarist and corporatist late-Ottoman and early-Republican principle of *halkçılık* represents "intellectual populism" in Turkey (Toprak 1992, 62). On the other hand, he argues that, with the beginning of multiparty politics in Turkey in 1945, populism became a political element, or, "political populism," and enabled the political participation of the masses in public affairs (62).

In line with Toprak, İlhan Tekeli underlines the solidarist-corporatist use of the principle of *halkçılık* in the early-Republican period as a way of providing popular base to the new regime and overcoming social and cultural differences within society (1983, 1932). Tekeli and Gencay Şaylan, in referring to an influential ideologue of the era, Recep Peker, define the *halkçılık* of the period as a principle implemented by the elite "against the people for the people" (1978, 80). Subsequently, they evaluate the *halkçılık* of the DP as a refutation of the early-Republican perspective. Tekeli and Şaylan define the *halkçılık* of the DP programme in 1950s as "from the people, with the people, and for the people" (89). They argue that the DP never imposed any change from above and "did not insist on any reform which was not appreciated by the people" (91).

A crucial study on *halkçılık* in the early-Republican era by Asım Karaömerlioğlu also underlines the lack of mass support for the regime in those years. An experiment attempted by the Kemalist elite resulted in the foundation of an opposition party, the Free Republican Party (*Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*, SCF). According to Karaömerlioğlu, the unexpected success of this party showed the fragility and weakness of the new regime (2006, 52). The result of these

developments was a reconsideration of the principle of *halkçılık* and the establishment of "People's Houses" (*halkevleri*) for the education of adults (52). In his evaluation of these attempts at popularizing the regime in the early-Republican period, Karaömerlioğlu points out the antidemocratic and state-centred character of the process. He also argues that, to a certain extent, the term "*halk*" had been used as a substitute for the term *millet* (nation) by the early-Republican elites due to the latter term's religious connotations (44). Thus, for him, "*halkçılık* in Turkey emerged as a state policy in the service of eliminating the spontaneous movements of the masses" (14). Karaömerlioğlu thus considers early-Republican *halkçılık* as a hindrance to democracy from the very beginning; "the single party *halkçılık* in Turkey had overwhelmingly elitist, jacobinist, bureaucratic, anti-liberal and anti-democratic qualities" (49). Nevertheless, he also notes the transformation in the multiparty era and argues that early-Republican *halkçılık* later became a genuinely bottom-up phenomenon as a part of the import substitution regime in the 1960s and 1970s.

Thus the importance attached to the *halkçılık* by early-Republican intelligentsia is not surprising. According to the general secretary of the CHP of the period, Recep Peker, "the Republic of Turkey is a *halkçı* entity" (1984, 54). The main property of this principle of *halkçılık*, according to Peker, was the denouncement of any privilege for any social class or status except the differences stemming from the different occupational positions. Peker also argues that the *halkçı* mentality considers the nation as an indivisible whole, and that the principle of *halkçılık* is thus entirely contrary to Western ideas of class struggle (55).

İsmail Arar underlines very similar features in his study of the exposition of the principle of *halkçılık* by Mustafa Kemal himself in the *Program of Halkçılık of 1920*. He emphasizes that Mustafa Kemal saw the principle of *halkçılık* as an instrument for overcoming social class distinctions and for achieving national homogeneity in the young Republic, and that he closely identified Republicanism with *halkçılık* (1963, 11). Likewise, Cezmi Eraslan, in his comprehensive study, emphasizes the same identification of Republicanism with *halkçılık* among the early-Republican elite (2003, 144). Nevertheless, he goes beyond this identification and argues that not only Republicanism but also the "unconditional sovereignty of the nation" and "democracy" were seen as identical to *halkçılık* (261–267).

It seems that early-Republican *halkçılık* is mainly a solidarist-corporatist ideological narrative created by Kemalist elite to serve the project of building a homogenous nation. Paul Dumont

underlines this point: "[halkçılık] also had a much more specific meaning: a vision of a Turkish nation constituted not of classes but of solidary, closely interdependent occupational groups" (1984, 31). It seems, then, that there is considerable overlap between *halkçılık* and nationalism. Nevertheless, more significantly, *halkçılık* was identified as an adaptation of the practices of Western democracies and their representative institutions and ideas to the circumstances of Turkey by the early-Republican elite.

ii. Political economy and populism

A different approach to the concept can be found in the studies of political economists of Turkey. Korkut Boratav's seminal article on the economic regime of Turkey between 1962 and 1976 triggered much-needed debate on the concept of populism in Turkey and has had an enduring influence. His analysis of the economy and political regime of the period is that the combination of the import substitution economy, a loose employment regime in the public sector, high salaries for the workers, and state subsidies for the agricultural sector shaped a "populist political framework" (1983). To Boratav, the distinguishing feature of this framework was the conciliation between the ruling class and working classes (1983, 15). In other words, this economic approach to populism reinforces the subordination of the working classes to the bourgeois order through the redistributive effects created by import substitution. The importance of the import substitution economy and cross-class coalitions in the definition of the populist regime can also be found in contributions by Haldun Gülalp (1984) and Nuri Karacan (1983/84 and 1984) to the debate around populism initiated by Boratav. An exceptional study here belongs to Galip Yalman (1985), who illustrates the conceptual ambiguity with regard to the use of the populism and particularly in the Boratav-Karacan-Gülalp debate. He argues that the concept of populism does not provide sufficient analytical leverage to the researcher since it substitutes vague concepts like "elite" and "hegemonic bloc" for concrete and well-defined social classes, and he goes so far as to propose abandoning the concept altogether (65).

A more precise political economic approach to populism can be seen in Çağlar Keyder's oft-cited study (2003). Keyder accurately distinguishes *halkçılık* from *popülizm* and affiliates the former with the corporatist desires of the early-Republican elite (153), and the latter with the multi-class appeal of the DP. Keyder argues that "in historical perspective, the *official halkçılık* of the single-party state has encountered the *popülizm* of the Democrat Party which

was *genuinely* attractive for the masses" (275, emphasis mine). Keyder sees populism with a cross-class political ideology under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie which is also embraced by the masses and is employed mainly by the centre-right tradition in Turkey (170). He argues that the concept and strategy of populism have hindered the development of social-class-based understanding of society (280–281). A similar approach can be seen in the study of Reşat Kasaba on the DP period in Turkey, in which he defines populism as a "supra-class appeal" to the masses (1993, 45). In short, there is a strong tendency in the political economy literature on Turkey to highlight the supra-class nature of populism *vis-a-vis* the supposedly class-based political distinctions in Western liberal democracies.

iii. **Patronage**, **the centre-right**, **and populism**

There is also a strong tendency in the literature on Turkish politics to evaluate the concept of populism as closely associated to that of patronage. In his highly influential approach to the DP era in Turkey, İlkay Sunar considers patronage one of the fundamental properties of populism (1983, 2077). Sunar strictly differentiates early-Republican *halkçılık* from the *popülizm* of the DP in the 1950s. He argues that this difference was a result of the lack of mass support for the CHP in the early-Republican era (2079). According to Sunar, while early-Republican *halkçılık* was a top-down project of transforming society and it ignored the aspirations of the masses, the *popülizm* of the DP was shaped by the existing values and expectations of society (2081).

In another study, Sunar argues that, the democratization of Turkey developed between "the early bureaucratization of the state" and "later industrialization of society" (2008, 161). According to his analysis, the main legacy of this early bureaucratization had been, on the one hand, a "Westernist," "secularist," "authoritarian" and "etatist-nationalist" "bureaucratic alliance" which consist of "military-bureaucratic elites," "bureaucratic cadres" and "bureaucratic constituency of urban intelligentsia" (162). The other legacy—one "in contrast to the bureaucratic uniformity"—was a "traditional, heterogeneous and disjointed" society "dominated by a large stratum of petty producers prevalent in agriculture, commerce and industry" (162). According to Sunar, these were the circumstances of Turkey's early democratization which shaped the DP's early struggle for electoral support and power, in which the main instruments of its success were "populism and patronage" (164). He argues that the DP introduced an "inclusionary" populism instead of the "exclusionary variant"

developed by the early-Republican elite, which he explains through patronage relations in which goods, services, and public posts are provided by politicians to supporters in return for votes (165). Thus, Sunar argues that "patronage and populism," has been the prominent feature of Turkish politics since the DP's coming to power (168).

In their analysis of Turkish politics through a similar distinction between "state elite" and "political elite," Metin Heper and Fuat Keyman argue that while the former has always favoured rational planning, the latter has always depended on political patronage to gain support (1998, 259–60). In the view of authors, while the state elite in Turkey represents a "strong state" (political prudence), the political elite represents the "weak state" (political responsiveness) (260). In other words, this tension between state elite and political elite (thus between strong state and weak state) also reflects the tension between "planning" and "patronage." On the one hand, Turkish politics in the early-Republican era between 1923 and 1945 was dominated by the state elite and their visionary, long-term views. The authors argue that "during this era, the founders of the Republic, Atatürk and İnönü, emerged as the defenders of the long-term interests of the community and, thus, as the proponents of a strong state. Consequently, the socio-economic policies they pursued were strongly coloured by their 'high politics'" (260). On the other hand, political patronage in return for electoral support has been dominant in Turkish politics since 1945 and has been one of the main components of the centre-right political tradition including the DP of the 1950s, the AP of the 1960s and 1970s, and the True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*, DYP) of the 1990s. According to the authors, politicians in this tradition "presented themselves as the proponents of the 'national will' against the 'state's will', and as the protectors of the masses against the state elite" (261). The authors also contend that the multiparty system in Turkey had a corrosive effect on strong state qualities and consolidated attempts at "political patronage" by allocating state resources and enlarging public sector employment to respond to the "local and particular demands of the constituencies" (262). According to the authors, the perennial leader of the centre-right in Turkey, Süleyman Demirel, embraced "a populist and majoritarian conception of democracy, with non-mediated mass political participation" (265).

Similarly, in his study on the politics of the post-1983 period in Turkey, Heper sets up a distinction between "rationalist democracy" and the "populist democracy" advocated by the centre-right tradition in Turkey (1990, 322). In a similar fashion, Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, in his study of the relationship between patronage and democracy, argues that "political parties

stand out as the penultimate political institution of populist patronage" (2001, 63). He argues that, in Turkey, democracy is essentially "populism practiced through clientelistic networks" (67). Thus, according to Kalaycıoğlu, there is a particular contradiction between "good governance" and "popular government" in Turkey (67).

The studies analysed above can be seen as the bases of the descriptive uses of the concept of populism by many other studies on the centre-right. For instance Nuray Mert evaluates the conservative politics since its beginning as a *popülist* opposition to the *halkçılık* of the early-Republican regime (2001, 46). Similarly Seyfi Öğün argues that centre-right tradition in Turkey has consolidated populism in Turkey (1995). In his study he uses various different terms such as "Turkish populism," "legal populism" and "cultural populism" to examine the Turkish politics in the multiparty era (101). In line with these evaluations, Necat Erder argues that "by the 1950s, the era of populist rule in Turkey has begun its tendency towards satisfying, persuading, or detaining the masses" (1998, 17). It must be also noted that the concept is widely used in the literature on the AKP. Very surprisingly, while some analyses seek to determine the "non-populist" character of the AKP, others emphasize the "populism" of the party as a factor in its rise and electoral achievements.[5] It is also common to see the concept of populism used to classify and/or examine divergent political actors, movements and events such as the Islamist[6] and nationalist discourses of the 1990s,[7] and the secularist protest meetings in 2007.[8]

Nevertheless, some works on Turkish politics with a more rigorous theoretical and conceptual approach to populism should also be acknowledged. Necmi Erdoğan (1998) deploys a discourse theory approach to avoid the common binary oppositions in the literature, particularly that between a "populist centre-right" and a "bureaucratic centre-left". This enables him to overcome the widespread truisms in the Turkish political science that leftist and socialist movements have always had an elitist tendency. Thus he is able to reveal the role of populist discourse in the mobilisation of the masses by CHP and Revolutionary Path

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[5] For instance Ahmet Yıldız (2008, 43) and Burhanettin Duran (2008, 82) refer to the non-populist politics of the AKP, while Ziya Öniş talks about a "controlled populism" (2012, 137). In contrast, Jenny B. White (2008, 373), Dağı (2008, 30), and Taşkın (2008, 59) all mention the populism of the party.
[6] See Mehran Kamrava (1998), Ali Yaşar Sarıbay (1993), Toprak (2005), and White (2002) for the identification of the Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP) as populist. Cihan Tuğal defines Islamism as "religio-moral populism" (2002, 85).
[7] See Ebru Bulut (2006).
[8] See Kabir Tambar (2009) for the analysis of the Republic Rallies as "secular populism".

(*Devrimci Yol*, DEV-YOL, a radical leftist organisation) in the second half of the 1970s (1998). The works of Tanel Demirel on the centre-right DP and AP are also significant since these studies underline the conceptual ambiguity in most of the studies on populism in Turkey. In line with the definition of Weyland (2001), Demirel refrains from defining DP and AP as populist because of the highly institutionalized organizations of these parties (2004, 130 and 2011, 129). Deniz Yıldırım's study (2009) also mounts a remarkable conceptual discussion of populism. Nevertheless, he considers redistributive strategies as an inseparable property of populism in addition to the rhetoric of the "bureaucratic elite" versus "people" (85), and it is fair to say that he adopts an eclectic and economistic point of view. Mine Eder (2004) also discusses the concept in length. However she embraces a very loose definition of the concept and therefore considers the entire Republican history as populism.[9]

Despite a recent critical tendency which adopts post-colonial and post-structuralist approaches[10] as well as relational perspectives on political parties and politics in general,[11] most studies which apply the concept of populism to Turkish politics rely on binary oppositions. One of the most important and common of these is the distinction between *halkçılık* and *popülizm*. It should certainly be noted that the early-Republican elite's understanding of *halkçılık* itself was characterised by a top-down perspective which sees society as a classless, national, corporatist homogeneity in explicit contradistinction to Western societies with their concrete class distinctions and liberal-representative democratic institutions. Later analyses of the concept also underline the bureaucratic, solidarist-corporatist, statist, and elitist character of the early-Republican *halkçılık* as against the plurality of society. The analyses of multiparty politics through the concept of populism rely mainly on similar binary oppositions. To most of these analyses, there is, on the one hand, the bureaucratic, official, statist elite and their rational "high politics," and, on the other, the populist political elite and their popular and responsive but short-sighted policies. To a great extent, political-economic approaches to multiparty politics reproduce the same binary oppositions. On the one hand there are proper, democratic, Western-style class politics and on the other, there are *a-la-turca*, supra-class, populist politics of the centre-right, which depend

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[9] Joint studies by Tanıl Bora and Erdoğan (2004) and Bora and Nergis Canefe (2009) also draw attention to the conceptual ambiguity of the term populism and embrace a certain theoretical stance.
[10] See the works of Meltem Ahıska (2010), Alev Çınar (2006), Yael Navaro-Yashin (2002) and Esra Özyürek (2006) as prominent examples of this tendency.
[11] For a fresh approach to the political parties which avoids such binary oppositions, see Elise Massicard and Nicole F. Watts' edited book (2013), and particularly their introduction. See also Berna Turam (2011) for a similar critique of the dominant approaches in Turkish social sciences.

on import substitution and/or redistributive social policies and/or patronage networks and clientelism. I have also drawn attention to the widespread descriptive and unsystematic uses of the concept in the literature on Turkish politics, while noting exceptional works with more satisfying theoretical-conceptual approaches. As can be seen in figure 2, the use of the term in the literature on Turkish politics can be mapped, and works which deal with the term explicitly are clustered close to the centre. The comparison of this map with figure 1 on the uses of the term in wider academic discourse graphically reveals the dominance of multi-domain and descriptive understandings of the concept in the literature on Turkish politics.
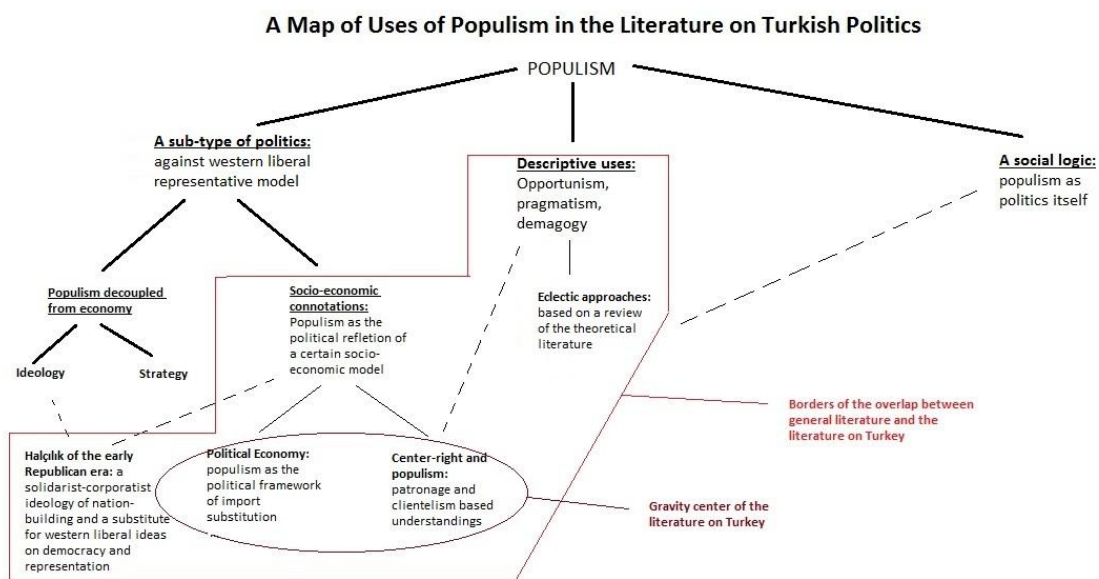
Figure 2: A map of the uses of populism in the literature on Turkish politics

It seems, then, that the majority of scholars are quite clear about the populist dimension inherent in Turkish politics, but very few of their accounts pay attention to the conceptual ambiguities of the term, including the linguistic distinction between *halkçılık* and *popülizm*. Yet the term continues to be used widely in the literature without recourse to a satisfying conceptual-theoretical discussion. In the next part, I will briefly examine a seminal work on Turkish politics as a route to rectifying this absence.

5. Enframing and populism in the literature on Turkish Politics

In his highly influential study, Şerif Mardin underlines the great difference between the very homogenous Ottoman official world under the rule of the Sultans and "the highly segmented

structure of Ottoman Anatolia" (1973, 171). Mardin asserts that this distinction between "centre" and "periphery" rooted in the Ottoman social formation has been very resilient throughout Ottoman and Republican Turkish history. In his important analyses of multiparty politics in Turkey, Mardin argues that "the electoral platform of the opposition, especially as seen in Democrat Party political propaganda, in newspapers, and in the media, established the lines of a debate between 'real populists' and 'bureaucrats'" (185). Also, Mardin defines the contradiction between DP and CHP in a similar vein, whereby the latter "represented the 'bureaucratic' centre, whereas the Democrat Party represented the 'democratic' periphery" (186). [12] This "centre-periphery" approach has dominated the analyses of Turkish politics since its publication in 1973 (Hale and Özbudun 2010, xviii). [13] Yet what makes Mardin's approach to Turkish politics so powerful? Apart from the economy and elegance of his theory, I think the answer would be very much related to the potential answers to the problematic of populism in the literature on Turkish politics.

I would argue that the distinction between *halkçılık* and *popülizm* analyzed above is a significant embodiment of a wider enframing process. It can be argued that Turkish politics have been the subject of a fundamental "enframing" in the distinction between the lived political experience of Turkey (reality) and an imagined Western model (meaning/framework) in social scientific narratives. According to the narrative of the early-Republican elite and the later analyses of the era, political modernity in the West was, at first, appropriated by the early Kemalist *halkçılık*. [14] In this sense, *halkçılık* appears as the appropriation of Western notions of democracy and republicanism in early-Republican Turkey. Thus, the first enframing is a distinction between the Western model and the *halkçı* practices of the early-Republican elite. Later on, with the beginning of multiparty politics, the first appropriation of representative and democratic ideas by Kemalism itself began to be criticized as an imitation of the Western

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[12] In his analysis of Argentinian politics, Pierre Ostiguy (2009) skilfully grasps the effects of a very similar and persistent contradiction in the political culture of the country. Ostiguy starts from similar binary oppositions embedded in the political culture and symbolism of the country. Nevertheless he avoids an essentialist reading of this contradiction and uses a two dimensional political space. Thus, he has been able to illustrate the relative location of different political actors as well as gradual transitivity among them along the two axes of Argentinian politics, namely "left and right" and "high and low".

[13] To see the longevity of the effects of Mardin's approach on the analyses on political parties in Turkey, see Feride Acar (1991), Kemal Karpat (1991), Avner Levi (1991) and Sarıbay (1991). These studies, on the one hand, identify the CHP with the forces and tendencies of the centre, namely the state elite and bureaucratic authoritarian tendencies, and, on the other, the main adversaries of this tradition, the centre-right political parties, namely the DP, AP, ANAP and DYP, with the forces of the periphery and populism.

[14] In his lectures on the Turkish Revolution, Recep Peker argues that "our revolution is original and not a copy at all" (1984, 34). This particularistic understanding of the early-Republican regime by the elite of the era is also highlighted by Eraslan (2003, 202–203).

model and was re-appropriated by the *popülizm* of centre-right politics in Turkey. Thus, the second enframing in Turkish politics is the distinction between the imitative, unrealistic, elitist and official *halkçılık* of the early-Republican period and the supposedly authentic or "real" *popülizm* of the post-1945 centre-right. In other words, there are two competing claims to legitimacy through "authenticity" in Turkish politics and hence two competing yet complementary ways of constructing "Turkish exceptionalism." To a considerable extent, these claims have been constructed and consolidated by social scientific narratives on Turkey. The distinction between *halkçılık* and *popülizm* also inscribes itself in the domain of binary oppositions illustrated throughout this essay: centre vs. periphery, state elite vs. political elite, centre-left vs. centre-right, military bureaucratic authoritarianism vs. conservative popular majoritarianism, secular politics vs. religious politics, rationalist democracy vs. populist democracy, high politics vs. responsiveness, modernity vs. tradition, and, last but not least, state vs. society.[15] It would be fair to argue that these binary oppositions are related to the two competing "method[s] of order and truth": an "official-rational" one signified by *halkçılık* and a "popular" one signified by *popülizm*. A general illustration of these different yet interconnected enframing processes can be seen in figure 3.
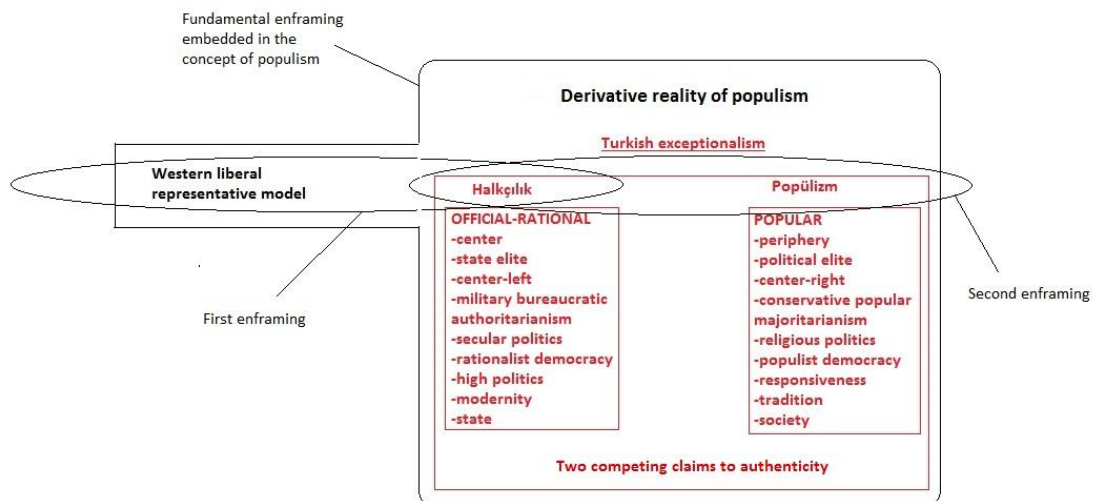
Figure 3: Enframing and populism.

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[15] For a remarkable critique of the discourse on "state and civil society" in post-1980 Turkey, see Navaro-Yashin (1998).

This understanding—that is, the distinction between Western model and Turkish reality—entails an assumption of the inevitable particularity of the realization of the model in Turkey. Since Turkish politics is evaluated as a unique realization of the Western ideal, few incentives remain for evaluating it from a comparative perspective. Most scholars have done little more than underline the differences of Turkish politics from an abstract—and largely imaginary—Western model. This situation can be defined as the underlying cause of the lack of a wider comparative understanding and hence the lack of a rigorous theoretical-conceptual approach to populism in the majority of the works in the field. The frequent descriptive or eclectic uses of the concept as a multi-domain phenomenon also reveal the reluctance to undertake a truly empirical comparative evaluation of Turkish politics or to understand it as a part of a wider and international political experience. In short, a particular mode of enframing in the literature on Turkish politics has caused a particularistic approach to Turkish politics and therefore an underdevelopment of conceptual-theoretical discussions in the field.

Nevertheless, this explanation does not shed light on the use of the term "populism" as the signifier of the Turkish particularity or "exceptionalism." At this point it is necessary to remember the fundamental enframing process inherent in the general academic debates on the concept. The dichotomy that the concept of populism relies upon—between the Western liberal representative ideal and the derivative reality of populism—has created strong incentives for the Turkish scholars to apply the concept to Turkish politics. In other words, there is an embedded enframing in the literature on populism, although some definitions are more conducive to non-particularistic thinking, like those of Weyland (2001), Mudde (2004), and particularly Laclau (2007). It should also be noted that work referring to these scholars can by no means be located in the mainstream of the literature on Turkish politics.

Finally, the existence of a normative hierarchy among Western liberal representative politics, the *halkçılık* of the early-Republican period, and multiparty-era *popülizm* should also be emphasized. Depending on scholars' ideological stance (and albeit in an implicit manner), the gradual modulation of the model through its different implementations is either praised or condemned. Nevertheless, this modulation itself has often been recognized by scholars across the ideological spectrum as deviation from an original model. The discussion over whether the consequences of this are desirable or not hardly changes the effects of the final cognitive consensus or the hierarchies brought by this recognition. It seems that this enframing process itself leads to a virtual yet influential normative hierarchy which, regardless of whether an

individual seeks to condemn the imagined model or the experienced reality, primarily serves as a tool of political legitimacy. Hence, at least in the Turkish context, the analytical leverage promised by the concept of populism actually entails more problems than it promises to solve. Ultimately, it reproduces a belief in Turkish exceptionalism in the Turkish social sciences and traps researchers in the normative and analytical bias outlined above.

6. Conclusion

This critical literature review has examined a range of key studies on Turkish politics which either examine or deploy the concept of populism. It has revealed the profound impact of a process of enframing in the social scientific literature on Turkish politics which ultimately relies on the distinction between a Western European ideal of representative democracy and its Turkish implementation. The common distinction between *halkçılık* and *popülizm* has highlighted the specific problems consequent on assuming the "Western model" as an abstract fixed point in the social scientific literature on Turkish politics against which its Turkish implementation is either lionized or held to account. This enframing has permitted a problematic belief in the exceptionality of the "Turkish reality," whose foremost consequence has been a lack of a comparative perspective or a rigorous theoretical-conceptual approach in the majority of the studies on *halkçılık* and *popülizm*. But this problem has also been caused and compounded by a deeper binary opposition in the general academic debates over the concept of populism; that between Western liberal representative democracies and the tendency to direct and popular participation supposedly definitive of populism. This convergence between the conceptual framework of general academic debates and the literature on Turkish politics highlights a broad, fundamental enframing process underlying the concept of populism itself. In most of the studies in the theoretical literature, populism appears as the slightly disturbing realization or misinterpretation of the ideals of representative liberal democracy in the geographical and political margins of Western Europe. According to the literature, populism is not antagonistic to the model but it is a deviation from the ideal: a derivative politics. Hence, it can be concluded that the concept of populism entails more problems than it promises to solve and has become a hindrance to understanding, particularly in the Turkish context.

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