

INTRODUCTION

Unravelling populist discourse

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Populism, a difficult concept to define

To understand the communicative and discursive nature of populism, it is necessary to take into account the many perspectives from which it has been examined so far. Almost half a century ago, Ionescu and Gellner (1969, p. 3) addressed many of the questions that nowadays still remain largely unanswered. They wondered whether populism was a recurrent frame of mind, an anti-phenomenon, or a subcategory of nationalism, socialism or peasantry.

Political scientists themselves struggle to provide an accurate definition of a term characterised by its ambiguity. According to Laclau (2005, p. 11), this has no referential unity because it is attributed to a social logic whose effects can be perceived in a great variety of examples; in his view, “populism is simply a way of building the political”.

Certainly, the recent unprecedented increase in populist phenomena on a global scale has compounded its definition and classification even more. In this regard, Taggart (2000, p. 1) reports on the highly slippery nature of this word because of the many different contexts where it has been used over time; for instance, Canovan (1981) includes under the same umbrella term American populism, Russian Narodniki, European agrarian movements and Argentina’s Peronism. Put more simply, Deiwi (2009, p. 1) concludes that it is a contested and problematic concept that, in everyday political struggle, is used to offend adversaries and, in the field of science, turns out to be an annoying formula.

Notwithstanding the usual difficulty, or reluctance, to give a precise meaning to populism, Gidron and Bonikowski (2013) make a key contribution to the field by identifying three angles from which to better define its boundaries: the first one regards populism as a strategy; the second one, as an ideology; and the third one qualifies it as a discursive style. These three research strands highlight three

of its basic components. We agree that, if taken separately, they provide solutions to a very complex issue only from a single dimension, leaving aside the other dimensions that may happen to be caused by the selected dimension (Anselmi, 2017, p. 56).

Populism is a strategy

In his description of Latin American politics, Weyland (2011, p. 14) uses the label “political strategy” to capture the essence of populism. In his words, this “emerges when a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalised support from large numbers of mostly unorganised followers”.

From this perspective, it is the socio-structural side of populism that has analytical priority (i.e. social and economic crises, social mobilisation, changes in society, and the geopolitical framework), laying emphasis on the disadvantaged classes’ reaction when claiming their own rights. In this case, polarisation becomes the driving force behind a call to gain greater sovereignty (Jansen, 2011).

Populism is an ideology

Mudde’s (2004) paper on the functioning of current European right-wing parties identifies populism with an ideology deeply rooted in the social and political opposition between the elite (with all its negative implications) and the people (endowed with an array of positive features). This standpoint echoes Van Dijk’s (2003, pp. 27–28) analysis highlighting the polarisation characteristic of populist dynamics (i.e. in-group vs. out-group mentality).

Drawing on this position, most subsequent research considers populism to be a “thin-centred” ideology (Abts and Rummens, 2007; Stanley, 2008; Rovira and Kaltwasser, 2012). According to Aslanidis (2015), though, the weakness of this paradigm lies in the vagueness of the definition of such a category and in the difficulties of its methodological application, precisely because a subtle ideology can be combined with other ideological elements. Certainly, this approach has contributed significantly to the growth of populism studies. Nevertheless, there are many reasons why it is perhaps more appropriate to describe populism as a discourse practice.

Populism is a discursive style

Compared to Mudde’s (2004) conclusion as to the markedly bipolar nature of populism, Kazin’s (1998) analysis of American populism stresses that this is not an ideology but a language, as it has a lot more in common with how contents are expressed than with the contents themselves. However, this is not the only author who argues that populism is a discursive style or communicative reality. The majority of studies supporting this perspective are inspired by Laclau (2005),

who examines social phenomena from the linguistic and mass psychology dimensions. As such, populism is a rhetorical system used to revert the people's subjection to the oligarchy, whichever this may be; thus, the identity of anti-system people-structures is construed communicatively. In line with this theory, populism is reported to simplify the political space by separating the "People" from the "Others" (Barros, 2005; Panizza, 2005; Groppo, 2009). The Essex School, on the other hand, is devoted to the rhetorical analysis of the expressive structures of populism, producing either more content-oriented (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Hawkins, 2010) or quantitative-oriented research (Armony and Armony, 2005; Reungoat, 2010; Pauwels, 2011). Moffitt and Tormey (2014), among others, start from the communicative dimension to encompass the concrete actions of political actors and their forms of organisation.

From the above, we can deduce that communication does play a very significant role in the rise of populism. This is the main idea around which the edited volume by Aalberg *et al.* (2017) revolves. Following Canovan (1999), populist political communication is said to comprise the following: (1) the use of very simple, democratic language; (2) the constant reference to the people; (3) the adjustment to the media logics; (4) the identification of a shared enemy; and (5) a charismatic, redemptive figure embodying provocation and antagonism. Furthermore, the most frequent topics reported in populist discourse are terrorism, immigration or the loss of benefits due to the economic crisis. As a rule, the negativity underlying this type of language helps to reinforce the construction of an "us" versus "them" world (Mudde, 2007; Aalberg *et al.*, 2017). As far as right-wing parties are concerned, this means the otherisation of various minorities regarded as dangerous for the majority; left-wing parties, on the other hand, construe the State and the powerful (i.e. the so-called "Establishment") as the caste that needs to be fought against. Nevertheless, the gradual though substantial shift of political communication, including the spectacularisation of politics and political personalisation, makes us wonder whether there is any difference between a *populist* discursive style and a *popular* discursive style. In actual fact, most parties nowadays function and communicate along increasingly similar lines. That is why it perhaps may make little sense to use this category if all politicians can be defined in this way.

Populism as a global phenomenon

Recursively in history, bare emotions such as social anger and malaise, moral satiety, distrust of the elite and the Establishment, fear and hatred of difference, disgust at corruption, despair at joblessness and homelessness, as well as a willingness to revolt and an urgent need for border control, to name but a few, have all, to varying degrees, materialised in the creation of a rather emotionally charged discourse (De la Torre, 1997; Van Leeuwen, 2009; Garlinska, 2017). Underpinning this very discourse is people's political disaffection (Betz, 1994) as a result of the allegedly poor performance of political experts (Moghalu, 2017).

Scholarly research as well as the (wo)man in the street alike use the same label to name this contemporary sociological hurricane, which to some seems to be the “curse of our age” (Karina Robinson in an interview by Ellen Conberg in 2016). But populism is nothing new (Kazin, 1995; Norris, 2016); it is neither a wave nor a fashion trend ready for consumption that will never come back again. As it happens, it was, has been, is and will be around whenever the above-mentioned circumstances are met (Canovan, 1999; Moffitt, 2016). A cursory diachronic glance at the twentieth century proves the truth and validity of this statement.

As Dalio *et al.* (2017) argue, quite before and shortly after the 1930s, it is possible to observe populism, or populist policies and populist leaders, in many countries around the globe. Here we will mention some of the most prominent ones. It is the case of US president Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was elected by the dispossessed in the hope of changing the old ways of doing politics. Louisiana governor Huey Long tried to end inequality and the power of big companies until his mandate came to an end in 1935. In his popular radio show, Father Charles Coughlin made extremely radical speeches that showed he was a classical anti-capitalist whose concern for the poor came to fuel his sympathies for fascist leaders in Europe. Another example is Oswald Mosley, a British MP who supported jobs programmes with the purpose of lowering unemployment rates; his early radicalisation encouraged his foundation of the British Union of Fascists. Likewise, the dictatorships of Mussolini, Hitler and Franco could be read in rather the same populist light.

Although it is true that populism is not comparable to fascism (Finchelstein, 2017), the birth of fascism can be explained on similar grounds to the ones that justify the rise of populism, that is, (1) a severe financial crisis widening the gap between social classes; (2) a generalised atmosphere of frustration and panic among the weakest sections of society; and (3) the lack of a strong government capable of handling domestic unrest and economic chaos. Moreover, the success of these regimes can be attributed to some of the key features that characterise populism as well, namely, (1) the priority of the people, or “majoritarianism” (Aydın-Düzgüt and Fuat Keyman, 2017, p. 3); (2) the priority of social justice; and (3) the priority of the own over the alien. After WWII, other remarkably outstanding populist figures were Argentina’s President Juan Domingo Perón, French politician Pierre Poujade, New Zealand’s Prime Minister Robert Muldoon or Venezuela’s President Hugo Chávez.

From 2010 onwards, through the press, TV and social media, we have grown accustomed to hearing and reading almost on a daily basis about the decisions and actions taken by Marine Le Pen in France, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Viktor Orban in Hungary, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Sarah Palin or Donald Trump in the US, Nigel Farage in the UK, Narendra Modi in India, Prabowo Subianto in Indonesia, Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Néstor and Cristina Kirchner in Argentina, Beppe Grillo in Italy, Pablo Iglesias in Spain, Alexis Tsipras in Greece or Rodrigo

Duterte in the Philippines (Gherghina, Mişcoiu and Soare, 2013; Schulz, 2016). All of these leaders are also well known for their populist agenda and flaming rhetoric (McCoy, 2017). The latter is one of the aspects this edited volume will pay particular attention to.

Types of populism

In the last decade or so, lengthy and heated discussions and debates on the term itself, or its derivatives, and the perils and dangers of the (“thin”) ideology behind it (Mudde, 2004, p. 544; Hartleb, 2013, p. 1) have been rife all over the world. Despite its expansion globally (Aydin-Düzgüt and Keyman, 2017), populism is not a homogeneous entity (Aytaç and Öniş, 2014), and the roots and strategies of each of its actualisations are not the same either. Although this old-new phenomenon is partially, or poorly, understood (Taggart, 2000), there is an overall tendency for oversimplification in various fields, especially the mass media and the big, old parties; these reinforce a Manichaeian view of populism and its leaders, perhaps out of dread of its potential for disruption of the well-established social order.

In De la Torre (1997), the reader is provided with an excellent description of the breeding ground for populism during periods of economic turmoil. Over the last decades, democratic institutions seem to have weakened; as a consequence, mediated representation has undergone a harsh crisis (Decker, 2003). In this context, the people are discursively construed as a “collective actor” (Laclau, 2005, p. 202), and the (self-)proclaimed leader, quite often an outsider, maintains that they are its genuine mouthpiece. In so doing, they tend to promote outright confrontation with one antagonist, the public enemy number one, whose lack of purity contrasts sharply with the purity of the community (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). The latter often results in a generally uncontested feeling of moral superiority among citizens (Lee, 2006; Müller, 2016a) and their blind adherence to the sense of being always right. To this list, it is necessary to add some other basic ingredients: the reliance on new media technologies (Moffitt, 2016); the expansion of anti-globalisation (Ranieri, 2016) and direct democracy (Puhle, 1987; Haskell, 2001); and, finally, a style of politics based on simplicity, demagogic persuasion (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014) and restricting public debate over issues concerned with liberal democracy (Müller, 2016b).

To better understand what populism is, we will use a very vivid metaphor, the so-called “Cinderella complex” to which Allcock (1971, p. 385) refers in an influential paper of unquestionable validity. According to this author:

[t]here exists a shoe – the word ‘populism’ – for which somewhere exists a foot. There are all kinds of feet which it nearly fits, but we must not be trapped by these nearly fitting feet. The prince is always wandering about with the shoe; and somewhere ... there awaits a limb called pure populism.

Although we are not shoe-makers, we will try to spot which foot is which, and which size and brand are the most appropriate ones for each. The most frequent divide is that between left-wing populism and right-wing populism (Mudde, 2007), or radical populism and populist authoritarianism (Norris, 2016). Jagers and Walgrave (2007) prefer speaking, instead, about complete populism, excluding populism, anti-elitist populism and empty populism. Canovan (1981) reports that there are also agrarian and political populisms. A fourth classification is that of Puhle (1987), who states that First World populism is distinctively different from Third World populism. On the whole, all these subcategories share something in common; they are all variously conceived of, once and at the same time, as a spectre (Albertazzi and McConnell, 2007), a challenge (Akkerman, 2003), a threat to global consensus (Gilly, 2005; Decker, 2003; Lawson, 2017), and a collection of naive solutions (Crick, 2005; Schulz, 2016), which, as Ferguson (2016, p. 20) puts it, are “jam today”. Despite the similarities highlighted above, these variants of populism clearly differ in many other respects, as shown in the remainder of this section. Next, we concentrate on those most commonly discussed in the literature, alongside the characteristics that set them poles apart.

Left-wing populism is defined in terms of wealth distribution and anti-capitalism (Puhle, 1987, p. 93), and hence, relies on straightforward opposition to the interests of banks and big corporations (Dalio *et al.* 2017, p. 11). It may start from above (Puhle, 1987, p. 96), especially in former colonised countries, or through participatory democracy (Hartleb, 2013), as best illustrated by the Spanish 15-M, an anti-austerity citizen protest movement that gathered thousands of *indignados* (i.e. outraged) in many cities from May to December 2011. One of the key strategies employed by adherents to this kind of populism is to exploit and heighten people’s concern with social asymmetry, climate change or scarcity of natural resources (Aydın-Düzgüt and Fuat Keyman, 2017, p. 4), with the intention of promoting a more altruistic view of all social and economic issues. It is more typical in Latin America, Africa and Asia, where they aim to empower marginal sections of society (De la Torre, 2005).

In contrast, right-wing populism features more frequently in the so-called West (De la Torre, 2005), and is often associated with post-truth politics (Speed and Mannion, 2017), which, curiously, results from personal beliefs and the appearance of truth taking priority over objective data in the information and social-media era. This type of populism usually favours isolationism, or “nativism” (Aydın-Düzgüt and Fuat Keyman, 2017, p. 3), and, as a side effect, all prejudices possible such as elitism, racism and xenophobia (Dalio *et al.* 2017, p. 14). Additionally, it is grassroots- and common-person-based (Puhle 1987, p. 90), and seems to support, or be supported by, anti-intellectualism (Hartleb, 2013). In order to defend the hegemonic status quo, right-wing populists tend to draw upon people’s fear of the loss of traditional values, and of an increase in migration flows and unemployment rates (Aydın-Düzgüt and Fuat Keyman, 2017, p. 4).

The aims and contents of this edited volume

Populism is much more than discourse, but it is mainly through discourse that it is enacted. Such an important sociological phenomenon can be articulated through various modes and channels like the deceptively simple election campaign speeches and adverts voters have become used to. Simultaneously, the media can take various sides in their portrayal of anti-Establishment politics, assessing its pros and cons with a view to influencing a broad section of the population, steering it towards one position or another. As it stands, populism has become an unstoppable wave informing policy-making in towns, cities and countries. Accordingly, politicians have come to phagocytise the language of the man and the woman in the street, whilst people echo and reproduce populist themes, slogans and rhetoric, and the press successfully shape public opinion.

The chapters collected here are an example of scholarly research reflecting a comprehensive understanding of key aspects intimately connected with the focus of this book. Some analyse the portrayal of populism in the press as a reaction to the financial crisis hitting especially the West; others are about the many ways of making populism mainstream. These contributions pay special attention to how populist leaders, in their self-imposed capacity as guardians of the truth, resort to different communication strategies to spread their own agendas. In their rallies, during TV interviews and on Twitter, right-wing populists indoctrinate their aggrieved fellow countrymen and countrywomen into anti-welfarism, anti-immigration and racial intolerance. Conversely, left-wing populists endorse egalitarianism, wealth redistribution and social justice. Interestingly, both represent two divergent modalities of anti-systemism and protectionism. This book is a multidisciplinary effort aimed to address all these issues rigorously.

As mentioned above, the complex and multifarious nature of populism makes it a notoriously slippery phenomenon to examine and define. To achieve a clearer understanding of its underpinnings, we need to delve deeper into instances of allegedly populist language and discourse in a wide range of contexts. In so doing, more evidence will become available to help us to disentangle populist from non-populist discourse, which, in turn, would enable us to better distinguish between those discursive features that are specific to populist styles and those that were perhaps originally populist but are now beginning to seep through all kinds of political communication. Our aim with this edited volume is to offer a thorough and wide-ranging analysis of so-called populist communication styles worldwide from three naturally interconnected, broad methodological approaches to the study of discourse: (1) content and framing analysis (e.g. Entman, 2003); (2) corpus-assisted discourse analysis (e.g. Baker and Levon, 2015); and (3) rhetoric, and metaphor and critical discourse analysis (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Fairclough, 1995). These three sections comprise 17 contributions in total, spanning the political contexts of Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, the US, Venezuela and Bolivia.

The first section consists of five chapters whose common thread is the main tenets of communication theory and two well-known political science methods (content and framing analysis). Arroyas Langa and Fernández Ilundain test their hypothesis as to the relation of populist discourse to the politics of authenticity, through the analysis of the persuasive strategies the spokeswoman of Podemos resorted to during the parliamentary no-confidence motion against the then Spanish Prime Minister in June 2017. De Blasio and Sorice turn to the rise of technopopulist parties in Italy to analyse how the growing use of technology and digital democracy have led to a discourse reflecting the development of depoliticisation processes. As is evident, the press does not remain immune to the anti-politics approach advocated by neo-populist parties; this is demonstrated by Ibáñez Rosales, who analyses how Podemos drummed up support and successfully rose to public attention through its leaders' politician/journalist communication strategies and their mediated representation in the Spanish mainstream print media. Do Espírito Santo and Figueiras also draw on the influence of the media, but instead of focusing on how populist leaders' messages and language inescapably affect the media's take on political events, they address this issue from the standpoint of neo-populist leaders who frame their messages to fit as much as possible with media logics. They observe the Portuguese neo-populist presidential candidates' self-presentation strategies in their electoral programmes and how they are portrayed by television media coverage of the election campaign. Moving from a focus on self- and mediated representation in campaign programmes, TV and press coverage, in the last chapter in this section, García-Marín and Luengo delve into microblogging and examine a corpus of the tweets posted in 2017 by Spanish, Venezuelan and Bolivian populist politicians and parties in order to categorise the frames present in each case to describe otherisation.

The second section includes six chapters where quantitative and semi-automated analyses of corpus data prevail. Corpus-assisted discourse analysis thus lies at the core of this section. Ruiz-Sánchez and Alcántara-Plá examine how the "us vs. them" polarisation is construed in a corpus of tweets produced by Spain's main parties and candidates during the 2015 and 2016 General Elections. Breeze draws on automated semantic tagging, keyword analysis and subsequent qualitative coding to explore the differences between populist and non-populist political styles through a corpus of articles produced by the press offices of the Labour and UKIP parties in the UK in the early months of 2017. Bartley, by contrast, focuses on the potential populist features of Labour's discourse by studying key sections from the 2017 Labour manifesto through manual tagging of all the verbs used therein on the basis of a modified version of Halliday's TRANSITIVITY system. Finally, Pérez-Paredes, Nisco and Russo, although still within the realm of populist discourse, move the emphasis away from political communication as produced by specific parties. Whereas Pérez-Paredes deals with the representation of Austria's Freedom Party by the British right-wing press, Nisco and Russo discuss two topics that often form part of the populist

agenda: disability and climate change. More precisely, using keyword analysis, word sketches and collocational analysis, Pérez-Paredes is able to show that these newspapers' use of Austrian politics aimed to legitimise a populist vertical discourse against the elites, personified by the EU, foreigners and immigrants. Nisco focuses on tabloid newspapers to explore the consistently negative light in which disability was portrayed in the British press in 2016–17, which reflects populist views ingrained in certain sections of society. Russo, in turn, uses corpus analysis to look at the fear-driven discourse of climate change, as evidenced in a longitudinal corpus of Anglophone online news reports and opinion editorials from 1996 to 2017.

The six contributions in the third section draw on methods and theories inspired by rhetoric, and metaphor and critical discourse analysis. Whilst quantitative findings are provided in some of them, the analytical approach followed is, in general, more qualitative than in the chapters from the previous section. Two of them are largely centred on the Spanish context; the remaining contributions in this section revolve around Greece, the UK, the US and Germany. Keating and Soria identify and categorise the metaphorical utterances whereby Nigel Farage (UKIP) and Pablo Iglesias (Podemos) dichotomise reality in a series of speeches given in the European Parliament; their initial quantitative identification of the keywords in each sub-corpus (e.g. *people*, *against*) is followed by a more in-depth analysis of the novel metaphors associated with those words. Holgado-Sáez and La Rubia-Prado go back in time to Nazism to show how the aesthetic-related discursive strategies underpinning the populist discourse of National Socialism (as reflected in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and in a range of laws) contributed to legitimising the horrific violence towards, and annihilation of, millions of people. McCallum-Bayliss turns to American politics to uncover the conceptual metaphors apparent in Donald J. Trump's political speeches from late 2015 to early 2017; her analysis reveals that all the specific metaphors in the corpus are instantiations of a more general metaphor, i.e. DONALD TRUMP IS A CONQUEROR. Kaniklidou analyses a corpus from *I Avgi*, a newspaper linked to Syriza, to explore the discursive construction of austerity by Greek left-wing populism through frames and metaphor analysis. Sánchez García concentrates on the two leaders of Podemos, but in a context where the polarisation between both (radical communism vs. moderate socialism) was most evident, i.e. during the heated campaign for the party's presidency back in March 2017; the author's analysis of the rhetorical resources, argumentative fallacies and non-verbal language in their speeches and statements reveals marked differences between their communicative styles. The last contribution in this section, by Forceville and van de Laar, differs from the others in its reliance on visual and multimodal metaphors, and in the change of emphasis from the metaphors revealed in populist leaders' discourses to people's metaphorical conceptualisation of those leaders; in this chapter, the authors try to uncover the metaphorical patterns that most typically occur in political cartoons involving the extreme right-wing Dutch politician Geert Wilders.

We are confident this volume will be of interest to students and researchers in linguistics, discourse analysis, politics and communication studies, as it provides a detailed account of what might be (or not) populist discourse in specific contexts (rather than in broad general terms) thanks to the fruitful and valuable combination of methodologies and theoretical frameworks.

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