



**The non-European roots of the concept
of populism**

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the conceptual history of the term 'populism'. It examines the way in which the concept of populism emerges, takes different theoretical and normative connotations, and has been linked to other concepts (e.g. 'democracy', 'the people', 'popular'). The concept of 'populism' is rooted in the development of a so-called asymmetric counter-concept, namely 'the people' versus 'the elite'. While the people is seen as positive, the elite is seen as negative. The logic between good and bad is inverted by opponents of populists, which identify 'the populists' with 'false democrats'. The paper analyzes the historical transfer of these specific pairs of concepts and studies to what extent these concepts have changed their nature in the course of time. Since politics is linguistically constituted, it is argued that shifts in meaning of the concept of 'populism' do not only stem from the semantic variability of the concept, but also from political struggles to define the word. A conceptual conflict about 'populism' could, therefore, express a political conflict about preferred political action and practice.

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1. Introduction

The term ‘populism’ seems to be a popular term in Europe nowadays. But has that always been the case? When, in what political context and by whom was the term ‘populism’ originally invented? Has the term remained in constant use ever since? By whom and against whom is the term historically mobilized? Does the term always mean the same thing in different political settings? This paper discusses the history of the concept ‘populism’. Aim of this essay is not to conceptualize a theory of populism as a political phenomenon, but to show how the concept is used in different political settings. The essay attempts to trace the shifts in meaning of the concept. Since there are several ways and methods to construct a conceptual history, the next section [section 2] discusses briefly how the conceptual history will be made in the paper. It is assumed that shifts in meaning of the concept of ‘populism’ are the result of actions of political actors who attempt to appropriate the term and use it in specific ways. This implies that a conceptual history briefly analyzes the political context in which the concept is used, the use and appropriation of the concept and the struggle for the dominant interpretation of the concept. In what follows [section 3-7] the conceptual dimension and conceptual innovation of the term ‘populism’ is highlighted by analyzing its conceptual history. The third section attempts to clarify the origin of the term ‘populism’. The remainder of the paper [section 4-7] studies the shifts in meaning of the concept of populism. The main results will be summed in the conclusion [section 8].

2. Conceptual history

In the field of conceptual history, there have been two dominant research traditions, namely the German *Begriffsgeschichte* and the Anglesaksian Cambridge School.¹ Although both research traditions developed independently from each other, a growing interaction between

¹ The most prominent representative of the German *Begriffsgeschichte* is Reinhart Koselleck, who led the famous series *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (published between 1972 and 1992). The series still stand as a major exemplary of conceptual history. Quentin Skinner has become the figurehead of the Cambridge School (1960s-1970s).

the two traditions has led to a convergence or even a methodological synthesis.² The publication of the influential volume *Political innovation and Conceptual Change* (1989) by Anglesaksian historians is an exponent of this convergence. In his contribution to the volume, Farr explains that conceptual historians share, at least, two common ideas. The first is that politics is a linguistically constituted activity. Political actions are carried out in and through language.³ For example, citizen's protests, political bargaining and consent, declaring war are political acts carried in language. Without language these political acts would become impossible. This is a minimal characterization of the impossibility of politics without language, because political acts are also carried through language. For example, politicians appraise their political friends and criticize their adversaries through political speeches and texts. The concepts that are used by these politicians are often value-laden and mobilized as political tools or weapons to meet certain ends.

Secondly, political concepts partly constitute political beliefs, actions and practices.⁴ Beliefs and language through which they are expressed do not merely reflect the social and political world, but inform the very actions by which we maintain or transform that world. For example, the way in which governments of representative democracies responded to fascist and communist militias in the interwar period depended upon their shared belief about whether these militias were a real threat to representative democracy and, if necessary, about what action and practice the defense of democracy required. These beliefs were partly constituted by the concept of 'democracy' which these governments held. A conceptual conflict about 'democracy' could, therefore, express a political conflict about preferred political action and practice.

These two general claims indicate that political language is paradoxically related to the social world. Political concepts are part of the world, but they also partly constitute the world. The world is accordingly changed by the use of concepts. This dominant idea in the field of conceptual history is explained in the introduction of *Political innovation and Conceptual*

² François, P. (2005), 'De convergentie tussen de Angelsaksische ideeëngeschiedenis en de Duitse/continentale begripsgeschiedenis – een status questionis', *Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire/Belgisch tijdschrift voor filosofie en geschiedenis*, vol. 83, nr. 4, pp. 1175, 1202.

³ Farr, J. 'Understanding conceptual change politically' in: Terence Ball, James Farr and Russell Hanson (eds.), *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 26.

⁴ Farr gives three arguments why political practices are not fully constituted by political concepts (pp. 28-29). Firstly, political practices usually have unintended practices. Secondly, political practices are constituted by political concepts, but may in turn shape other concepts. Finally, political practices happen often 'below language' because they express psychological processes about fear, hatred, or self-deception.

Change: “...speaking a language involves taking on a world, and altering concepts constitutive of that language involves nothing less than remaking the world. Insofar as the political world is linguistically and communicatively constituted, then, conceptual change must be understood politically, and political change conceptually.”⁵ Since political change and conceptual change are mutually related, the meaning of a concept is historically mutable. That is, the meaning of one and the same political concept persists or is transformed within different political contexts; or the meaning of components of the concept overlap in some contexts, while being rejected within other political contexts.

This essay on the conceptual history of ‘populism’ catches up with the methodology explained in *Political innovation and Conceptual Change*. The essay tries to analyze the concept of ‘populism’ both in a synchronic and diachronic manner. The synchronic analysis studies the location of concepts in their semantic field and in relation to those who used the concept. The concept of ‘populism’ does not exist in isolation, but is defined in relation to other concepts such as ‘the people’, ‘popular’ and ‘democracy’. This implies that the history of the concept ‘populism’ cannot be a mere etymological lifeline. The diachronic analysis concentrates on shifts in the meaning of concepts and links such shifts to social developments.⁶ A shift in meaning of a concept occurs whenever changes take place in the following features of a concept: 1) the criteria of application of a concept; 2) its range of reference; 3) its attitudinal expressiveness.⁷ The criteria of application denote the sense (meaning) of a concept and serve to mark off a concept from other concepts. The range of reference denotes the criteria of applying the word to the world. The attitudinal expressiveness, finally, points at the normative weight that is expressed by the concept. The term ‘populism’ is not just used to describe a particular phenomenon, but also used to commend or condemn it, express approval or disapproval.

Moreover, this essay explores the semantic operations involved in the construction of so-called ‘asymmetric counter-concepts’, a notion borrowed from Reinhart Koselleck. According to Koselleck, asymmetric counter-concepts belong to a particular kind of conceptual

⁵ Ball, T. Farr, J. and R. Hanson (1989), ‘Preface’ in: Terence Ball, James Farr and Russell Hanson (eds.), *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. ix.

⁶ François, P. (2005), ‘De convergentie tussen de Angelsaksische ideeëngeschiedenis en de Duitse/continentale begripsgeschiedenis – een status questionis’, *Revue Belge de philologie et d’histoire/Belgisch tijdschrift voor filosofie en geschiedenis*, vol. 83, nr. 4, p. 1179.

⁷ Skinner, Q. (1989), ‘Language and Political Change’, in: Terence Ball, James Farr and Russell Hanson (eds.), *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, pp. 9-10.

formations used by groups to define otherness: “It is characteristic of counter-concepts [...] that one’s own position is readily defined by criteria which makes it possible for the resulting counterposition to be only negated.”⁸ In this case, a group applies a concept to itself alone and rejects all comparison. That is, conceptualization is acted with the function of denying reciprocity of mutual recognition. These specific pairs of concepts are historically transferable and can change their nature in the course of time.

3. Origin of the term ‘populism’

The origin of the term ‘populism’ is related to the term ‘people’ and the changing meaning of ‘democracy’ in the first half of the 19th century. The word ‘democracy’ appeared during the 6th century in Southeast Europe and acquired a bad reputation. Democracy, according to Plato and Aristotle, was rule by the many and the poor, who were inclined to pursue their own interests in politics at the expense of the commonwealth. The word vanished from usage in the Roman Empire.⁹ In the great seventeenth-century political struggles in Great-Brittan, ‘democracy was not a rallying cry for the Levellers either, who claimed equal political rights.’¹⁰ The term entered public discourse in Europe only in the 1780s, at the time when the word ‘aristocracy’ was commonly used as its antonym. ‘Democrats’ were those wanted to enjoy the same rights as aristocrats.¹¹ ‘Democracy’ as a form of government, was, however, still regarded as an inferior, dangerous and unstable form of politics. The word ‘democracy’ contained negative connotations, so that both in the United States and France, the newly established political systems after the revolutions in the 18th century, was called ‘representative’ or ‘republican’ rather than ‘democratic’.¹²

The term ‘democracy’ remained very much a pariah word until the first half of the 19th century. The rising esteem of democracy has been the result of mass political movements that valued democracy and struggled to achieve what they took to be ‘democracy’.¹³ As these movements struggled for democratic rights and gained power in the name of democracy, the meaning of democracy changed, as well as its respectability. Since the mid-19th century, the negative connotation of democracy has been replaced by more positive associations with

⁸ Koselleck, R. (2004), *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Columbia UP, New York, p. 159.

⁹ Dunn J. (2005), *Setting the People Free. The Story of Democracy*, Atlantic Books, London, p. 54.

¹⁰ Dunn J. (2005), *Setting the People Free. The Story of Democracy*, Atlantic Books, London, p. 60.

¹¹ Przeworski, A. (2010), *Democracy and the Limits of Self-Government*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 4.

¹² Manin, B. (1997), *The Principles of Representative Government*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 1.

¹³ Hanson, R. (1989) ‘Democracy’, in: Terence Ball, James Farr and Russell Hanson (eds.), *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 69.

popular sovereignty and political equality. Still, identifying good government with democracies became the norm only after the Second World War. From then on, 'democracy' became a work of common usage that it has never been previously. Third World countries, for instance, legitimized their political regimes after their struggle for independence in the 1960s. 'Democracy' ended up as a label that all governments would claim, so that even dictatorial regimes like the Popular Republic of North Korea, take reference to 'democracy' to legitimize their political system.

Against the historical background of the democratic revolutions in the United States (rising in the mid-1760s) and France (1789), the notion of 'people' becomes a key term of modern politics. The word 'people' has, however, an ambiguous meaning. On the one hand, 'the people' as a social category were identified with 'the plebs', 'the common people', 'the lower classes' by political thinkers. Being ignorant and resentful, they were perceived as irrational and liable to turn into a dangerous mob. This underclass posed a danger to public order and rationality of civilized society that underpinned order.

On the other hand, 'the people' came to be identified as the holders of sovereignty and the term became coextensive with the citizen. Since the democratic revolutions, politics came to be attached prominently to the name of 'the people'. This does not mean that 'the people' is always mentioned explicitly by political authorities, but legitimate political action will necessarily have to occur in the name of the people. However, alongside the people as collective citizenry, the dark shadow of 'the common people' still resonates in modern politics, in an uneasy combination with that of holders of equal political rights.¹⁴ The dividing line between the dangerous and unpredictable mob (barbarism) and men of good standing (civilization) was passed on to crowd theorists at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.¹⁵

The term 'populism' arises at the end of the 19th century, during an era in which the notion of 'the people' becomes a key word of modern politics and 'democracy' tends to be positively valued again. The term 'populism' is used to characterize the American People's Party, founded in 1892. The rise of the People's Party was a reaction against the 'failure' of both the

¹⁴ Canovan, M. (2005), *The People*, Polity Press, Malden, p. 69.

¹⁵ In his *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, Freud discusses crowd theorists Le Bon and McGougall, who both viewed the mass as a pathological phenomenon. Freud, S. (2003), 'Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse', in: *Studienausgabe. Fragen der Gesellschaft. Ursprünge der Religion*, Band IX, pp. 77-82.

Republican and the Democratic Party to represent the farmers and the workers. The upheaval of the American civil war (1861-1865) had left a mass of small farmers, who were landowners, but often in a state of desperate poverty.¹⁶ A sense of misalignment of the Republican and Democratic Party with the concerns of rural citizens led to the foundation of the People's Party. The People's Party appealed the unprivileged position of the ordinary people and reclaimed the power of the people as a whole: "...we seek to restore the government of the Republic to the hands of "the plain people", with whose class it originated."¹⁷

In *The Populist Revolt* (1931) the historian John Hicks argues that the term 'Populist' and 'Populites' originated as a derisive epithet to disqualify adherents of the People's Party. While the latter gradually disappeared from political vocabulary, the term 'Populist' was continuously used and became finally a self-description among 'Populists'.¹⁸ Hicks recounts an anecdote, told by John W. Breidenthal, one of the prominent members of the People's Party, to explain the origin of the name 'Populist'. According to Breidenthal, the name 'Populist' originated at a conference of Democratic and People's Party leaders in October 1892 where fusion plans were discussed.¹⁹ One of the leaders of the People's Party, the judge W.F. Rightmire, complained about the difficulty he experienced in using the name 'People's Party' in ordinary conversation. While he could easily refer to a man as a Republican or a Democrat, he could not call him a People's. He needed a whole sentence to introduce him as a member of the People's Party. Rightmire wanted a shorter name for everyday use and asked Overmyer, one of the democratic leaders who urged the creation of a coalition to defeat the Republicans, for a nickname of the People's Party. Overmyer brought forward the word 'Populist'.²⁰ The relation between the term 'people' and the Latin word *populus* inspired Rightmire to invent the notion of populism. Rightmire was, however, afraid that the printed media would call them 'Pops'. His prediction was partly right because the word 'Pops'

¹⁶ Taggart, P. (2000), *Populism*, Open UP, Buckingham, p. 29.

¹⁷ Quoted in: Hicks, J. (1931), *The Populist Revolt. A History of Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, Greenwood Press, Westport, p. 441.

¹⁸ Hicks, J. (1931), *The Populist Revolt. A History of Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, Greenwood Press, Westport, p. 238n.

¹⁹ Hicks, J. (1931), *The Populist Revolt. A History of Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, Greenwood Press, Westport, p. 238n.

²⁰ Hicks, J. (1931), *The Populist Revolt. A History of Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, Greenwood Press, Westport, p. 239n.

appeared the next day, October 9 1892, in the *Kansas City Star*.²¹ However, the term ‘Pops’ was not used very often to describe members of the People’s Party.

According to Hicks, the political event between Rightmire and Overmyer at the conference was the first initiative to baptize the People’s Party into Populist Party. However, a year before the conference took place, the terms ‘populist’ and ‘populism’ were already in vogue. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the *Emporia (Kansas) Daily Graz* reported on 14 December 1891 that “The Populist vote has increased 11¼ per cent” and the *New York Times* writes on 13 June 1892 that “The prospects for a fusion between the Democrats and the Populists are fast vanishing.”²² The exact origin of the term ‘populist’ or ‘populism’ is difficult to determine. A research in *The Nation archive* did not illuminate the question. *The Nation archive* includes all issues of the weekly magazine *The Nation* (America’s oldest weekly magazine) beginning with its first issue in 1865 all the way to the present.²³ The term ‘populism’ is first used in an article on November 24th 1892. A journalist of the magazine uses the term ‘populism’ to describe the members of a new movement that is emerging: “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 west of the Republicans”.²⁴ In this article, the term ‘populist’ is not employed polemically, either in a pejorative or positive sense, but it is used as a name to describe the members of the People’s Party.

The next few years thereafter, the term is connected with the People’s Party. In reports of *The Nation*, for example, the words ‘populist’ or ‘populism’ are almost always applied explicitly to (members of) the People’s Party.²⁵ Until 1896, the terms ‘populism’ or ‘populist’ are used descriptively in most reports. But when the People’s Party decided to cooperate with the Democrats and to nominate the Democrat William Jennings Bryan as its presidential

²¹ Hicks, J. (1931), *The Populist Revolt. A History of Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party*, Greenwood Press, Westport, p. 239n.

²² *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, ‘Populist’, 08-10-2010, www.dictionary.oed.com.

²³ I used the keywords ‘populism’, ‘populist’, ‘populistic’ and ‘populites’. The keyword ‘populites’ did not yield any hit. The terms ‘populism’, ‘populist’ or ‘populistic’ appear in 26 editions between 1892 and 1906.

²⁴ ‘The Week’, *The Nation*, vol. 55, nr. 1430, November 24 1892, p. 383.

²⁵ The terms 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 People’s Party, ‘The Week’, *The Nation*, vol. 66, nr. 1703, February 17, 1898, p. 123. Another article writes about ‘conservative versus populist elements in the Democratic Party’. ‘The Week’, *The Nation*, vol. 78 nr. 2012, January 21 1904, p. 39.

candidate and Thomas Watson, a dedicated member of the People's Party, as vice-presidential candidate, commentators of *The Nation* condemn the Populists: "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."²⁶

Watson is described as a notorious demagogue and "His easy nomination for the Vice-Presidency on the first ballot will the people of the United States what reckless and dangerous the party the Populist is."²⁷ A month before the presidential election in 1896, the term 'populistic' – a conjugation of the term 'populist' – is coined in an article in *The Nation*. Here, the word 'populistic' has a negative connotation and refers to the political campaigning of the People's Party: "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."²⁸

A few years after the self-labeling of the 'Populist Party', the term 'populist' became a label mobilized pejoratively by its opponents, too. For example, the Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* reports about the convention of the Democratic Party in Indianapolis on September 4th 1896, and quotes Fowler, one of the leaders of the Democratic party, who uses the term 'populism' as an asymmetric counter-concept of 'democracy': "Our presence here shows the nature of true democrats, opponents of the persons who favor populism and anarchism".²⁹ Populism is seen as negative, while the true democrats are seen as positive.

On the other hand, the label 'populism' was used by self-styled populists who claimed that democracy holds an anti-intellectualist vocation (in contrast to the complicated language of the financiers³⁰). Populists reclaimed power of the people and rejected the postures of politicians (republicans and democrats) that are distant from those people share. The very concept of 'populism' is thus rooted in an asymmetric counter-concept, namely 'the people'

²⁶ 'The Week', *The Nation*, vol. 63, nr. 1620, July 16 1896, p. 39.

²⁷ 'The Week', *The Nation*, vol. 66, nr. 1620, July 30 1896 p. 77.

²⁸ 'The Week', *The Nation*, vol. 63, nr. 1635, October 29 1896.

²⁹ 'De conventie te Indianapolis', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Sept. 4, 1896, p. 1. "Onze tegenwoordigheid alhier toont den aard der ware democraten, als tegenstanders van de personen die het populisme en de anarchie begunstigen."

³⁰ Financiers were one the most imposing powers on the life of the farmers. Many farmers were poor and could only get credit from financiers at the cost of mortgaging their crop in advance. This 'crop lien system' meant that farmers could only buy from the merchant at whatever prices he chose to ask. Canovan, M. (1981), *Populism*, Junction Books, London, p. 21.

against 'the elite'. Populism understood as a counter-concept inverts the above-mentioned logic of 'true democrats' and 'false democrats'. While 'the people' is seen as positive, 'the elite' is seen as negative. Moreover, the term 'populism' is linked with the suffix -ism, which, according to Koselleck, 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."³¹ The People's Party could, therefore, use the notion of populism as a motivating concept, capable of mobilizing the people towards a new and better future.

The baptism of the Populist Party has marked the beginning of a history of the label 'populism' in which both positive and negative connotations can be distinguished. 'Populism' has been detached from its original political context and has been applied to different American and non-American political phenomena and actors ever since. For, to put in the words of Koselleck, 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."³²

4. Translation of *Narodnichestvo* with 'populism'

The label 'populist' and 'populism' were coined under the condition of representative democracy, but the words have also been applied to political phenomena and actors within different political contexts, not marked by principles of representative democracy. Academics have used the term 'populism' to qualify the Russian notion *narodnichestvo*. The proper use of the term *narodnichestvo* has, however, been a matter of scholarly dispute. Richard Pipes has pointed out that the notion has had two distinct meanings. In modern historiography, *narodnichestvo*, "...describes an agrarian socialism of the second half of the nineteenth century, which upheld the proposition that Russia could by-pass the capitalist stage of development and proceed through the artel and peasant commune directly to socialism."³³ According to Pipes, the term had, however, a different meaning when it was coined in Russia. The term came into use in 1875 to describe a particular attitude toward the people within the radical movement: "Its adherents held that the intellectuals should not lead the people in the name of abstract, bookish, imported ideas but adapt themselves to the people as it was,

³¹ Koselleck, R. (2004), *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Columbia UP, New York, p. 80.

³² Koselleck, R. (2004), *Between Past and Future* (transl. by Keith Tribe), Columbia UP, New York, p. 90.

³³ Pipes, R. (1964), 'Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, p. 441.

promoting resistance to the government in the name of real, everyday needs.”³⁴ The term ‘Narodnichestvo’ denoted a stage in the development of the revolutionary movement of young intellectuals, who were resisting the Tsarist regime.

The tsarist regime was not a representative democracy, but an autocratic monarchy which pretended to be a government for all people. However, the rural populations lived in misery, even after the Tsar decided to abolish serfdom in 1861.³⁵ The situation of the peasants remained miserable, because according to the law, the land was property of the landlords and, therefore, the peasants had to repay the price of the owned land. Although the peasants were officially freed from the authority of the landowner, they continued to be attached to the land, because they were hardly in a position to buy their own land.³⁶ While the Tsarist regime pretended to be a government for all people, both before and after the abolition of serfdom, the young intellectuals could claim to represent the true people in opposition to the people represented by the Tsarist regime, because the emancipation of the serf did not free the peasants in the way the *narodniki* wanted.

Against this political background, a movement of young intellectuals went to the countryside in 1872 to mobilize the peasants for revolution. The intellectuals were convinced of the wisdom of the peasants and idealized the rural life of the commune. Drawing a contrast with competitive individualism of Western societies, they praised the *obshchina*, the peasant commune in particular. The intelligentsia maintained that according to Russian tradition, land was not held by the individual but by the commune, a self-governing community that emphasized egalitarianism.³⁷ Furthermore, the intellectuals were convinced of the willingness of the peasants to bring change, i.e. to abolish the state and all institutions tied to it. In the following years there were many separate peasant disturbances which were suppressed by the military-bureaucratic apparatus of the Tsar. For the young intellectuals these disturbances were an indicator for the revolutionary potential of the peasants. The peasant’s response was, however, disappointing. The attempt of intellectuals to stimulate socialist feelings in the villages failed, because the peasants were suspicious of the students and remained loyal to the tsar.³⁸

³⁴ Pipes, R. (1964), ‘Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, p. 445.

³⁵ Taggart, P. (2000), *Populism*, Open UP, Buckingham, p. 47.

³⁶ Pipes, R. (1974), *Russia under the Old Regime*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, p. 165.

³⁷ Taggart, P. (2000), *Populism*, Open UP, Buckingham, p. 48.

³⁸ Canovan, M. (1981), *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 should settle in the village and learn from the peasants and accept their wisdom. Revolution should not only take place in the interest of the people, but also by the people and in conformity with their wishes. This stage in the history of the intelligentsia has been labeled as *narodnichestvo* and the adherents of the ideology called themselves *narodniki* from their unbounded faith in the *narod*.³⁹ ‘*Narod*’ is an ambiguous term which basically means either ‘nation’ and, less frequently, ‘people’.⁴⁰ Here, the term *narod* is, however, identified with the people, the peasantry in contrast to the ‘cosmopolitan’ gentry. The intellectuals used the notions *narodnichestvo* and *narodniki* as self-descriptions and both terms had, therefore, a positive connotation. According to Pipes, the term *narodnichestvo* denotes “a theory advocating the hegemony of the masses over the educated elite, and represented a grass-roots, pragmatic theory of democratic action.”⁴¹

The new strategy of the young intellectuals led again to disappointing results. The social revolutionaries did still not gain credibility from the peasants and, additionally, their actions were undermined by the tsarist regime which arrested many revolutionary students. The consequence of this 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 *Zemlya I volya* (‘Land and Freedom’) and which became the vehicle of terrorist attacks.⁴² When tensions arose within the movement to proceed with the assassination of politicians, the party split in two. One section stuck to work among the people, calling itself *Cherny Peredel*. A stronger faction, calling itself *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 *narodniki* ideal,⁴³ the People’s Will operated under a highly centralized organization and had largely left behind the original ideas of the *narodniki*.⁴⁴

³⁹ Pipes, R. (1964), ‘Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, p. 443.

⁴⁰ Lazari, A. de (ed.) (1999), ‘Narod’, in: Andrzej de Lazari (ed.), *Idee w Rosji. Leksykon rosyjsko – polsko – angielski*, tom 1, Semper, Warsaw, p. 268

⁴¹ Pipes, R. (1964), ‘Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, p. 458.

⁴² Taggart, P. (2000), *Populism*, Open UP, Buckingham, p. 53.

⁴³ Pipes, R. (1964), ‘Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, p. 447.

⁴⁴ Taggart, P. (2000), *Populism*, Open UP, Buckingham, p. 54.

To sum up, the terms *narodnichestvo* and *narodniki* were coined in the Russian political context of the 1870s and had a specific meaning. According to Pipes, Marxist polemical writers of the early 1890s took the term out of its original political context and used it to describe those among their opponents who believed in the possibility to reach socialism while bypassing capitalism. In this sense, Pipes argues, *narodnichestvo* was used by Marxists as a polemical device to discredit the elite's view of the country's economic development. Here, the labels *narodnichestvo* and *narodniki* have a negative connotation. According to Pipes, this second meaning has no historical justification and was rejected by those against whom it was used.⁴⁵ Other scholars have accepted the distinction between the two different meanings of *narodnichestvo*, but reject Pipes' conclusion that it is not justified to use the term in a sense wider than the original context. Andrej Walicki, for example, adopts Lenin's position and 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."⁴⁶ The Italian historian Franco Venturi, on the other hand, has criticized Walicki's view on Lenin and argues that Lenin's definition of *narodnichestvo* was a perfect instrument for fighting against these movements.⁴⁷ For Walicki, however, Lenin's conception of *narodnichestvo* cannot be dismissed as a polemical device, but was a precise attempt at classification of political phenomena. Lenin used the term *narodnichestvo* to describe all democratic ideologists in Russia, which expressed the interests of small producers and looked for ways for non-capitalist development.⁴⁸

Historians have translated both meanings of *narodnichestvo* (the narrow and the broader sense) with the term 'populism'.⁴⁹ The Russian historian Paul Milyoukov translated *narodnichestvo* (in the broad sense) with populism already in July 1895. In the journal *Athenaeum* he adopts Lenin's view on *narodnichestvo* and distinguishes accordingly between two opposing groups in Russia: "the first [group] values primitive collectivism because it

⁴⁵ Pipes, R. (1964), 'Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, p. 458.

⁴⁶ Walicki, A., (1969), 'Russia', in: Ionescu, G. and E. Gellner (eds.), *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, Weidenfeld, London, p. 65.

⁴⁷ Berlin, I, Hofstadter, R, McRae D. et.al (1968), 'To define populism', *Government and Opposition*, nr. 3, p. 139.

⁴⁸ Walicki, A., (1969), 'Russia', in: Ionescu, G. and E. Gellner (eds.), *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, Weidenfeld, London, p. 66.

⁴⁹ Walicki, A., (1969), 'Russia', in: Ionescu, G. and E. Gellner (eds.), *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, Weidenfeld, London, p. 63.

regards it as an inalienable trait in the character of the Russian people; and at present of course, it sees in it not the immemorial peculiarity of the popular spirit [like the *narodniki* in the 1870s, TH], but a means of saving Russia from proletarianism [...] The other group derives its deductions from the teachings of Marx and Engels”.⁵⁰ The latter has adopted the title ‘Marxites’, the former “sticks to its old name of ‘Populist’”.⁵¹ Milyoukov does not employ the word ‘populist’ either pejoratively or positively, but uses it to describe the polemics between ‘Marxites’ and ‘Populists’. He comments on these polemics and seeks a middle position between the two opposing camps. Milyoukov does not explain why he translates *narodnichestvo* with populism and he does not make an explicit link between American populists and Russian populists either.

According to Allcock the fact that both the American People’s Party and *narodnichestvo* were characterized by the term ‘populism’ was an historical accident: “It is clear that there is no direct link between these two instances of ‘populism’: neither was copied from the other, and the application of the term to each of them was quite accidental, and was attributed no special analytical significance.”⁵² However, the translation does not seem to be a pure accident, since there is a linguistic correspondence between the term ‘populism’ (‘people’) and *narodnichestvo* (‘narod’). Pipes remarks that the noun *narod* was used in Russia as equivalents of the German notion ‘Volk’ in the middle of the 19th century. Its derivative, the adjective *narodnyi* often served as a Russian equivalent of ‘democratic’ or ‘popular’.⁵³

Historians have tried to show that the conjunction between the American People’s Party and the Russian *narodniki* is not meaningless. The social and political scientist John Saul has made the conjunction explicit: “...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.”⁵⁴ To conclude, the term ‘populism’ has been used by historians in two different ways. In the first instance, the term refers to the self-styled *narodniki* of the 1870s. In the second instance, the term covers a long period in the revolutionary movement, roughly from 1870 to 1917. This period includes

⁵⁰ Milyoukov, P. (1895), ‘Russia’, *The Athenaeum*, nr. 3532, July 6, p. 25.

⁵¹ Milyoukov, P. (1895), ‘Russia’, *The Athenaeum*, nr. 3532, July 6, p. 25.

⁵² Allcock, J.B. (1971), ‘Populism: A Brief Biography’, *Sociology*, vol. 5, nr. 3. p. 372.

⁵³ Pipes, R. (1964), ‘Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 442-443.

⁵⁴ Saul, J. (1969), ‘Africa’, in: Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner (eds.), *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, pp. 134-135.

revolutionary movements who wanted to reach socialism through bypassing capitalism like 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.

5. 'Populism' (1930-1965)

In the Interwar period, the term 'populism' is hardly used in reference to existing political parties or movements, while related concepts like 'popular' are activated more frequently. For example, in his *Prison Notebooks*, written between 1929 and 1935, Antonio Gramsci does not use 'populism' but 'popularism' to describe the ideology of the Popular Party [Partito Popolare Italiano], founded in 1919.⁵⁵ The Popular Party is the predecessor of the Christian Democrat Party, which reverted to its original name in 1994. Initially, the 'popularists' combated with the fascists ('white unions') against the communists ('red devils'), but were suppressed in 1925-1926 like other opposition parties. The catholic inspired 'popularists' – founder of the Popular Party was priest Luigi Sturzo and the party was encouraged initially by the Papacy – stressed the term 'popular' to indicate that only the Popular Party represented all the members of society, as opposed to parties that promoted the interest of a specific group. Moreover, the term 'popular' consisted of another meaning in this context. 'Popular' also referred to the Christian idea of a society where the people live in a kind of harmony. The 'popularists' aimed to seek a middle way between liberalism and socialism ("the secular intellectuals") and opposed to fascism ("philosophy of praxis").⁵⁶ In contrast to fascism, the 'popularists' believed that the idea of harmonious society was more a direction to work toward than a goal that could ever be attained.

Whereas 'populism' is hardly used in reference to political parties, the term is employed in a different setting in the late 1920s and early 1930s. 'Populism' becomes a self-description of a group of French novelists who emphasizes observation and sympathy with ordinary people. The self-styled populists André Thérive and Léon Lemonnier, the two founders of the movement said that, "we should stop writing about the people from the great world, creatures who have nothing else to do than to impose themselves rouge, 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

⁵⁵ Gramsci, A. (2010), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, International Publishers, New York, p. 62.

⁵⁶ Gramsci, A. (2010), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, International Publishers, New York, p. 62.

studies.”⁵⁷ The French novelists resisted so-called elitist arts movements and used the term ‘populism’ polemically as a honorary nickname.

Besides this French literary movement, populism was primarily a subject for historians.⁵⁸ As we have seen, the word ‘populism’ had then two specific references, namely the People’s Party and Russian *narodnichestvo*. A shift in meaning of the concept occurs after the Second World War. The popular support of totalitarian movements like fascism and Nazism and the popular approval of McCarthy’s policy⁵⁹ generated new elitist fear for the masses and new interpretations of populism. American scholars define ‘populism’ in opposition to an ideal of democracy, i.e. liberal democracy. Against this background of the (former) European totalitarian regimes and McCarthyism in the United States, ‘populism’ is used in a derogatory sense.

The American sociologist Edward Shils argues that populism has many faces – Nazi dictatorship, Bolshevism McCarthyism – and he gives a broad definition: “It [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.”⁶⁰ According to Shils, populists are, therefore, suspicious and hostile toward intellectuals, financial powers and politicians. Wisdom resides in the people and the people are supreme over every other standard: “Populism is tinged by the belief that the people are not just the equal of their rulers; they are actually better than their rulers and better than the classes – the urban middle classes – associated with the ruling powers.”⁶¹ The political concepts that Shils activates, constitute his political beliefs and preferred political action. For Shils, ‘populism’ is a delegitimizing term: populism poses a danger for democracy

⁵⁷ Quoted in: ‘Over le populisme’, *Het vaderland: staat en letterkundig nieuwsblad: staat en letterkundig nieuwsblad*, July 12, 1931, p. 1A. “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 vinden voor schoone psychologische studiën.”

⁵⁸ Allcock, J.B. (1971), ‘Populism: A Brief Biography’, *Sociology*, vol. 5, nr. 3. p. 372.

⁵⁹ Senator Joseph McCarthy dominated the American political scene (1950-1954) denouncing Democrats as traitors nurtured by communism.

⁶⁰ Shils, E. (1956), *The Torment of Secrecy. The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies*, The Free Press, Glencoe, pp. 100-101.

⁶¹ Shils, E. (1956), *The Torment of Secrecy. The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies*, The Free Press, Glencoe, p. 101.

and is a threat to the independence of legislators and the members of the judiciary.⁶² Hence, what must be defended is democracy coupled with respect for human rights.

The American experience of McCarthyism gave rise to a negative judgement of populism and it affected the judgments of historians about the American People's Party, too. John Hicks' classic about the American People's Party, which appeared in 1931, suggested that the American People's Party was a healthy political phenomenon, but this attitude toward the People's Party changed in the 1950s. The historian Richard Hofstadter argued that the People's Party had mobilized irrational hostilities, i.e. elements of anti-Semitism and generalized xenophobia against immigrants.⁶³ In the 1960s and 1970s, this judgment about the American People's Party changes, once again, when academics begin to favour participatory views on democratic politics. The American People's Party is not viewed as an irrational movement then, but as a grass-roots movement that gave rise to democratic participation in politics.⁶⁴

The dominant negative judgment of populism in the 1950 was also the starting point for Lipset's analysis of populism in 1960. As with Shils, the typical case of populism is McCarthyism – “an irrational protest ideology”⁶⁵ – rather than the American People's Party. Moreover, Lipset uses the term ‘populism’ to describe the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s – “[...] a latter-day expression of provincial Populism appealing to farmers and the small businessmen in towns and villages against the domination by metropolitan centres”⁶⁶ – and links ‘populism’ to different ‘American fascist movements’ in the 1930s such as Huey Long, governor and senator from Louisiana.

Lipset's analysis of populism is not limited to American society. He also uses the term in reference to French Poujadism, a tax protest movement named after the French politician Pierre Poujade. According to Lipset, populism has an anti-democratic, i.e. fascist, orientation. Hence, he discusses McCarthyism and Poujadism in the same section as Italian fascism and German and Austrian Nazism. What they have in common, is that they “[...] were in large part products of the insoluble frustrations of those who feel cut off from the main trends of modern

⁶² Shils, E. (1956), *The Torment of Secrecy. The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies*, The Free Press, Glencoe, p. 102.

⁶³ Canovan, M. (1981), *Populism*, Junction Books, London, p. 47.

⁶⁴ Canovan, M. (1981), *Populism*, Junction Books, London, pp. 50-51.

⁶⁵ Lipset, S. (1960), *Political Man. The Social Bases of Politics*, Heinemann, London, p. 173.

⁶⁶ Lipset, S. (1960), *Political Man. The Social Bases of Politics*, Heinemann, London, p. 169.

society.”⁶⁷ Their discontent leads them to accept ‘irrational protest ideologies’, among which populist protest is just one of them.

In addition to American and European references, the term ‘populism’ is used by Lipset to describe the political leadership of Juan Peron, president of Argentine from 1946 to 1955, and Getulio Vargas, Brazilian president from 1930 to 1945 and from 1951 until 1954. Lipset identifies the political regime of Peron with that of Mussolini. ‘Peronism’ has “[...] a strong antiparliamentary populist content, stressing that the power of the party and the leader is derived directly from the people, and that parliamentarism results in government by incompetent and corrupt politicians.”⁶⁸ The same theme was developed successfully a decade earlier by Vargas. To conclude, the term ‘populism’ has a strong pejorative connotation for Shils and Lipset. The term ‘populism’ is almost used interchangeably with ‘fascism’, ‘authoritarianism’. In fact, their disapproval of populism reflects the elitist fear of ‘the people’ which can turn into a dangerous mob. Shils and Lipset conceptualize ‘populism’ as an asymmetric counter-concept of liberal democracy. While the latter is viewed as the political norm, the latter is seen as a negative political phenomenon that threatens the conditions for liberal democracy.

6. ‘Populism’ (1960-1985)

In the 1960’s and 1970s, a shift of meaning of populism occurs since the term is primarily used by academics in reference to forces of reform in underdeveloped countries. Interest in populism centered on the attempts to understand the changing nature of politics in the underdeveloped countries. Many political leaders of the Third World countries were labeled ‘populist’.⁶⁹ This academic focus is underlined by Ionescu’s and Gellner’s classic *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics* (1969). The book includes analyses of political movements in North America and Russia at the end of the 19th century, a study on Eastern Europe that covers political movements from the end of the 19th until the beginning of the 20th century, and analyses of political parties and leaders in Latin America and Africa in the 20th century. In the introduction of the book, the editors write that it is an “attempt to clarify the main aspects of a concept which during the nineteenth century and even more in the twentieth

⁶⁷ Lipset, S. (1960), *Political Man. The Social Bases of Politics*, Heinemann, London, p. 172.

⁶⁸ Lipset, S. (1960), *Political Man. The Social Bases of Politics*, Heinemann, London, p. 173.

⁶⁹ Worsley P. (1969), ‘The Concept of Populism’, in: Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner (eds.), (eds.), *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, Weidenfeld, London, p. 228

century has been more fundamental to the shaping of the political mind than is generally acknowledged.”⁷⁰

The book was a follow-up of a conference on populism organized by the London School of Economics, two years before the book was published. The conference involved 43 participants all over the world and their contributions covered different areas. In the opening of the conference, Leonard Shapiro summarized the purpose of the conference: “(These meetings)...are, as it were, attempts...to see whether there is such a thing as ‘populism’, something which applies to the various movements to which the name has given, and which is more than a mere coincidence of name.”⁷¹ During the two-days conference, the term ‘populism’ was used in reference to Russia, North America, Latin America, Africa ((e.g. African liberation movements like Tanganyika African National Union – the prominent political party in the struggle for sovereignty in the eastern part of Tanganyika (now Tanzania) in the 1950s and 1960s – and post-colonial states governed by a military leadership like the Ghanaian government led by colonel Kwame Nkrumah in 1969)) and Asia (e.g. the Indian independence activist and politician Jayaprakash Narayan, the Tamil separatists in the south of India and Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung).⁷²

In these cases, the term ‘populism’ could have a positive or a negative meaning. Socialist-inspired intellectuals often applauded the nationalist and anti-imperialist demands of these movements, while Isaiah Berlin made a distinction between ‘false populism’ and ‘populism proper’.⁷³ ‘Populism proper’ has a democratic egalitarian impulse, because it revolts against the aristocracy, against hierarchical systems. ‘False populism’, on the other hand, is the mobilization of certain populist sentiments – e.g. hostility against others – for creating an elitist regime. Examples of the latter include Bonapartists, McCartyists, Poujadists, the Egyptian president Nasser, Ghana’s first Prime Minister Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah and the Pakistani president Ayub Khan.

⁷⁰ Ionescu, G. and E. Gellner, ‘Introduction’, in: Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner (eds.), (eds.), *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, Weidenfeld, London, p. 5.

⁷¹ Allcock, J.B. (1971), ‘Populism: A Brief Biography’, *Sociology*, 5, p. 378.

⁷² Berlin, I, Hofstadter, R, McRae D. et.al (1968), ‘To define populism’, *Government and Opposition*, nr. 3, pp.138-155.

⁷³ Berlin, I, Hofstadter, R, McRae D. et.al (1968), ‘To define populism’, *Government and Opposition*, nr. 3, pp. 176-177.

At the end of the conference, Berlin tried to extract a set of positive definitional characteristics from the discussion, seeking to come to an acceptable description of populism. Berlin points out that populism is rooted in the development of the asymmetric counter-concept, viz. 'the people' versus 'the elite' as a counter-concept. 'The people' is not identified with the ordinary people or the poor, but with 'Das Volk', which has roots in the past, either real or imaginary. Populism wants to return to a 'spontaneous natural man', which has been lost by a spiritual fall somewhere a coherent, integrated society. The specific identity of the people will vary from place to place, but populism always speaks in terms of the majority of the people. Finally, populism occurs in society standing on the edge of modernization.⁷⁴

The association of populism with a sociology of modernization in the developing world prevailed throughout the 1960s and 1970s in academic discourses. A fine example is Torcuato di Tella, who defines populism as "...a political movement which enjoys the support of the mass of the urban working class and/or peasantry but which does not result from the autonomous organizational power of either of these two sectors."⁷⁵ Additionally, the movement is supported by non-working class sectors upholding an anti-status quo perspective. His conceptualization of populism refers, among others, to Argentine (Peron), Brazil (Varguismo), Bolivia (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, MNR) and Mexico (the heirs of the Mexican revolution, especially Cárdenas), Peru (Aprismo) and Venezuela (Acción Democrática).

Di Tella's conception of populism is inspired by the modernization theory: as underdeveloped societies move toward modernization, populist movements plays a function in the process of development. These movements appear in underdeveloped countries when there is an anti-status quo motivation among middle-level elites, when rising expectations generate a mobilized mass of citizens and, finally, when a widespread emotional state creates collective enthusiasm.⁷⁶ According to Di Tella, populist movements take the place of what would be social democratic parties in more developed countries.⁷⁷ In a later article, Di Tella extends his analysis to East European regimes like former Yugoslavia and the Solidarity's

⁷⁴ Berlin, I, Hofstadter, R, McRae D. et.al (1968), 'To define populism', *Government and Opposition*, nr. 3, pp. 173-175.

⁷⁵ Di Tella, (1965), 'Populism and Reform in Latin America', in: Claudia Veliz (ed.), *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*, Oxford UP, London, p. 47.

⁷⁶ Di Tella, (1965), 'Populism and Reform in Latin America', Claudia Veliz (ed.), *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*, Oxford UP, London, p. 53.

⁷⁷ Di Tella, (1965), 'Populism and Reform in Latin America', Claudia Veliz (ed.), *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*, Oxford UP, London, p. 51.

movement in Poland, but now conclude that populism often performs destabilizing roles in democratic systems.⁷⁸

In addition to Di Tella, Gino Germani proposes a different, though equally functionalist interpretation, too, and situates populism historically in a certain developmental stage. He views the populist mobilization as a deviation in the standard path from traditional to modern society, when new mobilized working and middle classes needed to be incorporated in the political process.⁷⁹ The rapid advance of urbanization and industrialization triggered mass participation, undermined the gradual establishment of new political regimes and thus generated unstable, populist type of rules. He explores the populist mobilization in comparison with ‘classic fascism’ in Europe (Italy, Germany) and ‘functional substitutes of fascism’ in Latin America (Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile in the 1930s).

Classical fascism is analyzed as an expression of middle-class authoritarianism, whereas its functional substitutes are viewed as authoritarian regimes, promoted and even established by the military.⁸⁰ ‘National populism’ is then distinguished from ‘liberal populism’. The latter is viewed in terms of political participation of the middle class, whereas the latter is compared with the analogous process of the mobilization of the lower classes in Europe. National populism occurs in societies where leftist ideologies of the working class fail to develop into mass parties.⁸¹ The paradigmatic example of national populism is the Peronist movement in Argentina. For Germani, ‘national populism’ has a negative connotation since it is identified with a form of lower-class authoritarianism often under charismatic leadership.

In sum, sociological analyses of Latin American populism see them as mobilizations linked to a transition to mass democracy, intended to bring changes on behalf of the politically inexperienced masses to satisfy their common interests.⁸² In this sense, ‘populism’ is often defined in relation to the term ‘popular’ which denotes a wide range of marginalized people. Guillermo O’Donell, for instance, distinguishes three mediations between the state and civil

⁷⁸ Di Tella, (1997), ‘Populism into the Twenty-first Century’, *Government and Opposition*, vol. 32, p. 200.

⁷⁹ Germani, G. (1978), *Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, pp. 126-127.

⁸⁰ Germani, G. (1978), *Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, p.73.

⁸¹ Germani, G. (1978), *Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, p. 88.

⁸² See also Hennessy, A. (1969), ‘Latin America’, in: Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner (eds.), (eds.), *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, Weidenfeld, London, p. 29.

society in Latin America: the nation, citizenship, and *lo popular*. He concludes that the nation and *lo popular* have become the principle links between state and civil society in Latin America. The nation refers to the network of solidarities of the ‘we’, as distinct from the ‘they’ that constitutes other nations. Citizenship comprises equal political and civil rights. *Lo popular* refers to 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.”⁸³ He views populism as the political activation of marginal popular sectors in which they were treated more as carriers of substantive justice (*pueblo*) than as citizens.⁸⁴

Most scholars share a basic conception of populism as a ‘popular’ movement, the pursuit of expansionary economic policies and a charismatic style of political leadership. This description of populism is inspired by prevailing modernization theories which assume close connections between populism and socioeconomic factors. By the late 1970s, a crucial assumption of the modernization theory, viz. that socioeconomic structures shaped politics, was, however, rejected and thus populism was no longer regarded as a specific stage of social mobilization.⁸⁵ As a consequence, other theoretical interpretations of moved away from the historical/sociological view of populism.

Against the background of populism in Latin America, Ernesto Laclau proposes a discursive approach to studying populism. Laclau sees populism as a dimension of the popular-democratic imaginary. His theory concentrates on the political subject that is addressed in a particular discourse. Laclau argues that “despite the wide diversity in the uses of the term [populism, TH], we find in all of them the common reference to an analogical basis which is the people.”⁸⁶ ‘The people’ is the central signifier – the word that is expressed – in populist discourse. But the reference to the people does not yet make a discourse ‘populist’. In addition, he claims that a populist discourse divides the social field in two distinctive camps, viz. ‘the people in antagonistic opposition against the ‘dominant ideology’ or ‘dominant bloc’.

⁸³ O’Donnell G. (1979), ‘Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy’, in: David Collier (ed.), *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America*, Princeton UP, Princeton, p.289.

⁸⁴ O’Donnell G. (1979), ‘Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy’, in: David Collier (ed.), *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America*, Princeton UP, Princeton, p. 290.

⁸⁵ Weyland, K. (2001), ‘Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics’, *Comparative Politics*, vol. 34, nr. 1, p. 10.

⁸⁶ Laclau, E. (1977), *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, New Left Books, London, p. 165.

Laclau's concept of populism embodies a commitment to a Marxist account. The asymmetric counter-concept 'the people' against 'the elite' is interpreted in Marxist terms. In this sense, he distinguishes between a populism of the elite (dominant classes) and a populism of the dominated classes. When a dominant class seeks to establish hegemony but is unable to do so, a solution could be the direct appeal to the masses. For the dominated sectors, populism occurs when class antagonisms are expressed in popular-democratic form. This expression denotes a conflict between 'the people' and 'the dominant bloc', which does not accord with particular classes, but goes beyond it. Hence, "Populism starts at the point where popular-democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc."⁸⁷

In the 1970s, the term 'populism' is employed regularly in American political discourses. 'Populism' means the politics of the small, ordinary people against the established, big government. The term denotes a democratic, i.e. popular expression of political action, opposed to the elitist (anti-popular) idea that experts should play the political game. For example, the elections of 1972 and 1976 abounded with people who claimed to be 'populists'. Robert W. Whitaker, listed as the Director of the Populist Forum, wrote a populist manifesto in 1976 in which he condemned both republicans and democrats for not being responsive to ordinary citizens, and praised Alabama Governor George Wallace, 'the populist of our day'. Oklahoma senator Fred Harris expressed a similar sentiment through his writings *A New Populist Call to Action* (1971) and *The New Populism* (1973).⁸⁸

The term 'populism' is also recurrently mobilized by Jimmy Carter before and after the presidential elections of 1976. When journalists asked Carter whether he was a conservative or a liberal, he avoided the question and described himself as a 'populist'. Carter attacked his opponent Ford in his successful political campaign as a member of the elite and promised to restore control of all aspects of government to the people. Carter used the term 'populism' as a honorary nickname, creating an opposition with his political opponent. In media coverage Carter's populism was explained as an appeal to the interests of ordinary people.⁸⁹ Scholars explained Carter's populism as a kind of catch-all politics. Carter used the image of the

⁸⁷ Laclau, E. (1977), *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, New Left Books, London, p. 173.

⁸⁸ Conniff, M. (ed.) (1982), *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, p. 211.

⁸⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 'Populist', 08-10-2010, www.dictionary.oed.com

outsider, while at the same time claiming to represent the ordinary people rather than any particular section.⁹⁰

Scholars often use the term ‘populism’ in the 1970s and 1980s to analyze political movements in Latin America⁹¹ in comparison with specific agrarian movements in the United States, Russia and Eastern Europe.⁹² Many of them are already discussed. Margaret Canovan broadens the meaning of the concept of populism in one respect. She uses the term ‘populism’ to describe a set of political institutions that are associated with the ideal and practices of direct democracy. For those, who aim at this ideal, she says, populism does not mean a threat to democracy then, but is “the true, radical ideal of democracy itself.”⁹³ The term ‘populism’ refers to those who aim at the ideal of direct democracy and those who have attempted to translate the ideal into political practices, such as the American National Progressive Republican League (ANPRL) in the early 20th century.⁹⁴

The ANPRL was not a grassroots movement like the People’s Party, but was driven by ideas of direct democracy that bypassed the role of political representatives. The Progressive reformers were inspired by the example of Switzerland. In Switzerland populist institutions are not a supplement to representative democracy, but are rather an integral part of the governmental structure. In some Western states, the Progressive reformers succeeded to supplement representative democracy with “populist devices for direct democracy”.⁹⁵ Whereas these populist devices had been dismissed by Shils and Lipset, associating these institutions with authoritarian leaders from Hitler, Huey Long to the French president de Gaulle, intellectuals saw ‘populist democracy’, committed by direct legislation, as a progressive ideal in the 1960s.⁹⁶

7. ‘Populism’ (1985-...)

So far, the conceptual history of the concept ‘populism’ illustrates that the term is applied to a variety of political actors around the world, but less often used in reference to West-European

⁹⁰ Canovan, M. (1981), *Populism*, Junction Books, London, p. 271.

⁹¹ Van Niekerk, A. (1974), *Populism and political development in Latin America*, Rotterdam UP, Rotterdam.

⁹² Conniff, M. (ed.) (1982), *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque; Canovan, M. (1981), *Populism*, Junction Books, London.

⁹³ Canovan, M. (1981), *Populism*, Junction Books, London, p. 172.

⁹⁴ A fine example is the Dutch political party D66, founded in 1966 and advocator of political devices of direct democracy.

⁹⁵ Canovan, M. (1981), *Populism*, Junction Books, London, p. 177.

⁹⁶ Canovan, M. (1981), *Populism*, Junction Books, London, pp. 223-224.

phenomena. In the 1960s, the term ‘populism’ was still used to describe European right-wing political movements like Poujadism,⁹⁷ but the term is hardly used as polemical notion to describe right-wing political actors in Europe in the 1970s. According to Taguieff, the word ‘populism’ played hardly any role in French public and political debate in the 1970s.⁹⁸ Similarly, the term was barely used in Dutch political debates. The term was coined in the Lower House on October 10, 1975, when a Dutch MP disapproved the policy of a commission of experts by qualifying it as ‘populistic’.⁹⁹ Terms like ‘populist’, ‘populism’ or ‘populistic’ were barely used in Dutch parliamentary debates until the mid 1990s. Since then, these terms are used frequently.¹⁰⁰

‘Populism’ begins to play a role in European public debates from the mid-1980s, during an era in which liberal democracy supposedly triumphs over alternative political regimes (authoritarian regimes, Soviet Communism). In the mid-1980s, the term ‘populism’ was first used polemically against politicians like Margaret Thatcher in Great-Brittan and Ronald Reagan in the United States. Here, the label populism indicates a specific political style, whereby politicians “appeal to the popular feelings and prejudices”¹⁰¹. Moreover, the label was applied to right-wing politicians like Jörg Haider, who founded the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) in 1986, and Le Pen, who founded the Front National in 1972 and managed to increase popular support in the 1980s. These political parties are not labelled ‘populist’ because of their political style, but because of their political discourse that refers to ‘the people’. In contrast to earlier Latin American accounts of populism, ‘the people’ are not necessarily the poor and has little to do with Marxist notions of class alliances. Here, ‘the people’ is identified either with the ordinary people opposed to a corrupt elite, or the authentic people which stands in an opposition against the stranger, e.g. immigrants.¹⁰²

Along parallel lines the term ‘populism’ is applied to other right-wing political actors in Western Europe in the 1990s such as Umberto Bossi’s Lega Nord (Italy), Christoph Blocher

⁹⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, ‘Populist’, 08-10-2010, www.dictionary.oed.com.

⁹⁸ Taguieff, P. (2007), *L’illusion populiste. Essai sur les démagogies de l’âge démocratique*, Flammarion, Paris, p. 122.

⁹⁹ Reports of Dutch parliamentary proceedings, 11e vergadering Oktober 10 1975, p. 522, <http://www.statengeneraal.digitaal.nl>.

¹⁰⁰ Between 1975 and 1995 the terms ‘populism’, ‘populist’, ‘populistic’ were used 30 times in either the Upper House or the Lower House. Since 1996 these terms were employed 340 times in parliamentary debates.

¹⁰¹ Di Tella, (1997), ‘Populism into the Twenty-first Century’, *Government and Opposition*, vol. 32, p. 188.

¹⁰² Taguieff, P. (2007), *L’illusion populiste. Essai sur les démagogies de l’âge démocratique*, Flammarion, Paris, p. 137.

(Switzerland), Carl I. Hagen (Norway), Philip Dewinter (Belgium), Paulo Portas (Portugal), Pia Kjaersgaard (Denmark), who articulate roughly a similar political discourse as Haider and Le Pen. In these cases, 'populism' is often defined in relation to 'right-wing radical', 'right-wing extremist', 'neo-fascist' and 'neo-nazi'. These political concepts partly constitute political beliefs and political practices among political actors. For example, when Jörg Haider's FPÖ entered into a coalition government with the ÖVP (Austrian People's Party) in 2000, the entire spectrum of 'respectable (or legitimate) democrats' was filled with envy. Commentators compared the coalition with Austria's Nazi past, a revival of political extremism akin to which resulted in the collapse of the first Republic 1934 and the Anschluß of 1938.¹⁰³ Moreover, the 14 European Union partners, the United States and Israel imposed sanctions to make clear that such a coalition would be unacceptable.¹⁰⁴

After the mid-1980s, the term 'populist' is increasingly used polemically by political actors to discredit political opponents. The term is not only ascribed to right-wing political actors, for the PASOK party in Greece and his party leader Papandreou have been labelled populist, too. The PASOK articulated a political discourse that subsumed all the heterogeneous interests of the 'non-privileged' people against the elite. This 'populist' discourse transcended divisions of Greek society by claiming an apparent unity at the political level. The unity was represented and incarnated by Papandreou.¹⁰⁵ The increasing polemical force of the label 'populist' could explain why the term 'populist' was transferred to Russian political vocabulary at the end of the 1980s.

In the post-Communist era, political leaders like Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first president, and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, founder and leader of the opposition party LDP (Liberal-Democratic Party), are labelled 'populist' in media and political discourses.¹⁰⁶ According to Taguieff, the roots of this use of the term against Yeltsin and other East-European politicians can be found

¹⁰³ Luther, K.R. (2000), Austria: A Democracy under Threat from the Freedom Party?, Parliamentary Affairs, vol. 53, p. 426.

¹⁰⁴ The EU-14 and the United States announced that they would not have any bilateral official contacts at political levels with the Austrian government; they would not support Austrian candidates seeking positions in international organizations and would receive Austrian embassy at 'technical level' only. Israel decided to withdraw its ambassador and banned Haider from the country. Luther, K.R. (2000), Austria: A Democracy under Threat from the Freedom Party?, Parliamentary Affairs, vol. 53, p. 433.

¹⁰⁵ Lyrantzis, C. (1989), 'PASOK in power: the loss of the 'third road to socialism'', in: Tom Gallagher and Allan M. Williams (eds.), *Southern European Socialism: Parties, elections and the challenge of government*, Manchester UP, Manchester, p. 38.

¹⁰⁶ Taguieff, P. (2007), *L'illusion populiste. Essai sur les démagogies de l'âge démocratique*, Flammarion, Paris, p. 138.

in the year 1989, when Yeltsin gained 90 percent of the votes and was elected to the Congress of People's Deputies as the delegate from the Moscow district. His popularity worried the Soviet government and they started a campaign to discredit Yeltsin.¹⁰⁷ During this campaign of the government, the term 'populism' is polemically mobilized and used interchangeably with 'nationalism'.

Taguieff remarks that Yeltsin's opponents do not use the Russian term *narodnichestvo*, but make use of a new Russian word 'populizm'.¹⁰⁸ The new term 'populizm' has a different meaning than *narodnichestvo*. The *Dictionnaire raisonné de la langue russe* (1992) defines populism as "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."¹⁰⁹ The shift in terminology indicates that the term *narodnichestvo* has acquired primarily a historical meaning. The term *narodnichestvo* was a polemical notion, mobilized by the self-styled *narodniki* and, later, by Lenin, but has primarily become a descriptive term used by historians to analyze historical phenomena. Yet, *narodnichestvo* could still be used polemically, but then the term refers to groups of people going to the countryside to save authentic Russian folk culture. While the term *narodnichestvo* was not apt for political use in the new Russian circumstances, the relative success of another political term, viz. populism, was adopted from other countries. After the term 'populizm' has been applied to Yeltsin and Zhirinovski, the label has also been used in reference to other political actors in Eastern Europe like Andrzej Lepper, Aleksander Kwasniewski, Lech Walesa in Poland, Slobodan Milosevic and Vojislav Seselj in Serbia, Istvan Csurka and Jozsef Torgyan in Hungary, and Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia.¹¹⁰

Another shift in meaning of the concept occurs at the end of 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, when the label is applied political leaders like Perot in the United States, Silvio

¹⁰⁷ Taguieff, P. (2007), *L'illusion populiste. Essai sur les démagogies de l'âge démocratique*, Flammarion, Paris, p. 140.

¹⁰⁸ According to Taguieff, the 24th edition of the *Dictionnaire raisonné de la langue russe* (1992) translates populism with *narodnichestvo* and *populizm*. Taguieff, P. (2007), *L'illusion populiste. Essai sur les démagogies de l'âge démocratique*, Flammarion, Paris, 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.

¹⁰⁹ Taguieff, P. (2007), *L'illusion populiste. Essai sur les démagogies de l'âge démocratique*, Flammarion, Paris, p. 141.

¹¹⁰ Taguieff, P. (2007), *L'illusion populiste. Essai sur les démagogies de l'âge démocratique*, Flammarion, Paris, pp. 143, 145.

Berlusconi in Italy, Bernard Tapie in France, and Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands. ‘Populism’ is associated with demagogy and refers to politicians who pretend to speak directly to the people through television, bypassing party structures and articulate an anti-partyist discourse. For example, when Berlusconi became head of government in 1994, he was labelled a populist by political opponents and a hostile press with the intention of discrediting him. In order to stress the demagogic nature of his personality, the term was often used interchangeably with the adjective ‘Perónist’.¹¹¹ For his critics, Berlusconi charges his goals with demagogic practices: denouncing political elites, formulating vague and simplistic political solutions and making unrealisable promises, and playing on popular emotions. The association of populism with demagogy has contributed to the extent that the two concepts are sometimes conflated. For Taguieff, for instance, Berlusconi is an exponent of ‘telepopulism’ and ‘video-demagogy’, transforming political communication into a mass spectacle.¹¹²

In the beginning of the 1990s, ‘populism’ is associated with political leaders, movements or parties who are not part of the political establishment, but in the mid-1990s the term is also applied to mainstream political actors.¹¹³ Here, the term ‘populism’ denotes a catch-all politics, whereby politicians appeal to the people as a whole. In the academic literature, this catch all politics is associated with the weakening of traditional party structures and ideological cleavages. The representative function of political parties is declining and the floating electorate tends to vote for a person and less for political parties.¹¹⁴ In this respect, Bernard Manin speaks about the era of ‘audience democracy’,¹¹⁵ whereby politicians aim to identify the relevant cleavages with their electorate in order to differentiate from their adversaries. Since television encourages political leaders to speak directly to the people as a whole, politics is highly personalized. This inclusive language of ‘the people’ has been used in Jacques Chirac’s campaign for the 1995 presidential election. Chirac criticized the elite for their inability to solve political problems – “[t]he people are aware they have not been taken into account in the thinking of hierarchies that are supposed to lead them” – and regarded

¹¹¹ Tarchi, M. (2002), ‘Populism Italian Style’, in: Yves Mény and Yves Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, New York, p. 131.

¹¹² Taguieff, P.-A. (1995), ‘Political Science Confronts Populism: From a Conceptual Mirage to a Real Problem’, *Telos*, vol. 103, p. 42.

¹¹³ Mudde, C. (2004), ‘The Populist Zeitgeist’, *Government and Opposition*, vol. 39, p. 550, Canovan, M. (2005), *The People*, Polity Press, Malden, pp. 77-78. Surel, Y. (2002), ‘Populism in the French Party’, in: Yves Mény and Yves Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, New York, p. 139.

¹¹⁴ Mair, P. (2002), ‘Populist Democracy vs Party Democracy’ in: Yves Sures and Yves Mény (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, New York, p. 87.

¹¹⁵ Manin, B. (1997), *Principles of representative government*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 223.

himself as closest to the people who should be called on to govern – “If I have these last two years chosen to keep away from the glitter of the Republic [...] it is because I wanted to turn toward the French”.¹¹⁶

The inclusive discourse of ‘the people’ has also been much used by Tony Blair, former prime minister of the UK, who employed the notion of ‘the people’ as a key reference in his political speeches. Blair provided the Labour Party a new impetus by reformulating the Labour Party as ‘New Labour’. Discussing the political strategy of Tony Blair, Peter Mair talks about populism “as a form of governing in which party is sidelined or disappears; where the people are undifferentiated, and in which a more or less ‘neutral’ government attempts to serve the interests of all.”¹¹⁷ The difference between the catch-all politics of the political insider and the anti-establishment discourse of the political outsiders constitutes a conceptual change. However, both articulate a discourse that emphasizes the people as a single body of common interests. The case Berlusconi shows that it is possible to make a transition from a political outsider to a catch-all politician in government.¹¹⁸

Throughout the 1990s, the term ‘populist’ for the most part has a pejorative connotation in media and political discourses. Di Tella notes that in these years, populism “[...] has become almost a by-word to imply irresponsible economic policies.”¹¹⁹ For example, former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan claimed that populism, in the form of a host of protectionist measures, was a backlash against globalization.¹²⁰ In a recent study, Van Kessel, Bale and Taggart investigate the use of the term ‘populism’ in the UK-print. They show that the term is used in reference to wide variety of policies and politicians across the world. The term is often used as “[...] a negative label to pin on one’s political enemies and their stances and policies.”¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Chirac, J., quoted in: Surel, Y. (2002), ‘Populism in the French Party’, in: Yves Mény and Yves Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, New York, p. 150.

¹¹⁷ Mair, P. (2002), ‘Populist Democracy vs Party Democracy’ in: Yves Sures and Yves Mény (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, New York, p. 96.

¹¹⁸ Canovan, M. (2005), *The People*, Polity Press, Malden, p. 78.

¹¹⁹ Di Tella, (1997), ‘Populism into the Twenty-first Century’, *Government and Opposition*, vol. 32, p. 188.

¹²⁰ Mudde, C. (2002), ‘In the Name of the Peasantry, the Proletariat, and the People: Populisms in Eastern Europe’, in: Yves Sures and Yves Mény (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, New York, p. 217.

¹²¹ Van Kessel, S., T. Bale and P. Taggart (forthcoming), ‘Thrown with abandon? Popular understanding of populism as conveyed by the print media: a UK case study’, p. 15.

Whereas the term ‘populism’ is often used in a derogatory sense, recently however, the term has gained a positive connotation, too. The Dutch politician Rita Verdonk is proud 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 a honorary nickname.”¹²² A few months later, another Dutch politician, Ronald Sörensen, announced to launch a new broadcasting in The Netherlands, which he named ‘Populist Broadcasting The Netherlands’ (*Populistische Omroep Nederland*). This new broadcasting wanted to offer a platform for ‘the dissatisfaction among the population’ that was negated by the existing broadcastings, which merely represented ‘the social-liberal elite’.¹²³ Similarly, politicians like Jörg Haider and Le Pen once claimed the term ‘populism’ as a *nom de guerre* in an interview.¹²⁴ In fact, these self-styled populists allude to the positive meaning of ‘populism’ that explains its popularity in the United States.

In the US the term ‘populism’ has less derogatory associations than in Europe. As we have seen, Jimmy Carter used the term ‘populism’ as a honorary nickname, opposing the old division between Democrats and Republicans. Some academics have argued that the ‘populist’ appeals to the people express an essential aspect of American politics. For example, Michael Kazin links the notion of ‘populism’ with politicians who employ a “flexible mode of persuasion.”¹²⁵ Kazin uses the term ‘populism’ to describe diverging 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.”¹²⁶ Kazin understands populism as strategy to include new social groups in the democratic process.

According to Kazin, American populism does not call the entire American system into question, but is rather linked up with several political values and traditions that have been central in American politics. American politicians tend to run ‘against government’, irrespective of whether they are attacking the interests they support, and tend to invoke the support of ‘the people’ in doing so. Populism holds, in the words of Urbinati, a popular or

¹²² ‘Ik ben er voor het volk. Populist? Daar ben ik trots op. Ik vind het een geuzennaam’, W. Duk en L. Sleutjes, ‘Populist? Ik vind het een geuzennaam. Interview met Rita Verdonk’, in: *Dagblad van het Noorden*, March 27, 2008.

¹²³ ‘Sörensen wil Populistische Omroep Nederland’, *Trouw*, November 20, 2008, http://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/nederland/article1905691.ece/Sorensen_wil_Populistische_Omroep_Nederland_.html, 05-11-2010.

¹²⁴ Mudde, C. (2009), *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 35.

¹²⁵ Kazin, M. (1995), *The Populist Persuasion*, Cornell UP, Ithaca/London, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Kazin, M. (1995), *The Populist Persuasion*, Cornell UP, Ithaca/London, p. 4.

direct style of expression opposed to an intellectual or indirect language of political elites.¹²⁷ Although American populism may be ‘anti-governmental’, it has rarely been ‘anti-regime’.¹²⁸ Because of its claim for a direct style of expression and politics, populism is often viewed as valuable strategy for political inclusion of new social groups which demand a legitimate share in the political power. Populism is equivalent to a democratic expression of political life. That is, populism plays a valuable political role in rebalancing the distribution of political power for the benefit of the majority of the people.¹²⁹

When the term is frequently used in European public debates, terminological and methodological discussions on the concept of populism increase in academic discourses. In the beginning of the 1990s, there remains a tendency to treat ‘populism’ as a pejorative category. For example, Betz regards 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.”¹³⁰ These parties of discontent, as he also explains in a later article,¹³¹ mobilize feelings of resentment and exploit them politically. Here, the term ‘populism’ denotes a specific form of political mobilization and is applied not only to European political actors, but also to the Canadian Reform Party in the late 1980s, formed by Preston Manning, the Australian politician Pauline Hanson and her “One Nation Party” and to “New Zealand First”.¹³² In his earlier work the negative connotation of the term was reinforced by the use of related pejorative labels. Betz did not only use the concept ‘populism’ to describe right-wing political parties, but characterize these parties as ‘radical right’ and ‘extreme right’, too. Although he does not hyphenate the labels ‘populist’, ‘radical-right’ and ‘extremist’, he uses the terms sometimes interchangeably.¹³³

More recent studies define ‘populism’ in relation to the hegemonic regime of liberal democracy. This relation is interpreted as ‘a crisis’ or ‘a danger of democracy’, or ‘a

¹²⁷ Urbinati, N. (1998), ‘Democracy and Populism’, *Constellations*, vol. 5, nr. 1, p. 111.

¹²⁸ Ware, A. (2002), ‘The United States: Populism as a Political Strategy’, in: Yves Mény and Yves Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, New York, p. 110.

¹²⁹ Kazin, M. (1995), *The Populist Persuasion*, Cornell UP, Ithaca/London, p. 7.

¹³⁰ Betz, H.-G. (1994), *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*, Macmillan, London, p. 38.

¹³¹ 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.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, New York, pp. 198-199.

¹³² 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.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, New York, pp. 201, 203, 211.

¹³³ Betz, H.-G. (1994), *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*, Macmillan, London, p. 4.

challenge to' or 'a change of democracy'. Departing from liberal democracy as either a type of regime or political ideal, populism is interpreted as a basic democratic impulse,¹³⁴ a threat to democracy,¹³⁵ or a hybrid phenomenon that encompasses two faces.¹³⁶ A lot of discussion has taken place about the overarching dimension (*genus*) of the concept of populism. Priester takes an exceptional position in the debate and views populism as a specific political current. Combining elements from anarchism, (*laissez-faire*) liberalism and conservatism (*Volkskonservatismus*), populism is understood as a revolt against the modern state.¹³⁷ The portrayal of populism as a liberal, anti-statist program is, however, roundly rejected by most scholars, because "[...] it is precisely by identifying populism with specific programmes or ideologies that we miss out on its crucial specificity."¹³⁸

A common starting point for many definitions is the idea of 'the people'. 'The people' is not identified with a specific class or social group but is seen as a formal category that stands in opposition to the political establishment and the dominant ideas and values of society.¹³⁹ For Canovan, the populist appeal to 'the people' is sustained by an ideology of popular sovereignty and majority rule.¹⁴⁰ Along parallel lines, Mudde, Abts and Rummens, Albertazzi and McDonell, and Stanley define populism as a thin political ideology that interprets social and political reality and provides a call to political action.¹⁴¹ The populist ideology is considered to be thin because it lacks a comprehensive view of society. Instead, the thin ideology of populism denotes a core set of ideas centered on the idea that the sovereign

¹³⁴ Canovan, M. (1999), 'Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy', *Political Studies*, vol. 47, nr. 1; Canovan, M. (2002), 'Democracy and the Populist Challenge', in: Yves Mény and Yves Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, New York.

¹³⁵ Abts, K. and S. Rummens (2007), 'Populism versus Democracy', *Political Studies*, vol. 55, nr. 2, p. 415; Pasquino, G. (2007), 'Populism and Democracy', in: Daniel Albertazzi and Duncan McDonell (eds.), *Twenty-first Century Populism*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 16.

¹³⁶ Decker, F. (2003), 'The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy', *International Politics and Society*, vol. 48, nr. 3, p. 57; Arditi, B. (2008), *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism*, Edinburgh UP, Edinburgh, p. 81.

¹³⁷ Priester, K. (2007), *Populismus. Historische und aktuelle Erscheinungsformen*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/New York, pp. 48-51.

¹³⁸ Mény, Y and Y. Surel (2002), 'the Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism', in: Yves Mény and Yves Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, New York, p. 17.

¹³⁹ Canovan, M. (1999), 'Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy', *Political Studies*, vol. 47, nr. 1, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ Canovan, M. (2002), 'Democracy and the Populist Challenge', in: Yves Mény and Yves Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, New York, p. 25.

¹⁴¹ Mudde, C. (2004), 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 39, nr. 3, p. 543; Mudde, C. (2009), *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 23; Albertazzi, D. and D. McDonell (2007), 'Introduction: The Spectre and the Spectre', in: Daniel Albertazzi and Duncan McDonell (eds.), *Twenty-first Century Populism*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 3; Abts, K. and S. Rummens (2007), 'Populism versus Democracy', *Political Studies*, vol. 55, nr. 2, p. 420; Stanley, B. (2008), 'The Thin Ideology of Populism', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 13, nr. 1, p. 100.

people are a homogeneous group. Populism separates society into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, i.e. the homogenous people against a set of elites and dangerous others.

Others such as Taguieff and Pasquino maintain that the core characteristics of populism are not substantial enough. Hence, the suggestion of a populist ideology, let alone a populist current, would be an exaggeration.¹⁴² These 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,¹⁴³ or a mentality (state of mind).¹⁴⁴ Despite the terminological disagreements, there is, however, agreement about the constituent components of populism. Both Taguieff and Pasquino refer to the populist appeal to the people. This appeal to the people is meant to denunciate elites or foreigners,¹⁴⁵ or is closely linked with an ‘anti-political mentality’ and ‘anti-party sentiment.’¹⁴⁶

In a European context, ‘populism’ is defined in relation to liberal democracy, but in the context of Latin America ‘populism’ acquires different meanings. Here, ‘populism’ is defined in relation to social and economic factors, politics or different ideals of democracy. While ‘populism’ in Latin America has often been interpreted as a popular mobilization in relation linked to a transition to mass democracy in the 1960s and 1970s, the term seemed to disappear from Latin American studies in the beginning of the 1980s. Paul Drake, for example, argued that populism was ‘dead’ since populist movements clearly faded in the 1970s.¹⁴⁷ Its pronounced death seemed, however, to be exaggerated, since the term reappears in academic debates in the late-1980s and 1990s. Academics use the term ‘populism’ to analyze leaders like Peru’s Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), Brazil’s Fernando Collor (1990-1992) and Argentina’s Carlos Menem (1989-1999). The term is now, however, used in a different socioeconomic context. This constitutes a conceptual change because most scholars shift the

¹⁴² Pasquino, G. (2007), ‘Populism and Democracy’, in: Daniel Albertazzi and Duncan McDonell (eds.), *Twenty-first Century Populism*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 20.

¹⁴³ Taguieff, P.-A. (1995), ‘Political Science Confronts Populism: From a Conceptual Mirage to a Real Problem’, *Telos*, vol. 103, p. 9.

¹⁴⁴ Pasquino, G. (2007), ‘Populism and Democracy’, in: Daniel Albertazzi and Duncan McDonell (eds.), *Twenty-first Century Populism*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 20.

¹⁴⁵ Taguieff, P.-A. (1995), ‘Political Science Confronts Populism: From a Conceptual Mirage to a Real Problem’, *Telos*, vol. 103, pp. 32, 34.

¹⁴⁶ Pasquino, G. (2007), ‘Populism and Democracy’, in: Daniel Albertazzi and Duncan McDonell (eds.), *Twenty-first Century Populism*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 21.

¹⁴⁷ Drake, P.W. (1982), ‘Conclusion: Requiem for Populism?’, in: Michael Conniff (ed.), *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, p. 217.

focus away from socioeconomic features and focus instead on the concept's political characteristics.

Politicians like Fujimori and Menem enacted neoliberal reforms that diverged radically from the extension of social benefits that was pursued by politicians like Peron and Vargas. While (Marxist-inspired) scholars maintain that neo-liberalism violates popular interests and therefore refuse to call presidents such as Menem and Fujimori populists, others emphasize that neoliberal reforms achieved broad popular support.¹⁴⁸ The 'neoliberal' variant of populism is identified by these scholars as 'neo-populism' in contrast to 'classic populism', which advocated expansionist or redistributive policies.¹⁴⁹

Roberts has tried to solve the seeming divergence between 'classic populists' and neo-populists' to adopt the Wittgensteinian concept of 'family resemblances'. He redefines populism as a multidimensional phenomenon and lists five characteristics that are derived from competing perspectives on populism: "personalistic and paternalistic [...] political leadership"; "a heterogeneous, multiclass political coalition"; "a top-down process of political mobilization that bypasses institutionalized forms of mediation"; "an amorphous or eclectic ideology" and "an economic project that utilizes widespread redistributive or clientelistic methods."¹⁵⁰ Roberts proposes a theoretical compromise that affords great flexibility. Phenomena that are described as 'populist' will not exactly be the same, but will have some features in common with other 'populist' phenomena.

Political scientists have, however, criticized these Wittgensteinian approaches because authors may associate very different meanings with the term¹⁵¹ and it remains unclear how much resemblance is required and how the members of the family are related.¹⁵² Instead, political scientists tend to develop classificatory systems of party families. 'Populism' is described then as a species (subgroup) within a genus (overarching dimension). For example,

¹⁴⁸ Roberts, K. (1995), 'Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America', *World Politics*, vol. 48, nr. 1, pp. 106-107. Weyland, K. (1999), 'Neoliberal Populism in Latin America and Eastern Europe', *Comparative Politics*, vol. 31, nr. 4, p. 379.

¹⁴⁹ Knight, A. (1998), 'Populism and Neo-populism in Latin America, especially Mexico', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 30, nr. 2, p. 240; Weyland, K. (1999), 'Populism in the Age of Neoliberalism', in: Michael L. Conniff (ed.), *Populism in Latin America*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa/London, p. 173.

¹⁵⁰ Roberts, K. (1995), 'Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America', *World Politics*, vol. 48, nr. 1, p. 88.

¹⁵¹ Weyland, K. (2001), 'Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics', *Comparative Politics*, vol. 34, nr. 1, p. 10.

¹⁵² Mudde, C. (2009), *Populist Radical Right Parties*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 13.

‘populism’ is viewed as a member of the party family ‘radical right’¹⁵³ or ‘extreme-right’.¹⁵⁴ In these studies, the terms ‘extreme’ and ‘radical’ point at an opposition to (some key features of) liberal democracy.

In contrast to the view that populism is linked with liberal democracy, Laclau defines populism in relation to politics as such. In his modified discourse theoretic approach, laid down in *On Populist Reason* (2005), he rejects the dominant view that populism says something about the relationship between the people and the elite. Instead, he argues that populism is a product of an antagonistic relationship between the two entities. These antagonisms are, however, no longer exclusively located in class relationships. The populist discourse can now emerge from different places within the socio-economic structure.¹⁵⁵

In his original thesis, 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’. The reference to the people is replaced by the production of empty signifiers that unify in equivalential chains a multiplicity of heterogeneous demands. Laclau emphasizes that populism emerges through a failure of ‘the institutional system’ to fulfill particular demands.¹⁵⁶ Where the institutional system is capable to satisfy particular demands in such a way that antagonism does not emerge, the so-called logic of difference prevails. Where the institutional system is incapable to satisfy particular demands of social groups a logic of equivalence dominates and an antagonism arises between the people and the elite.

Here, ‘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.¹⁵⁷ According to Laclau, the social and political field is characterized by an interplay between the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference. Therefore, all politics is populist to some extent: “A

¹⁵³ Mudde, C. (2009), *Populist Radical Right Parties*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 26.

¹⁵⁴ Bornschieer, S. (2010), *Cleavage Politics and the Populist Right: The New Cultural Conflict in Western Europe*, Temple UP, Philadelphia, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ Laclau, E. (2005), ‘Populism: What’s in a Name?’ in: Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, Verso, London, p. 44.

¹⁵⁶ Laclau, E. (2007), *On Populist Reason*, 2nd edition, Verso, London, p. 73.

¹⁵⁷ Laclau, E. (2007), *On Populist Reason*, 2nd edition, Verso, London, p. 117.

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.”¹⁵⁸ 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.

Other scholars who adopt a discourse theoretic approach have rejected Laclau’s conflation of politics and populism. For example, Stavakris argues that Laclau cannot conceptually account for the difference between an equivalential discourse articulated around ‘the people’ and any other equivalential discourse. Hence, “[...] the risk here is to lose the conceptual particularity of populism as a tool for concrete political analysis.”¹⁵⁹ For Stavakris, ‘the people’ as signifier remains a crucial feature of a populist discourse.

In contrast to these discursive approaches, other scholars define populism as a political strategy or political style. Some of them conceptualize ‘populism’ in relation to a democratic regime or ideal. Weyland, for instance, defines populism as a political strategy with three characteristics: personal appeal to heterogeneous mass of followers; direct, quasi-personal mobilization that bypasses established intermediary structures; low level of institutionalization of the populist party.¹⁶⁰ In this sense, he distinguishes ‘neopopulism’ from ‘classical populism’. Populists act unilaterally on behalf of the people, whereas neopopulists act on behalf of the people’s wishes expressed through opinion polling.¹⁶¹ Whereas Weyland focuses on the instruments of winning and exercising political power, other scholars conceptualize populism as a political style. According to Knight, for instance, the populist style implies a close bond between political leaders and led.¹⁶² Knight’s definition of populism as a political style puts emphasis on the populism’s expressive aspects, including its discourse. Here, populism is not associated with charismatic leadership or with irrational and emotive mobilization.

¹⁵⁸ Laclau, E. ‘Populism and the Mirror of Democracy, in: Panizza, p. 47. The same argument is made in *On Populist Reason*, Verso, London, p. 154.

¹⁵⁹ Stavakris, Y. (2004), ‘Antinomies of Formalism: Laclau’s Theory of Populism and the Lessons from Religious Populism in Greece’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 9, nr. 3, p. 263.

¹⁶⁰ Weyland, K. (1999), ‘Neoliberal Populism in Latin America and Eastern Europe’, *Comparative Politics*, vol. 31, nr. 4, p. 380.

¹⁶¹ Weyland, K. (2001), ‘Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics’, *Comparative Politics*, vol. 34, nr. 1, p. 15.

¹⁶² Knight, A. (1998), ‘Populism and Neo-populism in Latin America, especially Mexico’, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 30, nr. 2, p. 226.

De la Torre, by contrast, argues that the populist style radicalizes the emotional element by constructing a moral struggle between the people and the oligarchy.¹⁶³ Like de la Torre, Hawkins sees populism as a style of mobilization that stresses the existence of a popular will and the idea of ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’. Additionally, populism is interpreted as a charismatic mode of linkage between the voters and politicians. Hawkins evaluates Chavismo as a paradigmatic instance of populism and concludes that “[...] it is difficult and perhaps impossible to build democracy on a foundation of populism like that we see in Venezuela.”¹⁶⁴ Both De la Torre and Hawkins describe populism as an enemy of democracy, i.e. liberal democracy. The populist tendency to devalue civil rights as well as the personalistic tendency of populism run counter to liberal democracy. In a recent updated study on Chavismo, Hawkins modifies his view. He stresses again the Manichean outlook of populist discourse (or worldview as he calls it here), but does no longer view charisma as an essential aspect of populism. Moreover, he does no longer write off Chavismo as a negative experience for Venezuelan democracy, but views Chavismo as a ‘semidemocratic’ government.¹⁶⁵

Whereas both De la Torre’s and Hawkins’s approaches link populism to a dangerous phenomenon, Marxist inspired scholars have criticized the implicit assumptions embedded in their definitions. For them, De la Torre and Hawkins assumes implicitly liberal democracy and the market as the political standard to organize society. According to Motta, for example, Hawkins’s (early) interpretation of Chavismo reflects the dominant view among scholars to conceptualize Chavismo as a form of illiberal populism. Motta, by contrast, sees the Chavismo as the answer to the undemocratic nature of Venezuelan politics and its failed model of economic development. Therefore, he rejects the concept of ‘populism’ and claims instead that Chavismo aims at creating a ‘popular democracy’ beyond the liberal state and the market economy.¹⁶⁶ The term ‘popular’ denotes the social support base as well as the participatory political practices of Chavismo. Motta uses the term ‘popular’ to avoid the negative connotation of the term ‘populism’.

¹⁶³ De la Torre, C. (1997), ‘Populism and Democracy: Political Discourses and Cultures in Contemporary Ecuador’, *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 24, nr. 3, p. 14.

¹⁶⁴ Hawkins, K. (2003), ‘Populism in Venezuela: The Rise of Chavismo’, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 24, nr. 6, p. 1145.

¹⁶⁵ Hawkins, K.A. (2010), *Venezuela’s Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, p. 27.

¹⁶⁶ Motta, S.C. (2011), ‘Populism’s Achilles Heel: Popular Democracy beyond the Liberal State and the Market Economy in Venezuela’, *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 38, nr. 1, p. 29.

8. Conclusion

The conceptual history of 'populism' illustrates that the concept of 'populism' is widely used and acquires different meanings in different contexts. Disagreement about the criteria of application (sense), its range of reference and its attitudinal expressiveness indicate a shift in meanings of the concept 'populism'. The term was originally invented in the United States by the self-styled Populist Party which reclaimed power of 'the people' from the Democrats and Republican who did not represent the interests of 'the people'. The concept of 'populism' is thus rooted an asymmetric counter-concept, namely 'the (good) people' versus 'the (bad) elite'. The logic between good and bad is inverted by opponents of the Populist Party, which identify 'the populists' with 'false democrats'.

This negative connotation of populism is adopted by Shils and Lipset in the 1950s and 1960s, during an era in which popular support of totalitarian movements and popular approval of McCarthy's policy generate new elitist fear for 'the people', i.e. the irrational, prejudiced masses. Against this background, populism is perceived as a threat for liberal democracy. 'Populism' becomes a positive term again in the 1970s when it is identified with a democratic expression of political life. Self-styled populists like Carter claim to restore control of all aspects of government to 'the people'. Here, 'the people' does not mean the mob, but 'the ordinary people' that goes beyond the partisan division between Democrats and Republicans.

Moreover, academics have translated the term *narodnichestvo* with populism. Here, populism has two different meanings: either it refers to a specific stage in the development of the self-styled *narodniki*, or it is a polemical notion used by Marxists to depict their political opponents who believed in the possibility to reach socialism while bypassing capitalism. The self-styled *narodniki* mobilized the asymmetric counter-concept of 'the people' versus 'the elite'. For the *narodniki*, wisdom resides in the peasants ('the people') and not in the Tsarist regime and the gentry ('the elite').

This asymmetric counter-concept acquires a different meaning when academics conceptualize populism in the underdeveloped or developing countries in the 1960s and 1970s. Populism is then often associated with a sociology of modernization. These sociological analyses understand populism as a 'popular' mobilization linked to a transition to modern mass democracy. The 'popular' mobilizations are intended to bring changes on behalf of 'the marginalized people' who are neglected by political elites. For some scholars, populism

represents a true democratic impulse, whereas it is seen as a destabilizing phenomenon by others. Moreover, Marxist-inspired thinkers understand the asymmetric counter-concept in Marxist terms, identifying an antagonism between ‘the people’ and ‘the dominant ideology’.

In the context of Latin America, the association of populism with specific social and economic factors is abandoned in the 1980s, because the term ‘populism’ is used then in different socioeconomic contexts. As a consequence, scholars conceptualize populism by describing political characteristics. Populism is put under the genus of discourse, political style or political strategy and defined in relation to the concept of ‘politics’ or to different ideals of democracy. Laclau’s discourse theory concludes that all politics is ‘populist’ to some extent. Other scholars define populism as a political style or strategy and interpret populism as a negative phenomenon of liberal democracy. This argument is criticized by Marxist-inspired thinkers who do not view liberal democracy as the political ideal. From their perspective, populism is regarded as a healthy phenomenon that rejects the undemocratic nature of existing politics.

The term ‘populism’ is frequently used in reference to European political phenomena since the mid-1980s, during an era in which liberal democracy is established as the hegemonic regime. The term ‘populism’ was first mobilized as a polemical notion against Thatcher for her political style. More frequently, the term is used against right-wing politicians because of their articulated opposition between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’. In the next decade, shifts in meaning occur when the term ‘populism’ is also applied to politicians who charge their goals with ‘demagogic’ practices and politicians from vested political parties, who articulate a discourse that emphasizes ‘the people’ as a single body of common interests.

Scholars who are interested in these phenomena define the term ‘populism’ less frequently as a political style, strategy or discourse than scholars of Latin American populism. Many scholars define populism as a (thin) political ideology. In contrast to Latin America, ‘populism’ is almost always defined in relation to liberal democracy, seen either as a political regime or a political ideal. From this dominant assumption, populism is regarded as a change or a danger of, or a challenge to liberal democracy. Shifts in the meaning of the concept of ‘populism’ do, therefore, not only stem from the semantic variability of the concept, but also from political struggles to define the word. Hence, a conceptual conflict about ‘populism’

could express a political conflict about preferred political practice, since politics is linguistically constituted.

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