Populism and Global Cooperation

Keywords: ideology, people, elite, nationalism, radicalism, identity, race, purity, integration, homogeneity, home, homeland, freedom of expression

Populism

Populism can be interpreted as a political discourse, as an ideology or as a style. Most definitions converge on emphasizing the common feature, that all populist movements, parties and leaders construct a difference between a ‘people’ and a (‘corrupt’, ‘illegitimate’ or ‘remote’) elite.

Focusing on the ideological aspect, Cas Mudde defines populism as a ‘thin-centred ideology’, consisting of ‘a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts’, which can then be ‘easily combined with very different (thin and dull) other ideologies, including communism, ecologism, nationalism or socialism’ (Mudde 2004: 544, for references see last page).

Discourse theory allows for a similar understanding of populism but shifts the emphasis to the antagonistic relation between ‘the people’ and the ‘elite’. Following Mouffe/Laclau, De Cleen focuses on the strategies that populists use to mobilise people and simultaneously reinforce dissatisfaction with ‘the elite’ (De Cleen 2017).

A third approach to populism focuses on its nature as a political style. Thus Benjamin Moffitt conceptualizes populism as a performative political style opposed to technocratic politics, which, apart from the appeal to ‘the people’, is characterized by an effort to display ‘bad manners’ (including swearing, display of emotions etc.) and a performance of imminent crisis or breakdown (cf. Moffitt 2016: 46).

Populism and Global Cooperation

Based on this focus, which understands of populism as a phenomenon, different aspects about the relationship between populism and global cooperation, nationalism and anti-globalism can be distinguished.

According to Mudde’s concept of populism as a ‘thin-centred ideology’, the coupling with exclusionary nationalism produces one potential variety of populist ideology, which characterizes what he calls the ‘Populist Radical Right Parties’ (Mudde 2007).

In De Cleen’s discourse analytical approach, the most important feature of nationalist varieties of populism is that the down/up axis which structures populism is combined with an in/out division: the antagonism between the ‘people-as-underdog’ and the elite is constructed as one in which the people belong to the nation while the ‘elite’ is a ‘non-national’ group – either because it betrays the ‘national’ interests of the people by undermining national sovereignty or because it does not belong to the nation at all. While in left-wing populism (e.g. Podemos or Syriza) this discourse is only symbolically exclusive in so far as it excludes the elites from the nation, radical right-wing populism is characterized by the urge to exclude anyone who is regarded as ‘foreign’ not only on the symbolic, but also on the material and political level (cf. De Cleen 2017: 351 f.). According to Halikiopoulos et al., in Europe, nationalism is closely associated with euroscepticism – since nationalists see ‘European integration [... ] as a threat to the autonomy, unity and identity of the nation. The radical right expresses this from a predominantly ethnic viewpoint, while the radical left adopts a predominantly civic perspective’ (Halikiopoulos et al. 2012: 506).

When looking at the relationship between populism and global cooperation through the prism of narrative analysis, it could be asked, what it is that makes the story of ‘globalism’ and ‘anti-globalism’ appealing. Trump’s slogan of ‘Make America Great Again’ already contains the condensed version of a plot, which is closely linked with globalization: it conveys the message that certain hostile forces have made America lose its greatness and that a ‘hero’ character like Trump is needed to restore it by consequently applying another prominent motto: ‘America first’. This motto, which also appears in a number of national varieties, is diametrically opposed to one which was influential around the turn of the millennium: ‘Another World is Possible’. Instead of emphasizing the unique importance of one state, this slogan expressed the vision of changing the world as a whole without stopping the process of growing global interconnectedness.
‘Another World is Possible’

‘Another World is Possible’ is the motto of the Global Justice Movement, a heterogeneous network of social movements and movement organizations which flourished around the turn of the millennium. Despite all its controversies and heterogeneity, the protagonists of the movement converged in their opposition to what they labeled ‘neoliberal’ or ‘corporate led globalization’, and in their goals of justice, equality and democracy on a global level. Key events in the formation of the movement were the uprising of the Zapatistas, which began in Mexico in 1994 and subsequently attracted admirers from all over the world, as well as the protests against the WTO meeting in Seattle 1999 (the ‘battle of Seattle’), and – of special importance – the foundation of the World Social Forum, which first took place in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001. The motto ‘Another World is Possible’ has different roots, one of which is the phrase by French poet Paul Éluard: ‘Il y a un autre monde, mais il est dans celui-ci’ (‘There is another world, but it is inside this one’). In 1994, a similar slogan was used in the context of the protests against the G7 summit, which was held in Naples, Italy. After that, ‘Un autre monde est possible’ was the headline of an influential op-ed published in Le Monde Diplomatique by journalist and activist Ignacio Ramonet on May 1st, 1998 in the context of the Asian financial crisis. This crisis strengthened the opposition movement against neoliberalism, austerity programmes and especially the power and politics of the IMF. Against this background, Ramonet wrote that ‘more and more people, from North to South think that enough is enough. That this world which is built on an economy turned inhumane is no longer viable’ (Ramonet 1998). The article was also one of the origins of the movement organization ‘Attac’ (‘association pour une taxe des transactions financières pour l’aide aux citoyens’), which in turn was one of the protagonists behind the foundation of the World Social Forum. ‘Another World is Possible’ also became the official motto of the World Social Forum I (cf. WSF 2001, ‘Call for Mobilisation’).

We have lost everything; our young people leave to go elsewhere, we see no prospects for our future; but at least we know that we are British, and we feel pride in that. Therefore, we voted to leave the EU.

People of Middlesbrough (BBC, cf. Crouch 2019)

‘My country first’

The different national varieties of ‘my country first’ have a long and fragmented history. For example, the so-called ‘America First Committee’ campaigned against the US’s intervention in Europe during World War II. A prominent member of the committee, Charles Lindberg expressly articulated his rejection of American intervention with anti-Semitic positions (cf. Gerstle, interview in Knigge 2016). Furthermore, the usage of the slogan also has a longstanding tradition in the Ku Klux Klan (cf. Churchwell, 2018). As is well known, the slogan then became an integral part of Donald Trump’s electoral campaign. Outside the US, the analogous ‘les français d’abord’ was used as a slogan by the radical right-wing Front National (recently renamed Rassemblement National). Party Founder Jean-Marie Le Pen used it as the title of his 1984 book (Le Pen 1984). In Austria, ‘Österreich zuerst’ was the title of a referendum initiated by populist right-wing leader Jörg Haider in 1992, which mainly focused on anti-immigrant policies (cf. Al-Serori 2018). The referendum was unsuccessful, but attained considerable attention. Recently, the Italian version ‘Prima gli italiani’ was excessively used by Matteo Salvini in his campaign and in his rhetoric as Minister of the Interior, in political speeches and on social media, where he turned it into a hashtag on Twitter.

The Leave Strategem

Trump’s track record of leaving or threatening to leave international organizations and treaties:

The US have left: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (‘Iran Nuclear Deal’), Trans-Pacific Partnership, Paris Climate Accord, UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO, INF Treaty, UNRWA & UNIFA (US is still a member in these last two but funding was suspended).

Threatened to leave: WTO, NAFTA, NATO

Furthermore, the US under Trump rejected the Global Compact on Migration, withdrew support for the Joint Statement of the 2018 G-7 meeting, and is considering to massively cut contribution to UN aid programmes.
Narratives of ‘Globalism’ and ‘Anti-Globalism’

In the ongoing debate about how the democratic forces should handle the rise of populism and contain its power, one recurring idea is the creation of positive counter-narratives and images. Implicitly, this has also been suggested by Colin Crouch, who argues that ‘the social democratic left […] needs to stand on the side of globalization against the new nationalism; but […] it must also insist on reforms to shake the process it is taking’. He then suggests that ‘the multiple identities available to us in today’s world become a series of concentric circles, enriching each other and rooted in a cooperative subsidiarity – or a Russian matryoshka doll, with successive dolls of different sizes nested comfortably within each other’ (Crouch 2019: 4).

Taking the EU into perspective, German journalist Heribert Prantl emphasizes the necessity of visions and of a ‘popular image of the future’ of Europe. Prantl criticizes former EU commissioner Jacques Delors for stating that one cannot ‘fall in love with a common market’ but failing to draw the consequences – namely to develop more appealing stories about the EU’s past and positive visions about its future. This is exactly what the EU institutions try to do, for example with the ‘New Narrative’ project launched by the EU Commission in 2013/2014 in an attempt to enhance the legitimacy of European integration and EU institutions. However, this top-down and rather uncritical approach has been criticized as problematic by citizens, and its overall impact has remained very limited (cf. Kaiser 2017).

Against the background of the limited success and potentially paternalistic nature of such attempts, it has been suggested to abandon them altogether. For example, Nikolaus Jilch points out that Europe wasn’t built on feelings but on rationality and should therefore not rely on emotions but rather focus on reason.

Another common criticism of the use of narratives is – as professor of storytelling and scriptwriter Jørn Precht points out – that narratives are directly related to a simplification of reality. Already in 2009, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie gave a speech discussing the ‘danger of the single story’. While Adichie did not criticize the use of storytelling altogether, she did show that it is vital to realize that there is never a single story: ‘the single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.’ This is in line with Wolfram Kaiser’s comment that ‘EU institutions and actors should perhaps consider whether Europe’s ability to tolerate the pluralism of narratives as a mark of any developed modern democratic polity could not actually help sustain the EU’s legitimacy in times of crisis’ instead of trying to draft a ‘new all-encompassing narrative’ (Kaiser 2017).

Narratives and Politics

At the centre of narrative analysis there are metaphors, roles and plots. Apart from narrative analysis, active construction of narratives by activists, institutions and politicians is on the rise.

The advantage of narrative modes of sense making lies in their capacity to render complex societal problems plausible, to mobilize emotional ties, to appeal to collective identity and to develop an engaging language.

From: Gadinger, Jarzebski, Yildiz (2015: 15)

Opposition to Globalization and European Integration

Aufstehen: A European Germany in a united Europe of sovereign democracies. The European Union should be a space that protects and facilitates creation, not a catalyst of radical market globalization and the hollowing out of democracy. European policy needs democratic legitimacy.

AFD: The aim of German foreign politics should be the preservation of a sovereign Germany that guarantees the liberty, rights and security of its citizens. We stand for a Europe of fatherlands and categorically reject centralist efforts of the EU.

UKIP: Britain’s foreign policy should be strictly framed from the viewpoint of what is in the UK’s national interest. We should not allow ourselves to be swept into war on someone else’s coat tails.

FPÖ: We are committed to a Europe of historically grown people and autochthonous communities and strongly reject an artificial cooptation of the diverse European languages and cultures through enforced multiculturalism, globalization and mass migration.

Donald Trump: America is governed by Americans. We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism.
# Populist Election Success Worldwide

A selection of populist candidates’ and parties’ results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Candidate / party</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presidential elections</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Bolsonaro (Brazil)</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>BBC, 29-10-2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Trump (USA) (306 electors)</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>BBC / AP</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Le Pen (France)</td>
<td>33.94%</td>
<td>NYTimes, 7-5-2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Duterte (Philippines)</td>
<td>39.01%</td>
<td>BBC, 10-5-2016</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National parliamentary elections</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Lega Nord (Italy)</td>
<td>17.69%</td>
<td>Guardian, 5-3-2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>AfD (Germany)</td>
<td>12.6 %</td>
<td>official result 12-10-2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>FPÖ (Austria)</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>Spiegel, 15-10-2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>PiS (Poland)</td>
<td>37,58%</td>
<td>Statista, 25-10-2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Perussuomalaiset (Finland)</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>CNN, 15-4-2019</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>Podemos (Spain)</td>
<td>14.31%</td>
<td>Guardian, 28-4-2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Syriza (Greece)</td>
<td>35,46 %</td>
<td>Ypes, 17-12-2015</td>
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<td><strong>European parliamentary elections</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>UKIP (UK)</td>
<td>26,77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Dansk Folkeparti (Denmark)</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>Fidesz (Hungary)</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>Syriza (Greece)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Ano 2011 (Czech Republic)</td>
<td>16,13%</td>
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References


