



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Introduction: the study of populism

Jansen, H.; Klink, B. van; Geest, I. van der

Citation

Jansen, H., Klink, B. van, & Geest, I. van der. (2020). Introduction: the study of populism. In *Vox Populi. Populism as a Rhetorical and Democratic Challenge* (pp. 2-16). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing. doi:10.4337/9781789901412.00006

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3238748>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

1. Introduction: the study of populism

Henrike Jansen, Bart van Klink and Ingeborg van der Geest

1. VOX POPULI

Vox populi, vox dei. This is how Stanley Johnson, the father of UK prime minister Boris Johnson in 2019, characterized the outcome of the British referendum about leaving the European Union: the voice of the people is the voice of God (Garschagen, 2019; see also Johnson, 2019). However, the (Dutch) newspaper that published the interview with Stanley dryly remarked that the outcome of the referendum was not so much the result of a divine intervention but had rather been caused by increasing Euroskepticism, and that this skepticism had partly been fed by the cynical and often made-up news reports of a certain journalist in Brussels in the early 1990s, called Boris Johnson. Moreover, it has often been claimed that the Brexit vote was the result of populist politics (Buruma, 2019), for instance by the ardent campaigns of Nigel Farage and his UKIP party, and – again – by Boris Johnson, today a popular politician and former mayor of London, who had, after some initial hesitations, chosen to publicly endorse a British departure from the EU.

Populist politics has proven to be successful, sometimes because of election results, at other times because populist ideas are adopted by mainstream politicians. Populism is not a recent phenomenon, as populist movements, right-wing as well as left-wing, have always been present in history. Nevertheless, it has disseminated itself rapidly in the political sphere in the last decades, while especially right-wing populism has gained increasing prominence in the Western world since the end of the twentieth century (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, p. 1; Mudde, 2018). Over the last years, populist movements have managed to mobilize an even more significant number of voters in most European countries than before. Currently, there are populists in power worldwide in every continent. Whereas expected victories of populist candidates in the Swiss and Slovakian 2019 presidential elections did not happen, in many other countries populist leaders now hold the presidency. Populist politicians have thus obtained an important voice in the political field, whether

or not by being in power themselves or by their influence on the positions and discourse of mainstream political parties.

2. THE PHENOMENON OF POPULISM

As the term populism is based on the Latin word *populus* ('the people'), populist politicians claim to be the *vox populi* – the people's voice (a.o. Pauwels, 2014, p. 21; Müller, 2016, p. 62). The populist is generally (but not always: Stanyer, Salgado and Strömbäck, 2017, p. 361) a charismatic leader, acting and speaking on behalf of the people, and nowadays often communicating with his followers by clever use of social media. He or she may also present himself as a political outsider, for example by ostentatiously not sticking to generally accepted social (language) behavior. Central to the populist's discourse is the cultivation of a Manichean distinction between, on the one hand, the 'homogeneous and virtuous people', and, on the other hand, an 'elite' and, in the case of exclusionary populism, 'dangerous others' (for instance, Muslims or immigrants), who deprive the people of their 'rights, values, prosperity, identity, rights and voice' (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, p. 3). The populist's central focus on 'the people's' interests and his or her aversion to 'the elite' and other out-groups bring along calls for more democracy. Invoking the notion of popular sovereignty, populism seeks to replace or supplement representative, parliamentary democracy by direct forms of democracy that allegedly present the will of 'the people' in an undistorted and unmediated way. These calls often arise 'in times of perceived or real crises' (Pauwels, 2014, p. 17).

Securing the interests of 'the people' (i.e. the population) is a natural activity of all politicians. However, the populist reference to the people is different, not only because it is much more frequent, but also because it presupposes an idea of a unified group with similar interests, wants and wishes. Indeed, this presupposition rests on a fiction, since even groups that are united on one issue may very well differ on another. Although claims of 'true', 'ordinary' or 'legitimate' citizens may suggest an entity in the real world, that is, an ethno-nationalist group, there is really no clear referent. What populist politicians basically seem to have in mind is a morally defined category covering those who support the populist's views and ideas (cf. Wodak, 2017, p. 555). This makes the people a successful rhetorical frame, which 'allows populists to reinforce their democratic credentials' (Taggart, 2000, p. 98). While attacking representative 'old' party politics as a form of cartelization preserved by career hunters, they call for referenda as the real means of democracy and describe any neglect of supposed majority opinion as undemocratic. Indeed, populism may generate a higher degree of political participation (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 104), but Müller (2016, p. 31) observes that claims of

representing ‘the people’s will’ eliminate the need of political accountability and bypass debate.

The notion of ‘the elite’ is as vague as ‘the people’. Populists practice a large amount of flexibility with regard to the demarcation of those belonging to this category. So-called elites are genuine or imagined groups having views that do not accord with the populist’s views and are therefore supposed to undermine the people’s welfare. It is for this reason that once a populist political party is in power, it is perfectly able to proceed with its discourse about people versus elites. Although a populist government, like any government, would rather be regarded as an elite itself, it can easily identify other elites to be held responsible for everything that goes wrong during their governance (a.o. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 14 ff.). It could say that the former government elite sabotages the goals of the new populist government through their control of key institutions like the media and judicial authorities. Or it could say that foreign governments or wealthy Jews are trying to interfere in national affairs with the aim of destabilizing the populist government. It can also blame an economic elite for trying to secure its own interests, blame academics for indoctrination, blame journalists for spreading fake news and blame international collaboration for taking away a country’s sovereignty. ‘Elite’ rhetoric is thus crucially connected with conspiracy theories (Müller, 2016, p. 32) and aims to legitimize the implementation of personnel changes of crucial positions in the media, the educational system and the judiciary.

The populist’s call for more democracy is sometimes regarded as a challenge to liberal democracy. Exploiting the ancient Greek democratic ideal according to which any citizen should have his share in deliberation and subsequent decision-making about how to shape society, ‘the people’s’ will is presented as an embodiment of the general will (i.e. Rousseau’s *la volonté générale*; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, pp. 16–17; Weale, 2018, p. 24 ff.). However, Rousseau’s concept of the *volonté générale* presupposes real participation in debate, whereas populists seem to know beforehand what this will is (Müller, 2016, p. 32). Moreover, populists have no patience for the complex bureaucratic operations of the modern state and prefer instead ‘straightforward and “common sense” solutions to society’s complex problems’ (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, pp. 1–2). Populists are willing to suspend fundamental rights when the people’s security, prosperity or identity are at stake. In contrast to the ‘Establishment’s politics of pragmatism’ it offers a ‘politics of redemption’ (ibid., p. 2), which promises to regain – after some sacrifices – an imagined paradise lost – the ‘heartland’ (Taggart, 2000, p. 95) – where the people are one and living happily and peacefully together.

Another reason why populism may endanger liberal democracy concerns the populist rejection of plurality. It is not, however, merely the populist complaint about the multicultural society and its aim of securing borders and

reducing immigration that may jeopardize pluralism, because – as Müller notes (2016, p. 81) – a pluralist society is not a value in itself and there is no natural connection between pluralism and freedom. Instead, the danger lies in the denial of equal dignity and equal rights for all citizens, that is, also for those who are not covered by ‘the people’. As soon as the rejection of pluralism entails the negation of minority groups being entitled to their preferred way of life, even if this negation has only been expressed in an informal way, populism becomes a threat to the basic principles of liberal democracy. An even more threatening situation is reached when doubt is cast on the impartiality of independent institutions meant to ensure minority rights, for example when these institutions are called undemocratic and occupied with members of the so-called elite (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 82). Identity politics is not necessarily bad, but it becomes problematic if one identity is suggested to be more legitimate than another.

It is important to note that the characteristics of populism vary from one country to another and can even vary within one country. Some populist politicians identify with the man in the street, others present themselves as intellectuals. Some play with anti-Semitism, others openly stand up for Jews. Many are charismatic leaders, but not all of them are. Moreover, so-called populist characteristics are not the sole preserve of populist politicians. The importance of media attention and the successes of social media as a direct means of communication are understood and valued by every politician nowadays. Highlighting the interests of population groups exemplified with stories of real citizens has become pervasive in all kinds of political discourse, and language that was regarded as highly inappropriate at the end of the twentieth century, such as insinuations and shabby assertions, is now part of mainstream politics (see, for instance, Wodak, 2015; Bracciale and Martella, 2017; Kienpointner, 2003). This makes populism a difficult phenomenon to define and characterize.

3. CONCEPTIONS OF POPULISM

Scholars have been studying populism from a range of different backgrounds, resulting in various definitions of this phenomenon (see also Chapter 2 in this volume); hence it has already become ‘a cliché to state that populism is a contested concept’ (Moffitt, 2018, p. 2). Attempts to categorize the several conceptions of populism are confronted with subsequent historical phases (cf. Taggart, 2000), each of which has its own characteristics. Usually a first rise of populism is discerned as ‘agrarian’ populism, that is, American populism, starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, and a little bit later also Russian populism. Another upswing concerns Latin American left-wing populism, already starting in the 1930s. And finally, the Western world is facing a populist wave that started at the last quarter of the former century and which

is often called ‘new populism’ (Pauwels, 2014 p. 14; Moffitt, 2016, p. 18). All three phases share similarities but also differences, which makes it hard to come up with an all-encompassing definition of the phenomenon of populism. Below we will discuss some conceptions that have become mainstream in the contemporary literature; our discussion is based on Moffitt (2016, Ch. 2; cf. Moffitt and Tormey, 2014) and Pauwels (2014; cf. Jagers, 2006).

The studies by Moffitt and Pauwels both identify an ideological conception of populism, namely Mudde’s (2004; cf. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6) definition of populism as a ‘thin-centered ideology’. This definition comprises the opposition of the people versus the elite and the claim that politics should be the expression of the *volonté générale*. It is called ‘thin’ because it can easily be combined with other ideologies (conservative, socialist, etc.), political views, concepts and lines of thought and therefore allows for both right-wing and left-wing populism (Mudde, 2004, p. 544). Mudde’s definition has gained considerable influence in academia, if only because it forms a convenient starting point for comparative research. For this reason Pauwels (2014) has adopted this definition for his studies on Dutch, Belgium and German populism; however, Moffitt fears that ‘a thin ideology can become so thin as to lose its conceptual validity and usefulness’ (2016, p. 13).¹

In addition to an ideological definition, a conception of populism is identified central to which is the way populist actors communicate. This conception is sometimes related to a ‘discursive’ perspective and sometimes approached as a ‘style of communication’. On the one hand, this conception of populism underlies studies that examine the presence of populist key words (the people, the elite) in the discourse of populist and non-populist politicians (e.g. Jagers and Walgrave, 2007) or it tries to discern populist ideas through a ‘holistic’ approach of political texts (e.g. Hawkins, 2009). On the other hand, this approach identifies ‘populist tactics’ such as ‘simplicity and directness’, not only in language but also in content (Canovan, 1999, p. 5). According to Moffitt (2016, p. 21), the great difference with an ideological approach is that the latter views populism as a matter of black and white, whereas studying populist elements in discourse may reveal a gradational concept of populism.

Apart from the above-mentioned conceptions of populism, both Moffitt and Pauwels distinguish a definition that focuses on the organizational features of populist parties: a low level of institutionalization allowing for informal and flexible organizational structures, exploitation of charismatic leadership, mobilization of and unmediated contact with heterogeneous supporter groups

¹ In addition to this description of populism, Pauwels’ (2014, p. 18) conception also includes Moffitt and Tormey’s (2013) more comprehensive idea of ‘style’ that is described below.

(Moffitt and Tormey, 2014, p. 286; Pauwels, 2014, p. 17; Moffitt, 2016, p. 20). Finally, Moffitt and Tormey also mention Laclau's (2007) conception as a distinctive category of populism. This conception, which has been adopted by Mouffe (2018), regards populism as a 'political logic', creating a division within society between 'us' and 'them' and attempting to destabilize the current power structure (or hegemony).

Rather than representing essentialist definitions of populism, the above conceptions might primarily be conceived of as ways of studying the phenomenon of populism and steering scholarly interest to where to look. It is often acknowledged that it can be hard to distinguish between the substantial and the formal aspects of populism and thus to separate ideology and style. An ideological approach 'does not exclude the possibility that it features a specific style of communication as well' (Pauwels, 2014, p. 19). In fact, where else than in their discourse can the defining ideological elements of populists be found? This may explain why the ideological conception has regularly been equated with the discursive conception (Moffitt, 2016, p. 23), and also why Laclau's approach has led to research conducted within the discourse-analytical framework of the 'Essex school' (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014, p. 385).

Studying populism from the viewpoint of both content and form is also propagated by Moffitt and Tormey (2014) and Moffitt (2016), who claim that both of these elements presuppose and generate each other. However, they also think that form as it is conceived of in the discursive approach focuses too exclusively on linguistic and text-based materials and therefore may overlook visual and performative elements, which they regard as equally important indicators of 'populism's appeal' (Moffitt, *ibid.*, p. 21). Moffitt and Tormey therefore propose to study populism as a 'political style' by building on Canovan's (1999) and Jagers and Walgrave's (2007) interpretation of this notion and extending it. Their 'stylistic' approach to populism pays particular attention to the performance of a populist leader in a mediatized era marked by appeals to the people versus the elite and to crisis, breakdown and threat, and by 'bad manners' (a.o. slang, abusive language, political correctness) – characteristics they contend to be commonly accepted as indicators of populist discourse (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). In these authors' view, mediatization and the concurrent simplification of political discourse (sound bites) has turned the political arena into a form of entertainment demanding a style of performance that perfectly fits a populist politician. This amounts to an approach not only dealing with the discursive aspects of populism but including an interest in the visual dimension.

4. EXPLANATIONS FOR THE RISE AND SUCCESS OF POPULISM

Explanations for the rise and success of populist actors are manifold (for instance: Betz, 1994; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014; Müller, 2016, p. 112 ff.; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 97 ff.; Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). A recurrent theme is that mainstream politics has failed to address serious and genuine concerns of a large group of voters. Those who did not benefit from the rise of capitalism and globalism feel that their problems have been neglected by disinterested political leaders. These feelings not only apply to working class voters losing their jobs and living in rapidly changing neighborhoods, but also to middle class and well-educated people experiencing that others are better off, that they work harder for less, and fearing a less promising future for their children. In addition, these problems are related to large immigration numbers resulting both in anger that community money goes to people who never lived here nor worked for it and in fear that our freedom and identity are threatened by alien norms and values. Populist movements have appeared to be perfectly able to express and stand up for exactly these anxieties.

In addition, a political landscape where ideological differences between political parties have faded and the resulting technocratic way problems are dealt with have created a sense of alienation in many voters. As technocratic decision-making is also encouraged through the rise of supranational institutions like the European Union or the International Monetary Fund and the related decline of national power, the way has been paved for complaints of being reigned by undemocratic and bureaucratic institutions that take away national money and power and give nothing back. Fuel to these complaints also comes from mainstream politicians themselves, who have no hesitation in shifting the blame for their own failures to exactly those institutions. In today's volatile political landscape, where a party may claim victory at one election and be swept away at the next, mainstream politicians are obsessed with electoral support and say everything their voters want to hear. Hence many of them refuse to take responsibility and fail to tell a fair story about the feasibility of political goals and plans.

The success of populist politicians can also be linked to demonstrated corruption, either by mainstream parties favoring their own members or by corruption that is engrained in the institutions of a weak state. Even if there is no verifiable corruption, a populist gut feeling simply makes many voters think that most politicians are insincere and only think of their own careers. This development goes hand in hand with a decline of respect for people in functions requiring intellectual expertise and the idea that common sense might be just as good as expert knowledge. Internet and social media make sure that decreasing

trust in politics has become widespread and gained growing support, especially since financial aids for established journalism have seriously decreased. In this regard sensationalist media are also part of the explanation with their repetitive interest in crime and abuses, telling a completely different story about the state of the country than many politicians do.

As most of the aforementioned causes of populism are not likely to rapidly disappear and can even be regarded as structural components of contemporary society and politics, populism is expected to stay for a long time (Mudde, 2018). Canovan (1999) even argues that populism is an inseparable element of democracy, that is, a shadow that cannot be disposed of (see also Chapter 15 in this volume).

5. METHODOLOGIES OF POPULIST RESEARCH

Not only from a conceptual point of view, also from a methodological point of view can various approaches be distinguished with regard to the study of populism. In order to come to grips with its discursive characteristics, numerous quantitative and qualitative case studies have been conducted analysing populist discourse in a broad range of countries in the Western world and elsewhere (for an overview, see for instance Hawkins, 2009; Wodak and Krzyzanowski, 2017a). Examples of qualitative research can be found, for instance, in Wodak and Krzyzanowski's (2017a) special issue of *Language and Politics*, including for instance the construction of 'us' and 'them' in the language of Nicholas Sarkozy, the construction of 'the people' and 'the elite' in the discourse of the Austrian politician Norbert Gerwald Hofer, a study on ethos, pathos and logos in Donald Trump's campaign for the 2016 elections, or a comparison to references to 'the people' in the inaugural speeches of Donald Trump, Barack Obama and Marine Le Pen.

Quantitative studies comprise a variety of content analyses measuring the degree of populism of a particular discourse, ranging from manual word-counting content analysis to computer-based inventories. Important in this respect is Jagers and Walgrave's (2007) inventory of the number of references to a certain population category and the adopted evaluation of such a category by different Belgian political actors, resulting in a quadrant distinguishing four types of populism, that is, *complete populism* (focusing on the people and being anti-establishment), *anti-elitist populism* (only focusing on this aspect and not on the people), *excluding populism* (only focusing on the people) and *empty populism* ('normal' political discourse). Another important quantitative study is Hawkins' (2009) comparison of the speeches of Latin American and non-Latin American leaders through a method of holistic grading, which is not based on word count but on the interpretation of a whole text along the lines of certain rubrics. Quantitative in nature is also

Roodijn and Pauwels' (2011) methodological study comparing a classical manual content analysis with a computer-based content analysis searching for references to the people and anti-elite expressions in election manifestos of some European parties.

A more recent quantitative study focusing on a broad concept of the populist's style, is Bracciale and Martella's (2017) analysis of the communication styles of some Italian political leaders on Twitter, in which use is made of dimensions like emotionalization, informality, intimization, taboo breaking, vulgarism, aggressiveness, provocation, humor, irony, self-promotion. One of the few studies of populists' *argumentative* discourse is a quantitative study on the use of fallacies by right-wing populist politicians from Switzerland and the UK (Blassnig et al., 2018). On the basis of an analysis of these politicians' representation in the media (news articles and press releases) during election campaigns the authors conclude that the examined populist politicians do make use of fallacies indeed, notably *ad populum*, *ad consequentiam* and *ad hominem*. While there are also studies which compare the discourse of populist and non-populist actors, these authors, and also Roodijn and Pauwels mentioned above, only examined the discourse of alleged populists.

Regardless of the quantitative/qualitative distinction, Stanyer, Salgado and Strömbäck (2017) observe that two approaches can be distinguished in the study of populist communication, that is, an 'actor-centered' and a 'communication-centered' one. The choice for the one or the other approach is occasioned by a researcher's conception of populism. When populism is approached as an ideology, one starts with classifying politicians as populist and then examines their style of communication. When populism is approached as a communication style, one studies politicians' communication and then draws conclusions about 'the ubiquity of populist political communication and about which political actors are populist' (ibid., p. 353). A systematic cross-European review of research on populism presented in Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck and de Vreese (2017), on which Stanyer, Salgado and Strömbäck reflect, makes them conclude that both approaches have delivered limited studies and that 'systematic knowledge of populist actors as communicators or political actors as populist communicators is scant'. They recommend that this knowledge 'should be a key priority for scholars to understand populist political communication' (Stanyer et al., 2017, p. 355).

6. AIM

This volume aims at contributing to the ongoing academic debate about populism by a combination of legal and political reflections and discursive studies. Following Wodak and Krzyzanowski (2017b, p. 474), who claim that each variant of populism is different and should be studied in its own national

and political context, the volume presents an overview of various case studies in different national contexts. Some of the authors contributing to this volume primarily study populism's content and its consequences for democracy and the Rule of Law. Others study populism as a type of discourse or a style of communication. On the one hand, this style is closely related to the content level of populism as a thin ideology, while it also has some characteristics that are not particularly content-related, that is, the kind of manners and symbols populists make use of. This volume adopts a multidisciplinary perspective in which insights are used and combined from linguistics, argumentation theory, rhetoric, legal theory and political theory. It brings together these different perspectives in order to provide for an integrated view regarding the form and content of populist discourse. We agree with Moffitt (2016) and other authors that it is the combination of content and style that enables us to grasp the bigger picture of populism and its diverse manifestations.

7. CONTENT

This volume consists of five different parts. Part I explores several conceptions of populism, Part II addresses constructions of 'the people' in light of in-groups and out-groups. Part III presents some case studies in which the style (or performance) of populist actors is analysed. Part IV explores the potential tension between populism and democratic representation. In the final Part V an exploration is provided of how to meet the challenge of populism. A more detailed description of the volume's content and the individual contributions can be found below.

Part I: Conceptual Issues

Part I focuses on the concept of populism. What exactly is populism and how can it be defined? Does this signifier have a clear referent and how is it used outside an academic context? In this Chapter 1, the editors Henrike Jansen, Bart van Klink and Ingeborg van der Geest provided an overview of conceptions of populism, explanations of this phenomenon and various types of research that have been conducted in order to come to grips with it. In Chapter 2, David Zarefsky and Dima Mohammed start with a historical overview of left-wing and right-wing populism in the United States, leading to the definition that populism is a rhetorical stance. They formulate some exigencies allowing for the emergence of populism and end with an exploration of rhetorical features of populist discourse. Massimo La Torre analyses, in Chapter 3, the concept of populism and explores its relation to democracy in further depth. He considers 'populism' as not just an 'essentially contested concept' but as an unmanageable concept, since it is mainly used for rhetorical

purposes, that is, to dismiss politicians whose views or way of doing politics one does not support. As a result, the underlying problem – the crisis of our current democracy – remains out of sight.

Part II: Construction of the People

In populist discourse, it is often claimed that the identity of the ‘ordinary’, ‘original’ or ‘real’ people is threatened, by the elite, and in exclusionary populism also by new people from the outside, that is, immigrants or descendants of immigrants with different cultural and religious backgrounds. The elite is accused of turning a blind eye to the negative effects of the immigration flow; due to its cosmopolitan orientation, it does nothing to stop the decline of the nation’s culture and valuable traditions. In this part of the volume it is explored how politicians (both populist and non-populist) refer to an in-group and an out-group.

In Chapter 4, Henk Pander Maat proposes a two-step corpus analytical method to identify populism in discourse. The first step tracks references to the three primary characters in the populist narrative: ‘the people’, ‘the elite’ and ‘the dangerous others’. The second step is a manual analysis of the statements containing elite references, in order to check whether they actually convey the central claim of populism, that is, that elites willfully work against the people’s interests. A corpus of Dutch parliamentary speeches from the last decade shows that the Freedom Party is a textbook case of exclusionary populism, whereas the Socialist Party is anti-elitist, but not populist. In Chapter 5, Yeliz Demir addresses the populist argumentative and rhetorical strategies applied by the Turkish leader Erdoğan in order to construe a unified ‘one nation’ and to distance ‘the others’ who are not part of it. As a case study, the chapter offers an argumentative analysis of some extracts taken from Erdoğan’s meetings with the local authorities called ‘*muhtar*’, in which he tries to justify Turkey’s military operation in Afrin, Syria. In Chapter 6, Carina van de Wetering presents a comparative case study between the Obama and Trump administrations, analysing how chains of meanings constructing the ‘people’ and the ‘elite’ are not ‘fixed’ but can change over time. By making use of Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) approach, she demonstrates that populist narrations are present in both administrations, although there are some sharp differences.

Part III: Populism as a Style

The style approach to populism identifies ‘bad manners’ as typifying the style of a populist actor. In contrast to the so-called composed and rational mainstream politician, who plays the game by the rules with respect for hierarchy and tradition, the populist politician is claimed to make use of ‘slang, swear-

ing, political incorrectness' and to be 'overly demonstrative and "colourful"' (Moffitt, 2016, p. 34) – in short: high versus low style (Ostiguy, 2009). In this way, populists can distance themselves from the despised elite.

Although violating decency standards is an important populist rhetorical strategy to present oneself as a political outsider, little research has been conducted focusing on the question of exactly how populists do this verbally. In Chapter 7, Ton van Haaften and Maarten van Leeuwen provide an analysis of how the Dutch politician Geert Wilders violates four decency standards for Dutch parliamentary debate aiming to create and maintain the image of a political outsider, and show how he systematically makes use of a variety of conspicuous as well as inconspicuous linguistic choices to fulfill this rhetorical strategy. In Chapter 8, Bertjan Wolthuis discusses the criticisms that populists 'do not play by the rules'. His goal is to define populist politics by studying the ways in which 'argumentation games' are played in parliamentary debate. Taking Wilders' talks and speeches in the Dutch Parliament as a case study, Wolthuis argues that this populist politician behaves poorly in parliamentary debate. Wilders refuses to defend positions that – although popular among certain parts of the electorate – are easily refutable, and if he is forced to argue, he is inclined to break the rules. Lisa Villadsen, in Chapter 9, performs a close reading of a Danish political newsletter. Drawing on Ostiguy's (2009) 'high/low' distinction, Moffitt and Tormey's (2014) conceptualization of populism as a *political style*, and Saurette and Gunster's (2011) notion of *epistemological populism*, she shows how the author of the newsletter breaks the high/low style register and in fact renders populist views mainstream.

Part IV: Democracy and Representation

Another central theme in populist discourse is democracy and, in particular, the question of representation. Populism thrives on the assumption that part of a population – allegedly, that part that really matters or, as Laclau argues, the part that claims to be the whole, that is, 'the people'² – is underrepresented or not represented at all. Paradoxically, the populist emphasis on 'the will of the people' as the prerogative of policy making results in the exclusion of other parts of the population not sharing the (implicitly assumed) characteristics of this entity. For this reason, Müller (2016, p. 3) conceives of populism as 'an

² Laclau (2007, p. 81) puts it as follows: 'the "people", in that case, is something less than the totality of the members of the community: it is a partial component which nevertheless aspires to be conceived as the only legitimate totality. In order to have the "people" of populism, we need (. . .) a *plebs* who claims to be the only legitimate *populus* – that is, a partiality which wants to function as the totality of the community'. As such, populism is based on a synecdoche.

exclusionary form of identity politics’, which constitutes ‘a real danger to democracy (and not just to “liberalism”)’ (ibid., p. 103). Following Canovan (1999), he states: ‘Populism is something like a permanent shadow of modern representative democracy, and a constant peril’ (2016, p. 11).

In Chapter 10, Luigi Corrias criticizes the notion of ‘public sphere’ in populist discourse. As opposed to a ‘thin’ liberal concept of public sphere, which gives people the opportunity to discuss the rules for their co-existence (the ‘polis’), populist discourse advocates a ‘thick’ romantic notion of the public sphere stressing the sense of belonging of people within a nation state (‘Heimat’). As a third way between liberalism and populism, Corrias conceives of the public sphere as a space for pluralism. In this phenomenological understanding, democracy is not an expression of a pre-given identity or fixed interests, but an ongoing debate on what we are and what our interests are. Whereas populism is mostly seen as a threat to democracy, Laura Henderson explores, in Chapter 11, the democratic potential of populist discourse. She acknowledges that populism can be a danger to democracy when it aims to grant power to certain groups in society by excluding other groups (in ‘absolute’ populism). However, populism can, in her view, also manifest itself as a legitimate fight for the inclusion of formerly excluded groups in politics, not at the expense of other groups (in ‘radical’ populism). In Chapter 12, Oliver Lembcke offers a comparative analysis of the policy proposals put forward in party programs of populist and other parties in Europe. To what extent do the policy proposals of populist parties differ from those of the established parties? How is the anti-establishment attitude of populist discourse reflected in these proposals?

Part V: Responses to Populism

In the final part it is explored what kind of responses populism may be confronted with. In Chapter 13, Marija Sniečkutė brings argumentation theory and social theory together in order to formulate specific counter-strategies addressing features of populist discourse that may be harmful to democracy: how are the values constitutive of the central concepts of populism argumentatively weaved into a populist text? And what argumentative counter-strategies could be useful in tackling the argumentation in such populist texts? In Chapter 14, José Plug and Jean Wagemans propose to develop a procedure for ‘rhetoric-checking’. Such procedure goes beyond ‘fact-checking’ in that it does not only concern the truthfulness of isolated factual statements but also the quality of various other aspects of argumentative discourse. In this chapter, they present the part of the procedure for rhetoric-checking that pertains to the connection between the premise and conclusion of an argument and illustrate its use by applying it to examples of arguments put forward by

alleged populists. In the concluding Chapter 15, Bart van Klink and Ingeborg van der Geest integrate the insights obtained by the different chapters from the perspective of possible responses to populism. Analysing these insights from the perspective of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*, they discuss how the various contributions to this volume offer potential clues for responding to populist discourse. Specifically, the question will be addressed how – both on the level of form and content – citizens could or should respond to the challenges populism poses to current notions of reasonable debate and liberal democracy.

This volume aims at analyzing and evaluating the phenomenon of populism from various (linguistic, legal and political theoretical) perspectives. By combining these different perspectives we are able to understand better how it manifests itself in discourse and why it offers a challenge.

REFERENCES

- Aalberg, T., Esser, F., Reinemann, C., Strömbäck, J., and Vreese, C.H. de (eds). (2017). *Populist Political Communication in Europe*. New York: Routledge.
- Albertazzi, D., and McDonnell, D. (eds). (2008). *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Betz, H.-G. (1994). *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. London: Macmillan.
- Blassnig, S., Büchel, F., Ernst, N., and Engesser, S. (2018). Populism and informal fallacies: An analysis of right-wing populist rhetoric in election campaigns. *Argumentation*, 33(1), 107–36.
- Bracciale, R., and Martella, A. (2017). Define the populist political communication style: The case of Italian political leaders on Twitter. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(9), 1310–29.
- Buruma, I. (2019). Britain's enemy of the people? *Project Syndicate*, 4 September. Retrieved 26 January 2020 from <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/boris-johnson-enemy-of-the-people-by-ian-buruma-2019-09>.
- Canovan, M. (1999). Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy. *Political Studies*, 47, 2–16.
- Eatwell, R., and Goodwin, M. (2018). *National Populism and the Revolt against Liberal Democracy*. UK: Penguin Random House.
- Garschagen, M. (2019). Interview. Dat ene woord krijgt de vader van Boris Johnson niet over zijn lippen: trots [This one word is Boris Johnson's father incapable of saying: pride]. *NRC Handelsblad*, 26 July. Retrieved 26 January 2020 from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/07/26/het-idee-dat-wij-een-clan-zijn-met-een-agenda-is-zwaar-overdreven-a3968330>.
- Hawkins, K.A. (2009). Is Chávez populist? Measuring populist discourse in comparative perspective. *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(8), 1040–67.
- Jagers, J. (2006). *De stem van het volk! Populisme als concept getest bij Vlaamse politieke partijen*. Antwerpen: Universiteit Antwerpen.
- Jagers, J., and Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties' discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research*, 46(3), 319–45.

- Johnson, S. (2019). I'm proud of Boris, but he'll need to be on top of his game. *The Sunday Times*, 21 July. Retrieved 26 January 2020 from <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/im-proud-of-boris-but-hell-need-to-be-on-top-of-his-game-06g8sn17r>.
- Kienpointner, M. (2003). Populistische Topik. Zu einigen rhetorischen Strategien Jörg Haiders. *Rhetorik*, 21(1), 119–40.
- Laclau, E. (2007). *On Populist Reason*. London/New York: Verso.
- Laclau, E., and Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (2nd ed.). London/New York: Verso.
- Moffitt, B. (2016). *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. Retrieved 26 January 2020 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvqsdsd8>.
- Moffitt, B. (2018). The populism/anti-populism divide in Western Europe. *Democratic Theory*, 5(2), 1–16.
- Moffitt, B., and Tormey, S. (2014). Rethinking populism: Politics, mediatisation and political style. *Political Studies*, 62(2), 381–97.
- Mouffe, C. (2018). *For a Left Populism*. London/New York: Verso.
- Mudde, C. (2004). The populist zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, 39(4), 541–63.
- Mudde, C. (2018). How populism became the concept that defines our age. *The Guardian*, 22 November. Retrieved 26 January 2020 from <https://www.wrdtp.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Mudde-How-populism-became-the-concept-that-defines-our-age--Cas-Mudde--World-news--The-Guardian.pdf>.
- Mudde, C., and Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2017). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Müller, J.-W. (2016). *What Is Populism?* University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Ostiguy, P. (2009). The high-low political divide: Rethinking populism and anti-populism. *Political Concepts. Committee on Concepts and Methods*, Working Paper Series 35, 1–65.
- Pauwels, T. (2014). *Populism in Western Europe: Comparing Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Rooduijn, M., and Pauwels, T. (2011). Measuring populism: Comparing two methods of content analysis. *West European Politics*, 34(6), 1272–83.
- Saurette, P., and Gunster, S. (2011). Ears wide shut: Epistemological populism, argumentations and Canadian conservative Talk Radio. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 44(1), 195–218.
- Stanyer, J., Salgado, S., and Strömbäck, J. (2017). Populist actors as communicators or political actors as populist communicators. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, and C.H. de Vreese (eds), *Populist Political Communication in Europe* (pp. 353–64). New York: Routledge.
- Taggart, P. (2000). *Populism*. Buckingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Weale, A. (2018). *The Will of the People: A Modern Myth*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Wodak, R. (2015). *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. London: Sage.
- Wodak, R. (2017). The “establishment”, the “élites”, and “the people”: Who’s who? *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(4), 551–65.
- Wodak, R., and Krzyzanowski, M. (eds). (2017a). Special Issue of *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(4), 471–639.
- Wodak, R., and Krzyzanowski, M. (2017b). Right-wing populism in Europe & USA: Contesting politics & discourse beyond ‘Orbanism’ and ‘Trumpism’. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(4), 471–84.