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Editorial

Discoursing Populism: Types, Typologies and Contexts

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I

Populism in Perspective

Although the idea of populism is as old as Phaleas of Chalcedon, it has gained a new currency in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic meltdown. For Phaleas, if the right to private property and democracy were the pillars of *vox populi*, the current wave of populist politics are plagued by what Yochai Benkler et al. call an "epistemic crisis in media and politics that threatens the integrity of democratic processes, erodes trust in public institutions, and exacerbates social divisions" (2018, n.p.). Even if the very term 'populism' "carries associations of crowd-pleasing and cheap emotionalism" (2011, 100), as the South African anthropologist Jean Comaroff argues, "a certain populist radicalism – an opposition to the dictatorship and doxa of elites […] is a *necessary*, if not *sufficient* condition of mass transformative movements in all times and places" (104; emphasis original). Reaffirming this view, Chantal Mouffe (2018) has called for a radical reframing of populist politics that would not only counteract the politics of exclusion or polarization, but also preserve the existing social collectives and institutions (e.g. Podemos of Spain, the Zapatistas of Mexico). It is the very

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paradox of populism's dystopic disruptions and utopic desires that form the basis for the essays featured in this special issue.

Since the 2008 global economic crisis in particular, populist politics have become a dominant mode of mass mobilization on a global scale, and at both ends of the political spectrum: the far right and the radical left. The collective desire for a strong leader or the "colonial potentate" (Mbembe 2001, 34) in the postcolony is often held culpable for the rise and fall of a spate of populist dictatorships in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In the wake of such epistemic crises, political mimery and discursive ruptures on both sides of the Atlantic, how could the rise of populist political figures in the postcolony – Narendra Modi of India, Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Andrés Obrador of Mexico, Mahinda Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka, Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, to name a few – be conceptualized? Is there a contagious element to populism that defies our established understandings – if any – of public sphere and political behaviour? This special issue features original contributions that seek to explore the rhetorical (texts), psychic (contexts) and semiotic (image/media) economies of life that shed light on ideological convergence between populist politics in the Global North and the postcolony.

Although most commentators on populism lament that it lacks a theoretical premise or a clear political, institutional or ideological marker, many tend to agree on its formative and performative aspects, rhetorical cues, and patterns of mobilization. These include populism's ability to woo the masses by seizing upon the available public discontent; its stated aversion to pluralism; its formulaic pitting of "the people" against the "corrupt elite"; its knack for disrupting the status quo of "the establishment"; and its rhetorical ploy to organize people on the basis of social fears and anxieties, including the loss of cultural values, wealth, class status, rights, privileges, and "voice" (Gudavarthy 2018; Moffitt 2016; Mudde 2004; Canovan 1999; Laclau 2005; Panizza 2005). Of its many typological variants, three discursive threads merit further attention: 1) populism as a threat to democracy, 2) populism as a boon for democracy, and 3) populism as an integral part, or rather the "mirror", of democracy.

According to Nadia Urbinati, populist content is "made of negatives" – whether it is anti-politics, anti-intellectualism or anti-elite" (cited in Molloy 2018, n.p.). Despite her selective appreciation of the *casus belli* of populism, Chantal Mouffe argues that right-wing populism invariably leads to authoritarian democracy wherein the promised "alternative" to post-democracy (failed social justice and welfare state) or post-politics (the erosion of right/left distinctions) is quickly abandoned by the leader (e.g. Margaret Thatcher) who, after ascension to power, effectively becomes a "manager" of "neoliberal hegemony" (Mouffe 2016, n.p.; Fassin 2019, 87). While populist leaders amass support by means of a formulaic and "moralized" anti-pluralism pitting against nativist purism (Müller 2016, 3; Disch 2019, S100), they do so by vilifying, if not demonizing, the opposition in a manner that forestalls fair and free competition (Weyland 2013, 21). It may seem paradoxical, but left-wing populism is deemed as a greater

threat to democracy than right-wing populism. This is largely to do with the perception that the neoliberal market tends to weaken the power of the right-wing populists overtime, though the evidence suggests otherwise. By extension, the social discontent brought forth by neoliberal market interventions lends additional support for the left-wing populists (Weyland 2013, 27).

For other critics, manipulation, *heresthetics* and "a radical partiality in interpreting the people and the majority" (Urbinati 2019, 112) are endemic traits of both right- and left-wing populism. Inciting violence and disruption of public life are commonly used tactics by the populist leaders in the postcolony, which provide them an opportunity to prove their mettle as the "strongmen" who can lay "claims [to] a decisive decision-making capacity without being restrained by the niceties of liberal institutionalism. The legitimacy here is mobilized because of the available discontent against dysfunctional institutions" (Gudavarthy 2018, xx). Once in power, the populist leaders embark on a "permanent campaign" to prove to their voters and loyalists that they do not ally with the establishment (Molloy 2018, n.p.).

The critics who refuse to treat populism as a "stand alone phenomenon" (Arditi 2007, 58) contend that populist movements hold "the potential to strengthen political participation and improve the representative link between politicians and citizens due to its emphasis on vertical mechanisms of democratic accountability such as direct democracy or elections" (Ruth-Lovell et al. 2019, 2). While it is true that populism can arise from a crisis in previous regimes, populist movements themselves cannot be reduced to the "crisis" framework alone (Panizza 2005, 11). Much like democracy, populism is invariably linked to the perils of non-representation, as in Ernesto Laclau's reading of the rhetorical rift between *populus* as the represented majority, and *plebs*, the non-represented minority. Populists typically construct *plebs* as *populus*, a process which attempts to create a "chain of equivalence" without erasing difference, and in doing so, always leaves out some sections of the population on the margins of representation. Pace Laclau, the "people" of populism are typically drawn against an "upper boundary" of the establishment and "lower boundary" of the underrepresented whose demands or aspirations are typically ignored (Chiantera-Stutte 2018, 164-165). Here, democracy as a majoritarian representation serves as a custom-made template for populism, as the rights of the representation of those who are left out in the process become the mantle of "social heterogeneity" (Laclau 2005, 200), which is both internal and integral to the spirit of *demos*. It is for this reason that Laclau concludes that "populism is the royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political as such" (67).

The third typology of criticism closely espouses Laclau's reading of populism as "a way of constructing the political" (xi), and even goes a step further to argue that populism is the heightened expression, if not an *epitome*, of democracy. According to Margaret Canovan, populism is "a shadow of cast by democracy itself" (1999, 3). Although liberal democracy itself is beholden to a

"redemptive" notion of reclaiming *vox populi*, in its everyday functioning it is dominated by its "pragmatic" side in which structures, institutions and laws of governance ensure the processing of conflicts in an amicable way (9-11). Populism, for Canavan, is an "appeal past the ossified institution to the living people, proclaiming the *vox populi* unmediated" (14). Even the advocates of left-wing populism such as Chantal Mouffe acknowledge this redemptive quality of populism – i.e. proclaiming and reclaiming *vox populi* – that has been central to the populist movements in Europe at the turn of the millennium, which sought to "reassert popular sovereignty" (cited in Panizza 2005, 29).

The notion that populism is a "shadow" or a "mirror in which democracy can look at the rougher, less palatable edges that remain veiled by the gentrifying veneer of its liberal format" (Arditi 2007, 60), or "a mirror in which democracy can contemplate itself, warts and all, and find out what it is about and what it is lacking" (Panizza 2005, 29) is certainly enchanting, but risks dubbing the phenomenon into a zero sum equation. In such readings, populism becomes a mere return of the repressed, a redemptive symptom that not only conceals *and* reveals the limits of democracy but also rescues the latter from the iron cage of institutional pragmatism. Given these conceptual limitations, populism is prone to myriad typological classifications: an ideology or a "thin-centered ideology"; a moral or Manichean discourse; a mode of representation; a political practice or strategy; and a logic or set of tactics on mobilizing dissent on the basis of unmediated *vox populi* (Arditi 2007; Moffitt 2016; Gidron and Bonikowski 2013; Mudde 2004). There exists, however, a loose scholarly consensus on the *types* of populism to have emerged in the post-war era, as outlined below.

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Type	Characteristics	Examples
Right-wing populism	is built on both a "triadic" distinction between "the people", elite, and a third group of national/social outsiders (John Judis in Voelz 2018, 204-205), and a Manichean division between the "people" and the "rest" wherein "people" remains a floating signifier; anti-pluralist in nature; also known as **exclusionary populism** (Hameleers and de Vreese 2020), as it portrays certain social groups as a threat to the imagined community.	Donald Trump; Boris Johnson; Narendra Modi
Left-wing populism	is "dyadic" and draws a *clear* distinction between the people and the elite (Judis in Voelz 2018, 204-205). It is not anti-pluralistic in principle, but capable of propagating nativist, nationalist and anti-internationalist sentiments and ideology ("anti-imperialism"). It draws heavily from anti-colonial/decolonial ideologies, and operates both within and outside of electoral politics. Reformed Marxist parties, advocates of secession, armed resistance and para-militaristic leadership are its salient features.	Alexis Tsipras; Hugo Chávez; Rafael Correa; Shining Path (Preu), FARC (Colombia)
Democratic populism *Populism as Style & Performance*	stems from, and operates within, the electoral systems of democracy. It revolves around developing strategies and styles of political campaigning to draw in voters, and create and preserve long-term "vote-banks". Political style and performance of the leader play a vital role: unorthodox, subversive moral position, the "use of tabloid-like language" and everyday expressions, simplistic, targeted solutions to complex problems, pretense of transparency, mimicking of the cultural codes/habitus of the commonman (Canovan 1999; Arditi 2007, 61; Voelz 2018; Kazin 1998).	Sectarian, ethnic or religious political parties (e.g. Shiv Sena Party; Iran Novin Party)
Dynastic populism	is an electoral cult built around inherited power through fraternal, filial and affective bonds of the nation-builders. These family icons are portrayed as a new generation of saviors; the harbingers of 'a second independence'.	Dynasties of Gandhi, Bhutto, Su Kyi, Trudeau, Bush, Sukarno, Rajapaksa
Totalitarian mass dictatorship	is akin to totalitarianism which mobilizes masses with the promise of creating "a new world order", a "type of new man" and arrive at a "perfect state of mankind" through "anthropological revolution". Its common features include repression of individualism and pluralism, removal of enemies, the presence of a single party, and an attempt to "engineer a new mentality" as well as an "imposition of uniform world views" through frequent terror and violence (Griffin 2013, 34).	Fascist Italy: Nazi Germany; Bolshevik Russia; Communist China
Authoritarian mass dictatorship	is "exercised *over* the masses, with no serious intention to inaugurate a new era or socially engineer a new man" (Griffin 2013, 39). Power is deployed "towards anti-revolutionary ends" to curb any potential threat to the status quo, and is displayed "nakedly" (39). Every attempt is made to keep the traditional elite in power by eradicating "social instability", anarchy, pluralism and opposition from sectors of civil society (39).	Idi Amin; Rafael Trujillo; Sani Abacha; Omar Al-Bashir; Robert Mugabe
Electoral authoritarianism/ Benevolent dictatorship	is a part of democratic populism, wherein elected leaders rise to power through election, and use authoritarian structures and elements to retain power, and "utilize populist appeals to maintain their place in office" (Peters and Pierre 2020, 8). This is akin to benevolent dictatorships wherein the regime/the leader in command is lauded for economic development and gains public acceptance as a dictator with a vision.	Lee Kwan-Yew; Mahathir Mohammad; Park Chung-Hee
Post-truth populism	is premised on the denial of established scientific truths; an overt anti-intellectualism which depicts think tanks, researchers, and discourses of science and reason as the instruments of a "top-down" establishment "which do not alleviate the people's problems. Against this backdrop, ordinary citizens are assumed to be more knowledgeable and better able than experts to come up with solutions to societal problems" (Hameleers 2018, 2175). It uses social media as alternative media – "as a mouthpiece for 'fake news' and 'alternative facts'" (Speed and Mannion 2017, 249).	Donald Trump; Rodrigo Duterte; Jair Bolsonaro
Autocratic populism	is a hybrid of neoliberalism, surveillance and control regimes from the cold war era, and populism. It further pertains to a cult-like image of the leader, cultivated by "coercion and adulation" (Nelson 1998, 158).	Viktor Orbán; Jarosław Kaczyński
Soft populism	is defined by "a negative distance" from an incumbent leader. It is tied to the idea that aspiring leaders must solicit popular support through media, TV debates, polls, and cultivate a political strategy and style for campaigning which is deemed essential and harmless. It is seen as a compensation "for public lassitude" in political participation (Foley 2007, 345) by which the leaders, who "claim to be the outsiders to the system", promise to bring back the citizens into the fold of electoral politics (345-346).	Emmanuel Macron

II

Populism in the Postcolony

The various types and typologies of populism outlined above are neither exclusive to nor simply derivative of Euro-American models of democracy; they are equally tenable to non-Western societies as evident in the predominantly postcolonial populist figures listed in the "Examples" column. The typologies such as **dynastic** populism are endemic to the postcolonial context, as the families of the "founding fathers" continue to dominate the national politics in India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Burma. **Autocratic** populism, **left-wing** populism, **authoritarian** and **totalitarian** mass dictatorships are also the unique by-products of the postcolony, which are invested in the leader figure who ought to fill in the political void leftover by the colonizer's departure, and socially re-engineer the arbitrary containment of diverse ethnicities and religions into physical maps in the name of nation-building. An **externally engineered** populism may be added to the above typology, wherein American imperialism, cold war rivalries, and neoliberal economic policies have led to the rise and fall of a slew of dictatorships in Latin America since the 1960s. Although the role of the populist leader has been vital to most of these typologies, it remains one of the most underrated phenomena in the scholarship on populism. Laclau, for one, restricts his discussion of the role of the populist leader to a psychoanalytical function: "the symbolic unification of the group around an individuality" and, in the next level, to the Lacanian *objet petit a*, "the identification of the unity of the group with the name of the leader" (2005, 100). In the postcolony, however, such unification of the people around a leader *exceeds* its symbolic function, as the leader himself/herself becomes the cynosure of mass mobilization.

In a conversation with Isabelle Hofmeyr, Achille Mbembe raises the question that lent inspiration to his work on the postcolony: "What 'form' does the 'Father' take in the aftermath of colonialism stricto sensu?" (Hofmeyr and Mbembe 2016, 181). If, for Mbembe, the "Father" symbolizes the colonial autocrat, then his "aftermath" is none other than the "strong man", the "postcolonial potentate" borne out of the re-appropriation of colonial sovereignty. But "what lies underneath the mask [of the postcolonial] 'Father'?" (181). Is he merely a humble colonial son, or has he amassed his own colonial clan? For Mbembe, the answer lies beyond the colonizer and colonized nexus, which is now replaced by "the violence of 'brother' towards 'brother' and the status of the 'sister' and the 'mother' in the midst of fratricide" (181).

Fittingly, the idea of decolonial recovery of the self, as argued by Ashis Nandy (1983), has lost its epistemic ground, as the enemy within has metamorphosed into an agent of normative order. Yet, the colonial sovereignty, in all its founding violence, survives its disappearance. The collective desire for a "strong leader" in the postcolony who can unite the nation singlehandedly and

can consolidate the "imagined community" of a majoritarian nation, is a case in point in how the negated colonized subject takes on the "act of his or her own destruction and prolongs his/her own crucifixion" (Hofmeyr and Mbembe 2016, 174). Just as Mbembe rightly could not distinguish between the colonial and postcolonial commandment, populism in the postcolony narrates a complex story of one sovereign order usurping the other in the name of the people – a repackaging of what Ashis Nandy refers to as the "intimate enemy" (1983) wherein tyrants and their victims share an "epistemic field" that allows power to align with conviviality, excess, and obscenity. Over the years, a predominant tendency in the postcolony has been manifested through an apology for cultural assertion. Such an apology often regresses into epistemic closure, while appropriating the logic of an aestheticism of difference that glosses over the performative demands and materialist praxis. In this way, as Laclau and Mouffe (2014) have pointed out, cultural appeals act as empty and floating signifiers. For them, nationalist symbols like flags, cartographic ensembles, religious sign systems or the strong leader act as floating signifiers in the Lacanian sense that they invite everyone to participate under its symbolism, thus generating an affective investment in the phantoms of agency and empowerment. Here, the emotive residues of anti-colonial nationalism are tacitly deployed by the postcolonial populists in a transference of fictive energy. The besieged and beleaguered image of the postcolonial nation is deftly played out by the ruling political dispensation to guarantee unconditional allegiance to the status quo in the very name of the nation. Within this, the postcolonial popular is the governing sleight of hand, a classic mechanism of deflecting public attention to rule over them.

Popular politics in most of the postcolonial world, as Partha Chatterjee has shown in his earlier work, is both norm-deviant and non-modular, as it largely thrives on illegal or paralegal means. Chatterjee's most recent work, *I Am the People: Reflections on Popular Sovereignty Today* (2019), traces the birth of populism to the demise of the welfare state and the (Gramscian) "integral state" in Europe and Americas. The postcolonies adopted what Chatterjee and others call the "passive revolution" model of social reform instead of total social restructuring, an arrangement that retained existing class relations and yet managed to earn civil society support through the dual mode of gradual social reform and state welfarism. This was met with a backlash by the widening of social and class inequalities brought forth by the neoliberal market interventions. Within this nexus of capital-state-class relations, the postcolonial social elite found a way to distribute economic benefits to its support base in the urban civil society, while leaving a large section of rural political society – peasants and subaltern classes – outside of the benefit chain, whose discontent would become a potent weapon to the new wave of populist discourses based on religious, ethnic and socio-economic markers in the postcolony.

The essays collected in this special issue address three sub-themes that we identify as foundational to the discourses of populism: texts, contexts and media.

While the texts discussed here refer to fictional and non-fictional narratives, theoretical works, and presidential speeches, the contexts featured by the individual contributions include the national cultures affected by nineteenth and twentieth century imperialism: Iran, the Philippines, Greece, India, Brazil and Ireland, among others. Apropos of populism, social and digital media and journalism take the central stage in this special issue. We open the special issue with Andrew Ridgeway's essay which offers a panoramic view of global populism, drawing far reaching connections between colonialism, postcolonialism, affect theory, Brexit and the tweets of Donald Trump. Following this, Grigoris Markou explores what he calls the "crypto-colonialism" of Greece's radical left party of SYRIZA which came to power through a left-wing populist agenda but soon began to follow the style of "pragmatic populis". By placing human rights defenders at the centre of its analysis, Ulisses Terto Neto's contribution sheds light on the resistance to the notoriety of Jair Bolsonaro's populist regime. Gene Segarra Navera's article turns to another populist president, Rodrigo Duterte, who is known for silencing his opposition by belligerent speeches deploying war metaphors. Mahmoud Arghavan's essay takes us to the machinations of yet another populist figurehead – Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran – who appropriated a large part of the leftist movement in Iran into a home-spun discourse of Socialist Islamism. Shifting the coordinates from Islamic to Hindu populism, Sanchita Srivastava's essay examines the various social-media technologies and their strategies – particularly *gaalis* (trolling and verbal abuses) – in queering dissent by populist forces in contemporary India. Applying postcolonial theory to the Western hemisphere, JM. Persánch reads the rise (and fall) of multiculturalism in the West as marking the end of the "white guilt" era, and the beginning of what he calls "magical populism": "a racial desire of the West to rewind globalisation in efforts to restore the now lost sense of home and security of whites" (126). Within the context of global flows, Georgina Lewis' article argues that a climate of (anti)globalism at the onset of forced migration continues to carry a colonial burden that brings a nexus between populism and necropolitics to the forefront of public life. Last but not the least, Dylan Emerick-Brown's essay on the artistic and aesthetic populism in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain – as played out between Joyce and Wilde vs Tenniel and M. Shelley – explores how artistic practices such as literature and illustration became a mouthpiece for populist purposes at a time when the British empire began to crumble. The special issue is also accompanied by a review essay by Nicholas Tampio based on two recent books on fascism: William Connolly's *Aspirational Fascism* (2017, University of Minnesota Press), and Samir Gandesha's edited volume *Spectres of Fascism* (2020, Verso). Readers may find Gitika De's review of P.K. Vijayan's *Gender and Hindu Nationalism: Understanding Masculine Hegemony* (2020, Routledge) particularly relevant, as it closely espouses the themes of Hindu populism explored in the book forum on Ajay Gudavarty's *India after Modi* (2018, Bloomsbury), which is featured as part of this special issue.

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