

Tell Me Who Your Enemies Are and I Will Tell You Who You Are': Populism and The Creation of The Political Self

Radu George Dumitrescu

Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest, Romania

Correspondence Email: radu.dumitrescu@drd.unibuc.ro

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Abstract: *Populist discourse is notoriously hard to pinpoint, molding itself on a great variety of national circumstances. However, one element always remains present, namely the opposition between the people and the inimical Other. The Other has been a constant for populists as distinct as Juan Peron and Donald Trump. The present article argues that, despite the previous importance placed upon "the people" within the scholarship, the creation of the political self is secondary to the identification of the enemy. As a result, identity, for populists, emerges out of opposition. The most important feature of populist discourse, therefore, is the inimical Other.*

Keywords: *Populism, Political Theory, Comparative Politics*

Introduction

Populism was already well established as an object of study by the early 2000s, yet its importance greatly increased since the 2008 financial crash and the refugee crisis of the early 2010s. Certain electoral outcomes, such as UKIP coming in first in the 2014 European Parliament elections and Donald Trump's 2016 win in the US presidential elections also came as important events signaling a shift. Time and time again, young, middling or established democracies have fallen to the siren song of populists, even when the latter did not even receive that many votes. The surge of populism in the West is believed to be the result of a number of intertwining political factors, such as voter disappointment in mainstream parties and falling turnouts

but also structural features, such as globalization, European integration and rising levels of immigration. These have led to an "antipolitical climate" that discourages participation in politics and favors a straightforward, "common sense" approach to complex problems, all wrapped in a promise of radical change – and it is exactly this that populists offer, to "make democracy work" (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008). For Usherwood (2019), "populist parties are incomplete and temporary manifestations of underlying structural developments in politics and society."

To pinpoint this particular affliction of democracy, however, the scholar must first grasp and define it. Ever since Aristotle, the recognized way of doing so is through building a typology

out of the exhibited traits – in the instances of populism, what is always there? What do populists have in common with one another, and what separates them from non-populists?

One need not consult with an academic knowledge specializing in populism to confirm whether or not a politician is a populist – although the label has been weaponized by one political actor against another time and time again. One identifies a populist by his or her speech. Trump does not speak like Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, Mitt Romney or George W. Bush. Le Pen does not speak like Hollande or Macron, and Hungary’s Viktor Orban does not sound like Merkel.

Speech, therefore, can be used to identify populists from non-populists. Speech, as such, constitutes a political identity. The relationship between social identity construction and discursive practices has been noted and studied since the 1980s, and has evolved into such fields as sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. Writing in the early 1990s, Ochs (1992) described the relationship between the links formed among speakers and listeners and identity, a relationship to which grammar, content, tone and many other factors contribute. Speech bears a particular importance in human interaction, and this is even more evident in hypersocial environments such as politics. A politician’s persona, the one that people see as a fitting representation for themselves, the one that would make them present, is his or her style and discourse. Speech is the main action one does while doing politics. It is how a particular politician or an entire party

signal to listeners who they are. Policy, meanwhile, is secondary to political speech. In this way, a politician is his speech and his speech is himself. For Silverstein (2003) semiotic links make it so the theme of a politician’s discourse is nothing less than his identity. Speech constitutes identity, and political identity is no exception.

One of the major approaches to studying populism is the discursive-ideational one (Hawkins et al., 2018; Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2017), which stresses the comparative discursive construction and subsequent Manichean opposition of two camps, the people and the Enemy. It is this approach that it also used in this paper. However, whereas most scholars focus on the former, here the accent is placed on the latter.

Populist discourse is notoriously hard to pinpoint, molding itself on a great variety of national circumstances. However, one element within it remains present, namely the opposition between the people and the Enemy. Even in examples of “classical populism” – the populism professed by actors such as Argentina’s Juan Peron – but also in more recent cases of Latin American populism, the Manichean opposition between the good *pueblo* and the evil oligarchy / imperialists is central (de la Torre, 2017). Present populists, like Donald Trump or Marine Le Pen, style themselves as political outsiders and truth-tellers opposed to mainstream parties – even though the former is part of one – and a clear Other, which can vary between national groups such as Latin American or African immigrants, Islam, racial and sexual minorities or international organizations and other state actors. The

authors below employ a myriad of approaches and definitions meant to explain populism away. Although very different from one another, they show that the Other, the Enemy, has been a constant for populists whenever and wherever they activated.

The Many Faces of Populism

Populism is chameleonic. What is populist to some is not so for another. The definition of populism itself has not been something that academics in the field have agreed upon. Appearing in all shapes and sizes and defying the left-right political oppositions, populism can, nevertheless, be pinpointed through a set of defining features, the list of which enlarges or shortens with every author seeking to test his or her explicative prowess. As it will be shown, however, one feature is always present – the fact that populism relies on a Manichean, dualist logic (Taggart, 2002).

Following Mudde (2007), an authority in the field, populism “considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the ‘pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elite.’ Moreover, populism can also be understood as a thin-centered ideology that argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people” (Mudde, 2007). As so many other authors that have written on populism, however, he lingers on the first concept, “the people,” identifying it as “nothing more than a rhetorical tool that does not truly refer to any existing group of people,” a “constructed sub-set of the whole population” (Mudde, 2007). “Us” is also a constructed identity and can range

from a local or regional “us” (Lega Nord) to a national “us” (FN, True Finns), a Christian “us” (Fidesz), a global and historical “us” (UKIP), and even a European “us” (AfD). Although correct, Mudde is focusing on the wrong half of the equation. Historically, as it will be shown below, defining one group has been done by constructing the Other. To define the French, one has to define the non-French, the Spanish, the Italians, the English and the Germans first. What is then left can constitute the French.

In their critique of dominant conceptions of populism, Moffitt and Torney argue that the political actors that fall under the label of populism are greatly diverse in terms of ideology, discourse and organization. The authors find that Mudde’s famous definition of populism as a thin-centered ideology (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012) fails at capturing the essence of the phenomenon, thus becoming a catch-all term that loses its conceptual meaning and utility, a criticism that can be applied to Laclau’s populism-as-the-political approach as well. To resolve such conceptual stretching, the two authors propose approaching populism as a political style which necessarily includes appeals to the people, crisis, breakdown, threats and bad manners (Moffitt and Torney, 2014). Despite identifying populism not as an ideology, but as a style, Moffitt (2016) points to the same opposition between the people and the elite as a defining feature.

Pelinka, on the other hand, notes that for the populist the elite is only a secondary enemy, while “the enemy – the foreigner, the foreign culture” (Pelinka,

2013). is the big Other, the culprit of whatever ills the populist calls forth before the electorate. Still, the primacy of the Manichean opposition remains uncontested.

Albertazzi and McDonnell define populism as an ideology pitting the homogenous and “virtuous” people against the “dangerous others who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice” (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, p. 3) Unlike the people, these enemies are “neither homogeneous nor virtuous. Rather, they are accused of conspiring together.” (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, p. 6) In this way, the enemy of the populist can be the national government, the EU “bureaucracy,” the immigrants, LGBT people and many more, all connected through a flexible narrative line.

For Bossetta, the populist rhetorical style “aims to establish political legitimacy through appeals to pathos while also striving to successfully denigrate a constructed enemy” (Bossetta, 2017, p. 7).

Ruth Wodak, who sees populism as a type of discourse, highlights that populists construct “scapegoats and enemies – ‘Others’ which are to blame for our current woes – by frequently tapping into traditional collective stereotypes and images of the enemy.” This enemy, which the populists use to create fear, can be

“Jews, sometimes Muslims, sometimes Roma or other minorities, sometimes capitalists, socialists, career women, non-governmental organizations

(NGOs), the EU, the United Nations, the US or Communists, the governing parties, the elites, the media and so forth. [...] Anybody can potentially be constructed as dangerous ‘Other’, should it become expedient for specific strategic and manipulative purposes” (Wodak, 2015, p. 25).

Searching for the “nucleus” of populism in his attempt to build a minimal definition, Rooduijin (2014) concludes that Latin American populism, a strand that preceded and outlasted other regional populisms and which served as basis for the early definitions of the phenomenon, differs from US-based populism, which also differs from European populism. A single definition for populism, therefore, cannot “travel” between regions, and remains bound to the conditions that spawned it. Nevertheless, the author finds four – out of a proposed dozen – core elements that populists irrespective of continent share: the centrality of the people; the criticism of the elite; the perception of the people as a homogenous entity; and the existence of a crisis. One can conclude that three-quarters of being a populist is dividing society into “the people” and “the elite” while denying both groups heterogeneity. Moreover, the crisis that is often pointed at as inherent to populist discourse “is almost always related to perceived pressure created by an other – whether this takes the form of internal elements, including citizens who happen to be Muslims, Jews, or ‘second- or third-generation immigrants’; or external ones, such as refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants” (Mondon and Winter, 2020, p. 46).

For many authors, anti-elitism is a core component of populism. Taggart (2000) argues that the group the populists target depends on their political context and ideology – but being out of power, they always claim to be against the elite in power. Populist anti-elitism, however, is not limited to the political sphere. Cultural, intellectual or economic elites can also be painted by populists as being the Other to the honest, decent “people” that they invoke in every speech. The opposition between the noble people and the corrupt elite is a hallmark of populism, even more so than nationalism and xenophobia, from which it should be treated as separate, despite the fact that both rely on establishing clear lines of separation between “us” and “them” (Peters and Pierre, 2020).

According to Carpentier (2017), there are “three nodal points” in the antagonistic discourse that opposes “us” from the “other,” namely 1) the need for the destruction of the enemy, 2) establishing a difference and a distance from the enemy and 3) a process of homogenization of the self that is connected to the previous nodal point. The creation of the self is thus secondary to the identification of the enemy. Identity, for populists, emerges out of opposition.

Reineman et al. (2017) deem the “anti-out-group” message as a key element of populist communication, alongside references to the people and anti-elitism, which itself can be seen as an anti-out-group message.

For Caramani and Manucci (2019), Western European right-wing populism is a “re-elaboration of countries’ national

past and their collective memories,” an interplay of culpabilization, heroization, cancellation and victimization, with each one being dominant in a certain country. Austria is the latter case, being “the ‘first victim’ of Nazism,” externalizing all blame. Britain, on the other hand, is portrayed by its populists through heroization, as the nation that fought fascism and won. Both examples evidently include the existence of an Other, the victim of whom was Austria and against whom Britain could be heroic.

Knight (1998) sees populism as a style of politics that cannot be divorced from the centrality of the people, a period of crisis and, importantly, a “them-and-us” mentality.

More popular in the literature, Kazin (1998) and Canovan (1999) see the simplicity, directness and roughness of speech as trademarks of the populist style of politics. The same point is touched upon by Moffitt and Torney (2014, p. 391), who also view populism as a style based on an inauthentic performance, recasting “the people” as audience and subject and the point from which the dichotomous Other is created. “We do not believe that populists necessarily think the elite are corrupt, or that they are always opposed to the elite,” but to immigrants or another identifiable group that is distinct from “the people.” However, doing so obscures the connections that populists build between groups of Others. Nigel Farage deftly tied the EU, “Brussels’ elite to the established, mainstream parties of the UK and then to migration. For Farage, the European Union is to blame for Britain’s powerlessness and for the invading

waves of immigrants. Even though the Other is multiplied, singular or part of an interconnected group of Others, the antagonistic relationship between the people and the Other is always present, creating a foundational, identity-building enmity.

Whether it is looked at as a form of organization (Weyland, 2001), a political style (Canovan, 1999) or as a type of discourse (Laclau, 2005), populism, stripped to its bare bones, is always Manichean, separating the people from the “evil” and “conspiring” elite and Other (Rooduijn, 2013). In creating a single, “all-absorbing and organic idea of the people” and an opposing plethora of enemies, populism “rediscovers and stretches [...] the opposition between friend and foe (whether internal or external)” (Mastropaolo, 2008, p. 34).

For Ronsavallon (2006), populism weaponizes the mechanisms within democracy that permit criticism of institutions, the “negatives,” which are commonly used by mainstream political actors as well. However, unlike such actors, populists not only question a certain government but seek “to attain the more radical outcome: that of expelling the ‘wrong’ part completely and installing the ‘good’ part in its place” (Urbinati, 2019, p. 52). The difference can be observed when one compares Republican presidential nominees – and one eventual president – John McCain and Donald Trump. In October 2008, McCain was campaigning against Barack Obama, and had organized a town hall meeting in Lakeville, Minnesota. At that meeting, a woman stood up and began espousing racist conspiracies, arguing that Obama was “an Arab.” At that point, McCain

grabbed the microphone to cut her off and countered:

“No, ma’am. He’s a decent family man [and] citizen that just I just happen to have disagreements with on fundamental issues, and that’s what the campaign’s all about. He’s not [an Arab]” (Stewart, 2018).

Donald Trump, by comparison, was one of the leading voices of the same birtherist conspiracy. Campaigning in 2015, after two Obama mandates, Trump faced a similar situation as McCain. At a rally in Rochester, New Hampshire, a man in the audience stood up and simply stated that Muslims were “a problem in this country” and that “our current president is one.” Unlike McCain, Trump simply said “We need this question. This is the first question.” When the man went on, asking “when can we get rid of them?” Trump replied with “We’re going to be looking at a lot of different things” (Schleifer, 2015).

The theme of the Enemy, the Other, is common in political discourse, and was present for both McCain and Trump. Mainstream political actors have opponents to confront, but whereas opponents can be persuaded or overcome, Enemies are to annihilated. There is no coexistence with an existential Enemy. If he was to be coherent with his narrative in front of voters, Trump could not back down when asked to “get rid” of the Enemy he constructed. McCain, on the other hand, was operating under another discursive narrative, one in which Obama was an opponent, but not an existential threat, not an Enemy. While democracy tames

factionalism by imposing a system of checks and balances and minority rights, transforming it into pluralism, populism transforms democratic contestation into a Manichean opposition, a war between good and evil where pluralism has no place.

Method

The populist radicals are proponents of what is called identity politics, which relies on the opposition between an in-group and an out-group, an “us” and a “them,” a Manichean and moral division of the world between “good” and “bad.” Be it an ideology, a style of doing politics, a rhetorical style or a type of discourse, populism relies on a simple opposition – good versus bad, the people and the other. While the former has received attention in the literature, the latter has been largely ignored. But if populists create “the people,” they also create the Other. “Othering” is a key tool of constructing and reinforcing identity, “highly instrumentalized by populist and far-right parties and movements” (Kamenova and Pingaud, 2018, p. 114) with “the simplest yet most expressive example of emphasizing distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ seen in the slogans the parties use to express their attitudes: ‘Bulgaria for Bulgarians,’ ‘Austria for Austrians,’ ‘Finland for Finns.’”

On social media platforms populated by citizens of the United Kingdom, othering flourishes. The immigrant is here, like in the discourse of populists, a burden on social services, being always poorer than the British natives. Racism and obscenities mix in

and there is an even a hierarchy of Others established, according to which the Roma are placed in an inferior position to Romanians and Bulgarians, themselves lower than the British. “Meanings of contamination, parasite, burden and war” discourse metaphors are also present, proof of how populist speech becomes embedded in entrenched cognitive patterns (Fielder and Catalano, 2017). To counter populist othering, their opponents reframe the issue, from morality to rights and from security to responsibility and humanity, by tackling the core of the populist narrative – the enemy. That is how the #RefugeesWelcome campaign countered Nigel Farage, by arguing that giving a safe haven to those fleeing danger was the British thing to do (Aitamurto and Staikova, 2018). Reimagining the Other leads to reimagining the self.

Result and Discussion

Friends and Enemies

The Online Etymology Dictionary (2020) pinpoints the origin of the word “enemy” in the Latin “inimicus.” literally meaning “unfriend.” With Latin serving as the source, different linguistic branches sprung, like they usually do. As such, one finds the Old French “enemi” and the even earlier, 9th century French “inimi,” but also the Italian “nemico,” the Catalan “enamic,” the Spanish “enemigo” or the Portuguese “inimigo,” all formed by the literal joining of “not” and “friend.” In the English of circa 1300, “enemy” stood for “adversary to God” or “heathen.” A few centuries later, it stood for “member of a hostile body in a war.” The same source tells the reader that while English has

only one word to designate personal rivals and rivals in war, Greek, Latin and Russian have two separate words for “personal enemy” and “enemy in war.”

The word “friend,” by comparison, comes from the Old English “freond,” which itself comes from the Proto-Germanic “frijōjands,” and is similar to the Old Norse “frændi,” the Old Danish “frynt,” Old Frisian “friund,” Dutch “vriend,” Gothic “frijonds,” Middle High German “friunt,” and the modern-day German “Freund.”

The two terms, therefore, come from two very different places – one has Latin roots, and is common to Latin languages and peoples of the south of Europe, while the other is Germanic, Nordic. This difference by itself signals an opposition that has served as the basis of human relations through the ages, ever since the cavemen of the late Pleistocene found that one cave contained friends and kin, while the other contained enemies and strangers.

Villains, enemies, are a constant in human stories – “Ishtar from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Kali the Hindu goddess of death, the demonic Ro-langs in Tibetan culture, Hera and Cronos in Greek mythology, Pluto from the Roman tradition, the trickster in some Norse and Native American stories, Set in the Egyptian tradition, and Gaunab and Ardo from African traditions. Perhaps the most recognizable example in the Western tradition is Satan” (Weiner, Peaslee and Prettyman, 2020, p. 17). The critical importance of the “baddie” in any narrative can perhaps be seen with more ease in another medium – comic books and superhero movies. There, villains have fascinated, being “cathartic proxies”

and authentic points of reference for the reader, power-hungry and violence-prone deviants that disrupt the establishment – much like a populist aspires to do. Stereotypical heroes like Batman and Superman are great not because of their personality and qualities, but because they stand up against a host of such villains. In the *Supervillain Reader*, Jones (2020, p. 13) puts it explicitly,

“Do you want your story, your comic, your movie, your play—your whatever— to be infectious and addictive and engaging, to pull the reader or audience in by the face, leave them unable to stop turning the pages? Then build your antagonist like Satan, with grandiose schemes and a need to articulate them. Be sure to make that antagonist as devious as Moriarty, as driven as Thanos, as charismatic as Lex Luthor, and as slippery as Iago. After you’ve done that? Then sketch out your protagonist, your hero, and never forget that your protagonist isn’t the real main character here. Yes, heroes are the ones who will experience “change” through the struggle of the story; yes, they’re the ones whose shoulder we’re most often looking over; and yes, they’re the ones we want to pull through, to overcome. But what they’re overcoming? It’s all the obstacles thrown up by the antagonist, by the supervillain, who is the one actually charting the shape of the story.”

Enemy-making remained at the center of modern films, with Dracula, Nazis and various criminals and evil-doers and cheaters always appearing on the screen. For Soberon, creating and

embedding enemy archetypes in society amounts to no less than social control, “setting the parameters of normality and abnormality” and “telling us who to hate” (Soberon, 2020, p. 71). Telling one who to hate is also telling one who one *is*, by telling him who he is not. Through antagonistic divisions, meaning and identity is thus formed (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). These divisions have long been used in storytelling and cinema, where “by attempting to evoke a sense of threat, accentuate danger, demonize or dehumanize characters, [...] filmmakers have established and subsequently refined formal techniques, tropes, and conventions” (Soberon, 2020, p. 63) to create a successful villain. To do so, they play with what Soberon calls “promotions” (pity, admiration) and “conemotions” (anger, disgust, contempt), the villains being showered in the latter. Otherness and animosity are thus established in cinema in several stages of building opposition between the hero and the villain, and hero “cults and enemy images are among the most effective instruments with which the demagogue conditions people to accept war and endure injustices” (Hase and Lehmkuhl, 1997, p. 37).

The poststructuralist theory of identity holds that any form of identity, including – especially – the national one, is discursively constructed and reinforced. In the field of international relations, such identities “are always constructed against the difference of an Other. Identity is unthinkable without such a difference: it would make no sense to say ‘I am European’ if this did not imply a difference from being ‘Asian,’ ‘African’

or ‘American’” (Diez, 2004). It would not be an exaggeration to say that othering, the creation of the ‘enemy image’ has been at the core of nation-building, that without it such a process would not have been possible. The European identity has been, from the start, built upon the opposition between Christianity and Islam – and, as Diez points out, that same opposition is still present in certain political discourse today.

The friend-enemy duality can be found in the most impactful ideologies of history. After studying the Brazilian indigenous Mundurucu group, Robert Murphy published in 1957 a paper titled *Integrating hostility and social cohesion*, in which he noted that in the view of the Mundurucu the human world was populated either by “people,” meaning themselves, and *pariwat*, or non-Mundurucu humans, who were all enemies – with the exception of an allied tribe and white men. For the Mundurucu, enemies were not mere obstacles but targets to be attacked, raided. Defeating the *pariwat*, however, was an ongoing process to the Mundurucu, for they always had new enemies with whom to do war. Murphy concluded that this extreme aggression, which naturally transformed into the institution of warfare, “operated to preserve the integration and solidarity of Mundurucu society” (Murphy, 1957.) Enemies existed for the Mundurucu as a reason for unity, and without their enemies, there would have been no Mundurucu.

During the Great Terror of 1936-1938, Soviet leaders, Stalin in particular, carefully pieced together images of the enemy that fit the narratives created in

the 1920s. These enemies were traitorous, immoral, aggressive, and subhuman and “made the Terror psychologically acceptable on nationwide scale” (Dobrenko, 76). The Show Trials were an essential part of this, creating an enemy that embodied the fears of the Soviet citizens and as a result mobilized them. Stalin linked himself to “the people,” and cultivated an image of heir and caretaker to Lenin’s legacy, while those on trial were “predators,” “snakes,” “wolves,” and “rabid dogs.” Keen (1986) identifies no fewer than nine different images that Stalin constructed for his enemies: Enemy as Stranger; Greedy Enemy; Enemy as Terrorist and Conspirator; Omnipresent and covert enemy; Enemy as Traitor; Enemy as Beast; Enemy as Aggressor. Internal/External enemy; Enemy as Abstraction; Enemy as Unworthy Opponent. The same Soviet leaders portrayed the socialists and liberals of Western Europe as “social fascists” – only to portray them as natural allies against Nazi Germany after operation Barbarossa. After Hitler died in his Berlin bunker, the US became “chief devil” alongside the “Anglo-French plutocracies” (Laswell, 1951). Stalin’s enemies were especially malleable.

Similar to the Soviet communism, Italian fascism “defined itself against an array of internal and external enemies,” (Stone, 2012) first and foremost communists or Bolsheviks, labels which were used interchangeably. All left-wing opponents, from social democrats to anarchists, were also targeted, painted as “shirkers” and “cowards” who had betrayed Italy after WWI. In the fascist imagery, in posters and cartoons,

communism often appeared as a smashed hammer and sickle. Stone highlights the fact that fascism “depended upon polarization and a clear set of dichotomies: Nation/Anti-Nation, order/chaos, good/evil, and us/them,” simple antagonistic constructs that mobilized and justified violence. Demonization and hatred were only ramped up in the final days of the regime of Mussolini, just as the Eastern front was crumbling. Instead of the hammer and sickle, images of a disease-carrying Soviet commissar appeared. These were meant to signal that “this enemy bears a broad array of visual markers of degeneracy, criminality, and racial ‘otherness’” (Stone, 2012, p. 91). Deep-seated racism blended in with fear and hate, and the communists were portrayed as having a distinct physiognomy. They were a “degenerate race” of invaders identified by “broad faces, high foreheads, sunken eyes that are far apart, and protuberant noses” (Stone, 2012, p. 91). This is the existential enemy against whom the Italians were called to fight, one which was to be “hated for both immutable biological flaws and an immoral ideology.”

In the Nazi paranoid propaganda, the true aggressor was the Jew, portrayed in the regime’s imagery with yellow coloring, oversized ears, nose, lips and curly hair and a small beard, as opposed to the tall, blonde and leather-clad SS heroic defenders. So absorbed were the Nazis by their own imagined narrative that the “anti-Semitic agenda contributed to major blunders and eventually to the Allies’ ability to defeat the Nazis” (Herf, 2006, p. 6). For the Nazis, the “world Jewry” controlled the USSR, where “they camouflage themselves as Bolsheviks,”

while in Europe and the United States supposedly “they appear plutocratic and capitalist.” “Global Jewry,” according to the Nazis, was on the path to establishing world domination, if not for the opposition of Nazi Germany and its allies. Individuals like Samuel Irving Rosenman, FDR’s adviser and speech writer, held the true power, not the American president. In the same vein, organizations like the B’nai Brith and the American Jewish Congress and Committee controlled the United States entirely. According to Hitler, “Jewry is the driving element in all enemy states,” and “Western humanity” was in danger, as after every Soviet division were “Jewish liquidation commandos” (Hardy, 1967).

2016), and immigration the policy issue that can most easily mobilize ideas of identity and nationalism, but also economic concerns such as jobs and social services. Another enemy of the European far-right is “the system,” i.e. the political system of a given country but also the European Union itself, an avatar of multiculturalism, globalization, progressivism, even leftism, as well as the obstacle to regaining a supposed national In China, Communist leader Mao embedded the friend/enemy antagonism within class struggle. He organized “rhythmically pulsating political campaigns that intensified as the category of enemy was deepened and extended,” harnessing hate in order to produce revolutionary intensity (Dutton, 2019). Urbansky notes the “rhetoric of friendship” that dominated the Sino-Soviet border relations in the 1950s, but then poses a question – “how do you get a people that officially loved another

country as an ‘eternal brother’ just some years earlier to regard it as a threat and the people across the border as enemies?” (Urbansky, 2012, p. 257). The answer is simple, by revamping old enemy images that had already been cultivated in the Soviet Union in the 1920s against then-imperial China and Japan-occupied Manchuria.

If for the Soviets the “enemy” disappeared in 1949, with the foundation of the communist People’s Republic of China, it had only been due to a new official narrative, which rebranded a militarized, closed border as a “border of peace.” By 1969, however, relations had soured between the two countries and violent clashes happened on the border. Propaganda was of course used by both states, with newspapers, radio and television made to present the “enemy population” and to “erect or reactivate mental walls.” Beijing referred to its old “eternal brothers” as “the new tsars,” a charge that held particular weight for communist revolutionary regimes, while the Soviet propaganda claimed to be fighting against a “treacherous Maoist group” and “Mao’s clique.” For the Soviet leaders, the “struggle against Maoism” became the “struggle for a united world communist movement,” and they even created a documentary called *The Maoists’ Disastrous Course*, charging Mao with being the author of “political provocations, betrayal and countless victims” (Urbansky, 2012, p. 259).

Against this newfound – and old – foe, the Soviet propaganda created the image of the heroic border guard defending the motherland against an “enemy that lurked behind the border

with this increasingly alien country” (Urbansky, 2012, p. 266). The Soviet hero was itself a revamped image of the 1930s, when the same border guard was standing watch against Japan’s Manchukuo state. Thus the enemy became a friend, and then enemy again, and the same hero rose up to battle. As late as the 1980s, the Sino-Soviet relations were still dominated by the enemy images they had created for each other, despite their previous friendship and ideological proximity.

From its foundation, the United States created Others for itself: the Indian tribes that opposed settler expansionism, the colonial European powers, the British Empire, Mexico, the Kaiser’s Germany, Hitler’s Germany, the USSR and finally China and Russia. Internally, there was also an Other – the non-WASP “late comers,” non-white and protestant immigrants – and the African-Americans that did not enjoy the same rights as other Americans (Wang, 2017). Trump’s populism and the enemy it constructs, the illegal immigrants from Latin America and the Democratic and liberal establishment (plus the media) internally and China externally, is only more of the same. For many – if not all – populists, the media is also an enemy. Indeed, research suggests that populists restrict press freedom whenever they can (Kenny, 2019).

For Stein (1989), the American and Soviet relationship and representation of each other during the Cold War is proof that “the indispensable enemy is a recurrent feature of a group’s own internal self-regulation” and as long as “intragroup stability” is established through “intergroup hostility,” then

conflict will flourish. Such oppositions and even animosities become possible because one tends to blur distinctions when it comes to one’s own group, but to maximize them toward one’s adversaries – “we’ must not allow ourselves to feel that we have much, if anything, in common with our enemies,” ((Stein, 1989, p. 481) for this would blur the line between friend an enemy and dilute one’s identity, which is built in large part through this very opposition. To know who one is, one needs to know who one is not. One is American because he or she is not Russian, or Chinese, or Mexican and vice-versa.

Williamson, Skocpol and Coggie (2011, p. 32) note that members of the conservative Tea Party movement in the United States “define themselves as workers, in opposition to categories of non-workers they perceive as undeserving of government assistance.” The foundational antagonistic relationship of the Tea Party is between the workers and the “freeloaders” or the “people who don’t work,” the undeserving groups – also identified by racial and ethnic cues – that are out for “handouts.” It is this concern with the freeloaders that “underlie Tea Party opposition to government spending” and redistribution, perhaps the most readily identifiable ideological position of the Tea Party and the conservative movement at large, including the Republican Party, although degrees should be taken into consideration. Self-described libertarians and supporters of small government and the free market, Tea Partiers do not view government programs as intrinsically objectionable – they do so only when the inimical Other is introduced. Further

substantiating the claim that in this populist frame it is not “the people,” the self, who matters, but the Other, for the Tea Party “the distinction between workers and nonworkers is not necessarily linked to actually holding a job.” If “us” is fuzzily defined, the Enemy is not, as there are “only two groups of people unambiguously included in the “nonworking” population: young people and unauthorized immigrants” (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggie, 2011, p. 33). Like other populists, the Tea Partiers know who they are only by reference to who they are not.

Juan Peron, army general-turned-politician and president of Argentina in the ‘50s and ‘70s and one of the classic examples of populism, understood the division between friends and enemies well enough, and reinforced it discursively. This meant attacking the “oligarchy” and casting himself as a political outsider closer to the public, to whom he talked using simple language and references to famous myths and symbols (Rooduijn, 2014). Peron mobilized *los humildes* and *los descamisados* against the political establishment of Argentina, in line with how later populists would target mainstream parties, financiers, technocrats, immigrants and others “who are not like us,” giving cohesion to their movement. Pasquino notes that “this overwhelming attitude of hostility is inimical to the acquisition of the fundamental democratic quality that allows the recognition of adversaries or competitors, but not of mortal enemies” (Pasquino, 2008, p. 28).

There are also examples that are closer to the present. Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of The Front National from 1972 to 2011, opposed a mythically homogenous French people to “dangerous others” and the corrupt elite. He compounded establishment parties into a single unit, the “Gang of Four” that stood in opposition to the interests of the French people (Rooduijn, 2014).

Neo-fascists in Europe lost their enemy when the Berlin Wall fell – but newer far-right movements found another Other, an alien to Europe on racial, historical –for the Greek far-right populists in particular (Lazaridis and Tsagkorni, 2016) –, linguistic and religious grounds. Islam is the newest inimical Other for the Western European populists (Campani, sovereignty that was lost. Populism’s anti-system and anti-establishment rhetoric centers on the image of the “enemy above,” i.e. the government, the “bureaucrats,” “deep state” or “Brussels.” These elites do not simply pursue their own interests, according to the populists, but are part of a conspiracy to betray “ordinary people.” The betrayal theme appears in party manifestos, in press statements and speeches (Breeze, 2019). The AfD, for example, refers to the center-right CDU and the center-left SPD as “the old parties” or “the established ones,” parties ran by “career politicians.” Similarly, UKIP condemns the “arrogant” Westminster elite that put a “spin” to trick “honest people.” Moreover, both parties use an external enemy, the EU, in their narratives. In the same logic, the two parties also “devote attention to the armed forces,” the purported defenders in

the imaginary conflict with the external “others” and the internal “traitors” who wish “us” harm. UKIP, specifically, uses the possessive “our” when referring to the troops.

The fringe right is not the only side of the political spectrum in need of an inimical Other. In France, Riposte Laïque, a leftist coalition of women’s rights activists and former communists also found their enemy in the Muslim population (Benveniste and Pingaud, 2016). The Islamic enemy is helpful for “new alliances, new supports and ideological shifts,” movements that hark back to the French resistance, equating Islam to Nazism. The threat of Islam brings together the radical right and parts of the radical left all over Europe, with free speech advocates in liberal Denmark claiming the “right to offend and insult ‘the other.’” (Siim and Meret, 2016). Liberal values like gender equality and tolerance are turned against the inimical Muslim, transformed into marks of identity against an Other who supposedly lacks them, “the authoritarian, male-chauvinist and intolerant Muslims” (Siim and Meret, 2016, p. 124).

Eastern European instances of populism also require an inimical Other. In post-communism, the Slovenian populist far-right “found the new enemies in migrants, former Yugoslavs, Roma, Muslims, LGBT people, also leftwing intellectuals, communists and politicians who did not prioritize national interests” (Pajnik, Kubar and Sori, 2016, p. 139). The Slovenian populists crafted a narrative around their country’s independence, with “our people” in opposition to the Balkan peoples and other ethnicities, but also a list of other

enemies defined either by their sexual orientation, political orientation, creed or gender. The “homosexual threat” to “our nation” also transformed LGBT people into the inimical Other.

During the Ukrainian Maidan, the anti- and pro- camps “imagined their opponents in terms of half-human or completely inhuman abnormality in need of cure and/or eradication,” (Baysha, 2019) as pro-Russian, backward “vatniks” or, on the opposing part, as fascists. Both sides saw the opponents as “homogeneous entities instead of complex webs of relations characterized by contradictions and tensions,” a “social imaginary” that made violence preferable to negotiation.

The discourse of Bulgarian far-right populists is ripe with anti-Semitism, Jews being to blame for communism, the pains of the post-communist transition and for a global capitalist order that put Bulgaria low on the hierarchy of success. To this end, they rehabilitate Nazi and fascist symbolism (Kabakchieva, 2008).

Another enemy for Eastern European populists is Russia and the Russian minorities that may be present in the territory of their nation-state. Mudde (2007, p. 77) notes that such is the case in Estonia, Latvia and Poland, where “Russophobia extends far into the political mainstream as well” Conversely, populists in Serbia and Bulgaria see the West as the “enemy” and Russia as a “friend.” Western European populists, especially since 9/11, have found their Other and “enemy” in the person of Muslims, and islamophobia in the West, like Russophobia in Eastern Europe, can also be mainstreamed. The Roma population is also a facile target of

othering throughout Europe, less so from the part of most populist parties and politicians in the West, but from tabloid media and local political representatives.

More recent Western populists have their own particularities when it comes to the inimical Other. Johal (2020) describes how newer proponents of the far-right, like Steven Bannon in the US, echo Schmittian ideas of political strategies based on a de facto *friend-enemy* distinction. It is the right, then, that in times of crisis managed to promote “a distorted idea of political change *and* order simultaneously, and fomented anger and hysteria towards migrants, refugees, minorities and other vulnerable groups into a refined political project” (Johal, 2020, p. 98). In identity politics, the right has been more effective, while “the left, for its part, seems to be primarily focused on contesting cultural issues and policing political correctness,” (Fernandez-Alvarez, 2020, p. 143) unable to reap electoral victories.

Feldstein notes that on the right, the McCarthyite red hunt, Regan’s fight against liberals and the conservative campaign against political correctness are all part of a paranoid process by which “an internal menace [is] projected outward into a scapegoat that threatens social parameters reidentified as “us” versus “them.” But “us” cannot exist without “them,” and to obtain group coherence and identity – for the conservative movement in the United States is diverse, with certain groups hammering on about immigration, while others lay more stress on balancing budgets or individual liberty – the enemy has to be out there, even if he is to be as

weakly defined as the PC “enemy-as-academic.” McCarthy claimed to be standing against Marxism internally – the “pinko” – and externally, an enemy clearly defined, but later neoconservatives railed also against “the homosexual lobby,’ radical black militant organizations, and the drug-taking children of the ‘60s” (Feldstein, 1997, p. 15).

The Others

If the theory and the examples given above are to be useful concepts in an explanative effort, however, they need to be integrated in larger theoretical framework regarding the importance of the oppositional construct between “the people” and the enemy in populist thought. Three authors are crucial when doing so – Carl Schmitt, Cas Mudde and Ritchie Savage.

For Schmitt (1932), from whom ideas can be lifted only with greatest care, politics “can be reduced to that between friend and enemy,” and it is “the most intense and extreme antagonism.” These two concepts are not symbols or metaphors, Schmitt adds, but concrete and existential, “not mixed and weakened by economic, moral, and other conceptions.” The Other, the stranger, needs no other traits to become the Enemy, aside from the fact that conflict with him is conceivable. He does not have to have blacker skin, different eye color, a propensity towards evil or any other distinction. The other is the enemy because he exists. It is this real, inherent opposition between friend and enemy that liberalism has attempted to domesticate, Schmitt maintains, by transforming the inimical Other into an

economic competitor, a “debating adversary,” but which comes stalking back from the shadows each time. Even in daily speech, “all political concepts, images, and terms have a polemical meaning,” with words like “republic, society, class, as well as sovereignty, constitutional state, absolutism” and others being “incomprehensible if one does not know exactly who is to be affected, combated, refuted, or negated by such a term” (Schmitt, 2007, p. 31). “A completely pacified globe,” Schmitt (2007, p. 35) claims, “would be a world without the distinction of friend and enemy and hence a world without politics,” and as any political entity coexists alongside other political entities, this “presupposes the real existence of an enemy” for every group. It is this foundational political division of the world into friends and enemies, into “the people” and “the elite” or the immigrant, which is the bread and butter of populist movements for which the Other is a prime theme. Schmitt, a member of the dreaded Nazi party himself, is able to put into words the power of the friend-enemy oppositional construct.

Ernesto Laclau has been at the nexus of the discursive study of populism. For Laclau, populism is the logic of the political, and “the people” its center and subject, the pathway to renewing, radical transformations that cannot be separated from the political realm itself. In this way, “all politics is populism” (Moffitt and Torney, 2014, p. 384). Rehashing Laclau, however, Ritchie Savage (2018, p. 134) notes that

[...] the central signifier that anchors each instance of populist discourse

(and arrests the play of substitutions) is not so much a positive term, such as the “people,” which links together a series of democratic demands (rendered now as popular demands), but overwhelmingly negative conceptions of the “enemy” that represent the destruction of the democratic foundation of the “nation,” constructed through collective memory. Thus, the positive-laden signifiers, such as “people,” “nation,” and “revolution,” to which Laclau is repeatedly referring, are only invoked after a thorough explication of the role the “enemy” has played in dismantling the fabric of society.

Laclau’s discursive model is deficient, Savage maintains, because it focuses on the wrong construct – or signifier. It is the negative concept of the enemy that is at the heart of populism. Savage substantiates his argument by comparatively studying four different instances of populism: two of them from the immediate postwar period, namely Senator McCarthy in the United States and the party Acción Democrática (AD) in Venezuela, and two from the contemporary period – the Tea Party and Hugo Chavez. In each, he finds a common trope, that of the opposition, leading him to posit that a populist actor is one whose discourse contains “a symbolic structure that demonizes the ‘enemy’ as the disruption of the legacy traced to a glorified “founding moment”” and that such a discourse unites radically different instances of populism. Thus, for populists, positive concepts and terms, among which one can count “people,” “nation,” and “revolution,” serve only to explain the threat posed by the “enemy.”

The final author in the explanative trinity, Mudde (2007, p. 63) describes how the opposition between the people and the Other easily transforms into “a Schmittian friend-foe distinction in which the ‘Other’ is demonized,” where “the in-group is largely defined *ex negativo*, i.e. as the mirror image of the out-groups and their alleged characteristics. Consequently, a better understanding of the out-groups, or in the populist radical right’s thinking the ‘enemies,’ is crucial to getting a better understanding of the worldview of the populist radical right” (Mudde, 2007, p. 64).

Mudde argues that to understand populism, one needs to understand the “enemies.” He is essential in approaching the issue of the “enemy” for populists, as he creates a spatial typology of enemies based on their relation to the nation and the state: those within both the nation and the state (the “traitorous” elite but also sexual minorities); those outside of the nation but within the state (the ethnic minority or the immigrant community); those within the nation but outside the state (the rarest type of enemy, countrymen that moved abroad, usually artists or intellectuals or countrymen that were left outside of the nation-state when the borders were drawn and who are now suspect); and finally those outside both the nation and the state, the truly external, alien enemy (the former occupier or threatening neighbor, EU and UN).

The populist radical right, Mudde (2007, p. 78) finds, is concentrated on – but not limited to – three enemies: the Jew, the “personification of modernity,” the Rom, “the barbarian” against whom

the in-group’s own modernity is stressed, and the Muslim, who “also a barbarian, although she or he is more clearly linked to modernity.” If the latter two groups are threatening due to their numbers, the Jew is portrayed as a cunning Other, the financier that controls others – sometimes the immigrants – and conspires for the downfall of the in-group, be that group Hungarian, French, British, German and so on. Mudde (2007, p. 89) concludes, citing Schmitt, that populists “divide the world into friends and foes on the basis of the three key features of their ideology: nativism, populism, and, to a lesser extent, authoritarianism. In most cases, while attention is paid primarily to enemies within the state, but outside of the nation (notably immigrants and indigenous minorities), the biggest threat is often ascribed to the enemies within the state and within the nation (i.e. the corrupt and traitorous elites).” The same “politics of fear” that populists disseminate are used in terrorist and antiterrorist campaigns, and “much of the official discourse on issues such as crime and immigration is based on a politics of fear” (Furedi, 2005). For the populists, the inimical other “functions in defining the in-group *ex negativo*. For example, the description of some enemies as primitive (e.g. Muslim and Roma) helps to define the ingroup as advanced and modern. Similarly, the targeting of criminal enemies (e.g. elites, dealers, immigrants, Roma) indirectly says that the ingroup is honest. The identification of parasitic enemies (e.g. Roma) proclaims the ingroup as hard-working and social. In this way, the enemies provide implicit

and intuitive substance to an otherwise vaguely defined ‘nativeness.’”

Conclusion

Human interaction is today a complex affair. More often than not, one has to employ electronic devices to reach another person. There are standardized, institutionalized – rule-based – ways in which one is to be addressed or the topics that one needs to avoid, circumstances of which to take account, and that is without the added complexity of interacting with more than one person at a time. Humanity has come a long way from the Socratic circle.

Political interaction is not an exception. Mature democratic regimes have brought stability, security, impartiality and prosperity, but also a standardized kind of political persona. Pressed to recall differences in beliefs and policies between politician A and politician B, the average voter would be at a loss. That is, of course, unless B is a populist. If that is the case, B can be revolting or courageous, racist or truthful, authoritarian or looking out for the common man, a bully or a strong leader, funny or terrifying – and many others. How can a single person, even a politician, be described in such contradictory terms?

It is because for some, populists are heroes, victims and leaders, while for others they are villains, criminals and deceivers. If the differences in policies between two moderates – in US, a moderate Republican and a moderate Democrat – are difficult to spot, the distinction between Donald Trump and Barack Obama are glaring even for the sparsely informed. So are the differences between Trump and John McCain. It is

such oppositions, acted out in fiery tweets, ingenious clap-backs and memes that excite people of mature democracies. The rise of the populist is the downfall of the democrat, the centrist, the moderate.

As this article showed, the populist political self can be constructed only in opposition to an inimical Other. A certain population can be constructed as hard-working or modern only through opposition to another group. During the 2017 French presidential elections, far-right candidate and populist Marine Le Pen asked for the backing of the LGBT community, arguing that she would protect them against supposed future Muslim violence. In effect, Le Pen was appealing to French tolerance, but by referencing the lack of tolerance of Islamic radicalism. She was telling the voters who she is – and who they are – by constructing her Enemy. Examples abound, and one has only to look for them once it becomes clear that the inimical Other, not “the people,” is the most important component of populist discourse.

Of immense importance in the process of studying populist actors, Laclau (2005) sees populism as an ontological phenomenon defined as by political and discursive practices that aggregate demands to give shape to an identity. As this paper has shown, however, populism constructs “the people” by referring to an inimical Other – and not the other way around. “The people” could not be an aggregation of demands in the absence of an elite or group against whom demands could be made. It is not Trump’s appeals to make America great again or Farage’s bar adventures and evocation of “Britishness”

that make them populists, it is the Enemies they conjure. Implied is that America was great when Others were small, and that it is the foreignness of Europe against which Britishness manifests.

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