"Introduction: imagining populism and the people in Europe"

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ABSTRACT

This volume was intended as an exploration of the new political order arising in Europe and its immediate neighbours in the wake of the crisis of 2008, with a particular focus on the way 'the people' is being represented in the discourses of parties that challenge the established order. The range of countries covered – United Kingdom, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Romania, Hungary, Germany, Turkey – serves as evidence of the way in which 'the people' is indeed a central point in current debates, acting to anchor identities and project antagonisms in a multitude of settings, and thereby fixing a political logic that is driven by an up/ down opposition between the elite and the people. These chapters examine the extent to which this focus is unique to so-called 'populist' parties, and explore the degree of commonality in people-centred discourses across (or at both ends of) the political spectrum, questions that most previous accounts equating claims to stand for 'the people' with radical politics on the right or left have failed to account for satisfactorily. This book thus represents an attempt to revisit the issue of populist discourse in the context of cases emerging across today's fraught European landscape. The range of methodologies applied, and the tensions between different analytical approaches and different understandings of populism, make this volume a stimulating contribution to current debates.

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Introduction

Imagining populism and the peoples of Europe

Jan Zienkowski and Ruth Breeze

The political landscape in Europe is going through a time of rapid change. Established political parties and ways of doing politics are being challenged by a multitude of new movements and players that claim to articulate the will of the people. Opponents of these movements often use the label of populism in order to disqualify these actors and projects. Whereas some actors reject this imposed label outright, others embrace it as a name connoting real or proper democracy as opposed to what they see as a decadent or corrupt mode of politics pursued by politically correct elites.

As populism has become a common term in contemporary political debates it has also generated wide academic interest (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013; Moffitt 2016; Aalberg et al. 2017; Laclau 2005; Wodak 2015; Yilmaz 2012). In the public sphere at large as well as in the confines of the tiny corner called academia, debates about populism abound (Stavrakakis 2017: 523; see Chapters 1 and 2, this volume). These debates often become needlessly convoluted as the signifier populism is deployed alternately – and sometimes simultaneously – as a descriptive or analytical term, as an insult or disqualification and/or as a democratic value to be pursued. The fact that the label is being deployed in order to designate ideological projects across the political spectrum does not make things easier from an analytical point of view. For instance, the anti-Islamic anti-immigration discourses of Trump in the US, PEGIDA in Germany or Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands have little in common with the projects of Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain or Nuit Debout in France. Whether such parties and movements are to be labelled populist is not only an academic question, it is a question that is part and parcel of the debate itself.

It is therefore imperative for discourse scholars to disentangle themselves from this conceptual and linguistic confusion and to take an analytical view of what these parties are actually claiming, how these claims involve appeals to

"the people", and how their different political styles and stances really coincide or overlap. Moreover, the category of populism itself cannot be used in an unreflexive manner as social-scientific analytic uses of this term may or may not overlap with the way this category is used in everyday political language.

This volume brings together a collection of analyses that focus on the core issue of populism, namely, the question how 'the people' can be imagined, constructed and interpellated in political projects that aim to mobilize majority populations with programs of radical change in opposition to supposedly minority and/or elite interests. The authors contributing to this volume base their analyses on textual and discursive evidence from a wide variety of sources within Europe and its nearest neighbors. The analyses on display rely on overlapping and diverging theoretical and methodological approaches in the fields of discourse studies and populism studies. They range from macro-analytical discursive analyses focusing on the large-scale interpretive logics structuring contemporary discourse to micro-analytic linguistic analyses focusing on the grammatic and lexical choices made by actors engaging in 'populist' rhetoric. This volume also contains contributions seeking to approach populism in a hybrid manner by analyzing the way large-scale interpretive patterns crystallize in empirically observable patterns that can be discerned with a more linguistically and/or textually oriented toolbox. As a whole then, this book presents a hybrid collection of articles that rely on largely compatible but distinct disciplinary, theoretical and methodological frameworks, that offer a prismatic view of varieties in populist rhetoric within Europe and Europe's immediate vicinity.

In what follows, we will explain our understanding of the nexus between political populism(s) and representations of the people and outline the thinking that underlies our choice of contributions.

First of all, it is essential to avoid the un-reflexive adoption of a strictly pejorative definition of populism. As Stavrakakis argues, it is extremely important not to reify populism, and to avoid equating populism with the "irrational, unthinkable, abnormal, even monstrous" (Stavrakakis 2017: 525). As he points out, we do not merely need to analyze populism, we also need to understand talk about populism, both within and outside of academia, and this requires a reflexive attitude (Stavrakakis 2017: 526). According to Stavrakakis, there is an "emancipatory potential" within "certain populist discourses in representing excluded groups and facilitating social incorporation against oppressive and unaccountable power structures". At the same time, it is important that one "remains alert to the fact that, due to the irreducible *impurity* of every relation of representation, due to the sliding capacity of signification, even genuine popular grievances and demands can end up being represented by illiberal and anti-democratic forces or becoming hostages of authoritarian institutional dynamics" (Stavrakakis 2017: 528–529).

Even though there is certainly no consensus over the definition of populism – either within or outside of academia – there is an interdisciplinary consensus that populism involves a systematic appeal and interpellation of 'the people' through the construction of a supposedly homogeneous will and identity of a group linked to a particular region and/or nation, by means of a strategic exploitation of selected ethnic and socioeconomic criteria. As we will see, not all authors consider mere appeals to the people a sufficient reason to label a particular political project as 'populist', but this homogenizing tendency, and the projection of some form of antagonistic opposition ('the enemies of the people') is nevertheless a recurring element in populist projects (Moffitt 2016). In short, although all politicians and parties try to attract supporters and build solidarity by making rhetorical claims to represent 'people', political projects are frequently called populist when they claim to embody and express the homogeneous will of 'the people' while opposing this will to an antagonistic 'other', which usually includes some kind of 'elite'.

Nevertheless, those who seek to understand the recent rise of populisms across the globe need to come to terms with the fact that in spite of many similarities, no two populisms are completely alike. There is no such thing as a prototypical populism. Rather, we seem to be dealing with a series of political discourses (Wodak 2015), styles and performances (Moffitt 2016; 2015; Moffitt and Tormey 2014; Krzyżanowski and Ledin 2017), strategies and logics (Laclau 2005; De Cleen and Carpentier 2010; see Chapter 1, this volume) that share a series of family resemblances. Regional differences exist with respect to these 'populisms' as well as with respect to the connotations the term 'populism' has acquired over time. Differences can be observed in the way populism is understood and practiced in the US, Latin America, Asia and Europe. But as this volume demonstrates, even within Europe the category of populism covers a wide range of projects that are often at odds with each other.

Here, we will be concerned first and foremost with current European manifestations of and debates on populism. It is fair to say that in Europe, left-wing populist projects have traditionally received less academic attention than right-wing projects, and left-wing political discourse has seldom been analyzed under the header of populism. This is not to say that the distinction between inclusionary and exclusionary types of populism overlaps with the distinction between a Latin American (left-wing) and a European (extreme right-wing) model (Stavrakakis 2017: 530). Many people active in projects such as that of Podemos have embraced the term populism in order to revindicate this notion for left-wing purposes. It should also be noticed that the signifier populism tends to be connoted differently by political actors in the South and in the North-East of Europe. Whereas radical left-wing actors in countries such as Spain frequently equate populism and democracy with participatory and emancipatory modes of politics (see Chapters 3

and 5, this volume), left-wing thinkers in the North of Europe tend to use the term to mean the opposite. But as the article by Óscar García Agustín demonstrates (see Chapter 6, this volume), even within Northern Europe we find left-wing articulations of the populist logic. Most Anglophone critical discourse analysts refer to racist and anti-migration right-wing political projects when writing about populism (e.g. Wodak 2015). But as this volume shows, more and more scholars of populist discourse are turning their attention to left-wing (re-) articulations, constructions and interpellations of the people and its will.

Not only is the notion of populism a site and object of ideological struggle. The same goes for the notion of 'people'. People-related signifiers have inherited many country and language specific connotations that complicate debates about populism further. All democratic modes of politics need to address the people living in a particular constituency to construct a demos and to let it shape the public realm, its identities, practices and institutions. If the notion of populism is to bear any analytic weight, we need not only to specify what sort of projects may be labeled populist, we also need to answer the question how they may be distinguished from other modes of politics. Based on the studies collected in this volume, the construction of antagonistic political relationships that comes with many contemporary appeals to the people may be one of the most compelling arguments for keeping the concept of populism in spite of the complexities of its use in academic and political discourse.

Comparative studies are needed in order to find commonalities and differences in the way the label of populism is used, as well as in the ways in which the people is being addressed and interpellated in contemporary politics. However, comparative discourse studies of populist projects across the ideological and international spectrum are relatively rare. We are therefore glad to provide a volume containing articles that highlight and explain the different ways in which notions such as 'people' and 'populism' are used across a variety of national contexts.

This volume contains articles that problematize and analyze both the label of 'populism' and the notion of the 'people' in a variety of European contexts from a wide variety of different discourse analytical and discourse theoretical perspectives. Considering the fact that the meanings of signifiers such as 'people' and 'populism' emerge through complex articulatory practices that should always be studied *in situ*, taking different layers of linguistic, interactional, social, historical, economic and political context into account, the authors in this book argue either that a single definition of populism will not do, or that the definition proposed should be flexible enough to account for the different forms populist projects may take. With the exception of the theoretical chapter provided by Benjamin De Cleen, all chapters included in this volume provide case studies of the way the people(s) of Europe and/or the notion of populism are imagined in a variety of political projects.

De Cleen's chapter offers an overview of the theoretical field of populism studies and an argument for studying populism as a discursive and political *logic* (see also Glynos and Howarth 2007). In Chapter 1, De Cleen reminds us that no two populisms or images of the people are completely alike and argues in favor of an understanding of populism as a political logic. He agrees with Laclau that the populist logic implies the construction of a down-up opposition between a people and an elite whose identities are mutually constitutive. However, he also suggests that more attention needs to be paid to the particular ways in which this opposition is being constructed if we are to acknowledge populism in its complex diversity. For him, populism is not to be equated with *the* political logic as Laclau suggests in his later works. Rather, we are dealing with *a particular* political logic as suggested in Laclau's earlier work and as suggested by contemporary Essex style discourse theorists (see Chapter 1, this volume).

De Cleen reminds us that the mere presence of the signifier 'people' is not a sufficient reason to distinguish populism from other political discourses. Liberal, communist, green and nationalist political projects all refer to the people on a regular basis. Instead of thinking about populism in binary terms by asking whether a particular political project or discourse is populist or not, we should ask to what extent a particular project is articulated with and within a populist logic. The question of populism then becomes a question of degree: to what extent is the identity and will of the people (re-)articulated through a discourse marked by a populist logic? De Cleen makes his point as follows: "the definition [of populism] proposed here considers only politics that revolve around the construction of a political frontier along the down/up, powerless/powerful axis as populist. The construction of a political frontier between a nationally defined 'people' and its outside for example is not in itself populist" (see Chapter 1, this volume). De Cleen's understanding of populism has implications for the way in which the signifier 'the people' needs to be studied in the field of discourse studies. Rather than assuming that the meaning of 'the people' is stable across all varieties of populism, we need to investigate empirically how this notion is articulated with elements from other political projects in complex and varying ways.

Several of the authors in this volume take a Laclauian perspective on populist discourse, but interestingly, they apply this perspective to different degrees, on different levels of analysis, using different methodological approaches. As de Cleen explains, Laclau proposed an understanding of populism as a political logic and even as the essence of the political itself (Laclau 2005).

In order to understand the different articulations and modes of populism within Europe while taking the shifting meanings of the label 'populism' into account, it is useful to consider populism as a communicative style, as a performative strategy, and even as a mode of politics with a logic of its own. In this edited volume,

we want to shed light on the surprisingly different ways in which the populist logic can manifest itself. For instance, in her analysis of the way the Turkish AKP has imagined and constituted the 'millet' or people since its inception, Hariye Özen argues that we are dealing with a form of Islamic conservativism infused by a decidedly populist logic (see Chapter 4, this volume). Wodak and Krzyżanowski describe right wing populism as "a hybrid political ideology that rejects the post-war political consensus and usually, though not always, combines laissez-faire liberalism and anti-elitism with other, often profoundly different and contradictory ideologies". They consider such ideologies to be populist because of their "appeal to the 'common man/woman', as to a quasi homogeneous people, defined in an ethno-nationalist way" (Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017: 475). Whereas this definition of populism accurately captures key features of many right-wing populist projects, hybridity itself is a feature shared by all forms of populism, and upon closer examination, by all forms of ideological discourse, a point raised explicitly by De Cleen and exemplified by several other authors contributing to this volume.

With some notable exceptions (see Chapter 1 and 2, this volume), most authors in this collection focus on 'the people' rather than on (debates about) populism as such. This focus on signifiers such as *de mensen* (Dutch), *das Volk* or *die Menschen* (German) or *la gente* (Spanish) allows for a cross-European and cross-linguistic perspective, sidestepping some of the inconclusive arguments that beset studies of what populism might mean in terms of policy or ideology. Taken together, the articles in this volume show how these signifiers are being articulated with different identities, concepts, practices and performances in different political contexts, thus exemplifying the contingency, agility and adaptability of populist discourse. The authors also focus on how friends, allies, adversaries and opponents of the people are being constructed. This volume allows us to address the question as to what this variety of articulatory practices tells us about the dynamics of democratic and/or populist politics within Europe and at its borders.

It is useful to shed some more light on the diversity of perspectives taken in this volume. The authors who contributed to this volume agree that the people-elite distinction is key to any definition of populism, but not all of them understand populism in exactly the same way or believe that this is the only criterion at play. Neither do they analyze their data – discourses about the people and/or populism – from the same disciplinary and theoretical point of view. As such, the collection provided here exemplifies convergences as well as divergences in the contemporary field of populism studies. Among the convergences it is possible to distinguish a tendency to refer to an emerging canon of populism studies. Authors such as Mudde and Laclau are frequently cited even though their understandings of populism may be operationalized in rather different ways (see Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013; Laclau 2005). The diversity in disciplinary, theoretical and

methodological takes on 'populist discourse' as well as on discourse about the peoples of Europe not only reflects the heterogeneity of the field of populism studies, it also exemplifies the transdisciplinary complexity of the field of discourse studies.

The field of discourse studies is emerging out of a convergence of multiple disciplines and schools with partially overlapping interests regarding issues of power, knowledge, subjectivity, context, language use, practice and reflexivity. It is not our intention to provide a mapping of this complex movement here. Such mappings exist elsewhere (see Angermuller, Maingueneau, and Wodak 2014; Angermuller 2014). Nevertheless, it is useful to consider how the way in which populism is understood by the authors contributing to this volume reflects key disciplinary, theoretical and methodological assumptions regarding discourse. Broadly speaking, the field of discourse studies emerges out of a partial convergence of discourse theory and discourse analysis. Whereas discourse theoretical approaches tend to reflect on the way knowledge, power, subjectivity, reflexivity and critique are shaped in and through discourse, discourse analytical perspectives focus more on discourse as a cover term for heterogeneous and contextualized linguistic – and sometimes multimodal – practices that should always be studied *in situ*. Discourse theory is thereby frequently considered to be a denominator for more abstract approaches to discourse popular in political science, macro sociology, history and philosophy. Discourse analysis is usually associated with approaches such as conversation analysis, linguistic pragmatics, linguistic ethnography, as well as with a variety of approaches in critical discourse analysis (see Angermuller, Maingueneau, and Wodak 2014; Angermuller 2014; Zienkowski 2017b).

It may be said that discourse analytical perspectives gravitate more to meso and micro perspectives on discourse, focusing on situated interactions and texts as well as on the way these draw on wider ideological and hegemonic structures, whereas discourse theories take a more macro perspective in order to shed light on large-scale patterns in a society's structures of knowledge, power, subjectivity, ideology and hegemony. However, such a distinction is far too simplifying and bypasses the fact that even the most micro-oriented perspectives on discourse do have a theoretical basis with implicit and explicit assumptions about social actors, communication and social reality at large. At the same time, discourse theorists frequently engage in analytical practices by examining concrete texts, imagery and practices, even though they may often be less explicit about the heuristic and methodological procedures taken. In this light, it should be noticed that as the dialogue developing between discourse theoretically and discourse analytically oriented scholars unfolds, more and more transdisciplinary theoretical and methodological cross-overs take place. In this volume, for instance, we encounter discourse theoretical and discourse analytical insights in order to provide a grounded and theoretically astute approach to the way signifiers such as 'people'

and 'populism' are being imagined across Europe's public spheres. This is not to say that every article integrates linguistic and non-linguistic insights into discourse to the same degree. Whereas some authors are clearly to be located on either end of the continuum between discourse theory and analysis, others engage in elaborate attempts to integrate both perspectives.

The authors in this volume frequently combine different approaches to discourse and populism in order to come to grips with the topic and with the data under discussion. Since not all authors rely on the same sources this leads to different understandings of populism that overlap and diverge in varying degrees. We consider this partial heterogeneity to be instructive as well as problematic in a productive sense of the word. It is problematic because of a key difficulty with populism research: the fact that the signifier populism – like its focal concept, 'the people' – is decidedly empty and has become a major object and stake of contemporary political struggles (Laclau 1994). Like every politicized and abstract signifier, the category of populism operates as a value (Zienkowski 2017a). The notion is valorized positively by some and negatively by others. As a result, it is being associated with a wide range of discursively constructed actors and practices across the political spectrum.

An exemplification of the way populism operates as a Laclauian political logic is provided by Borriello and Mazzolini who see populism as a politicizing alternative to the depoliticizing tendencies of neoliberal governance and governmentality. For them, the rise of the Italian *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S) and the rise of *Podemos* in Spain "epitomise the populist logic as Ernesto Laclau has defined it, namely as a mode of construction of the political – which involves the dichotomization of the social space through the construction of a common enemy – rather than as a specific ideology or rhetoric" (see Chapter 3, this volume). To say that populism is a discursive *logic* is to say that it is a political rationality or structure that can manifest itself through widely diverging semiotic forms. A political logic structures the relationships between subject positions, statements, practices, identities and institutions in a non-arbitrary but contingent way. It partially fixes meanings in a way that allows people to make sense of themselves and of the world they live in.

Not only the signifier 'the people' and understandings of 'populism' differ across Europe's political contexts. The same goes for the specific forms the logic of populism takes in a particular discourse. The paper by Borriello and Mazzolini explicitly reflects on this issue by tracing the populist political logic in the discourses of Podemos and the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S) while reflecting on the similarities and differences between these two political projects. They ask themselves explicitly if we are dealing with two examples of the same phenomenon, answering this question positively by pointing out that both projects represent populist

counter-discourses that position themselves antagonistically in opposition to a neoliberal hegemonic order with post-political pretensions. At the same time however, they point out that "Podemos and M5S display strong differences with regard to the specificities of their national context, their ideological background, the identity of the new political subject they attempt to shape, as well as their strategy and organisational structure, which could prove to be decisive when it comes to building an alternative to the hegemonic order they challenge" (see Chapter 3, this volume). In alignment with De Cleen, they conclude that "it is precisely in the articulation of a populist logic with a new hegemonic horizon where the key to these political movements' outcome lies" (see Chapter 3, this volume).

The paper by Montesano Montessori and Morales-López provides an in-depth analysis of the way Spanish left-wing party Podemos articulates notions such as *gente* (people), *pueblo* (people/village) and *patria* (homeland) into its populist strategy. Drawing – partially – on Laclau and other Essex discourse theorists, they seek to identify the political logics of equivalence and difference at play by focusing on figures of speech such as synecdoche and metaphor. Combining a textually grounded analysis with poststructuralist discourse theory and narrative analysis, they show how Podemos "created a counterhegemonic narrative based on the demands and interpretations of 15M, in which it decodes the discourses and practices of the traditional parties and recodes and enacts those of the new politics while claiming the need to reverse the power structures in a desired opposite direction (bottom up and from the periphery to the centre)" (see Chapter 5, this volume). This analysis thus provides an interesting counterweight for those authors who consider populist discourse to be an exclusively right-wing phenomenon and shows how Laclauian theory can be applied to European 'new left' parties.

De Cleen warns against academic attempts that aim to define populism once and for all. Degano and Sicurella's paper demonstrates that debates on populism are not limited to the confines of academia and that the debate about populism as conducted in newspapers is equally – if not more – tantalizing in its vagueness. The authors argue that "a full understanding of the dynamics and impact of populism requires investigating not only the contents of populist rhetoric, but also how populism itself and populist identities are framed, evaluated and represented in the public sphere" (see Chapter 2, this volume). In order to provide such a much-needed account, they analyze the commentaries on populism elicited around Brexit in the UK and Italian press in 2016 newspaper opinion pieces. By focusing on the use of the term populism in these articles, they aim to answer the question to what extent such articles contribute to an open and constructive dialogue on populism and issues considered to be populist. They are worried that "if no space of dialogue is opened at all, the people who share some of the key concerns leveraged by populist political discourse might feel excluded from the 'official' debate,

and thus become more receptive (or vulnerable) to radical populist propaganda" (see Chapter 2, this volume). This concern testifies to a more consensus-oriented normative stance towards the public sphere than the one taken by authors who ground their understanding of populism in conflict-oriented perspectives such as those of the post-Marxist account of the public sphere advocated by Laclau.

Degano and Sicurella operationalize the notion of dialogical space where the notion of populism can – in principle – be negotiated. Their analysis shows that most commentators do not work with explicit definitions of the term and that the meaning of the concept is mostly "'defined' by the company it keeps, through semantic prosody or through the effects deriving from 'populist' decisions or actions, so that a definition of sorts can only be inferred on the basis of evaluative elements connected with the concept" (see Chapter 2, this volume). They therefore conduct an analysis that seeks to identify different definitional clusters in order to come to grips with editorialists' use of the term. Such clusters include: populism as a threat; populism as identity politics; and populism as a reaction to justified grievances. They then proceed to examine the space for dialogic heteroglossia questioning to what extent the editorials broaden or narrow the space for a dialogue on the meaning and legitimacy of populism and the meaning of 'populism' itself. Through a detailed analysis of the different ways in which commentators define, evaluate and discuss populism, they conclude that "in terms of dialogicity the situation is best described as one of entrenchment, with each party focusing on reiterating its own standpoints rather than on challenging the assumptions made by the opponent" in the Italian sample (see Chapter 2, this volume). In the UK sample, they distinguish a "greater willingness than in Italian newspapers to discuss the merits of views antithetical to one's own, thus expanding to a certain extent the dialogical space" (see Chapter 2, this volume). These differences are noteworthy, and regardless of the normative and political lessons one may or may not draw from this observation, it is worth taking such differences in public discourse into account when studying populist phenomena across Europe.

One of the chapters that may shake us out of our established comfort zone when thinking about the different forms that populism may take is the paper by Hariye M. Özen. Like the first three authors discussed above, Özen draws on Laclau's understanding of discourse in her analysis of the Turkish AKP as a manifestation of Islamic conservative populism in Turkey. In addition to her insightful analysis of the way the AKP has embraced a populist logic, Özen makes at least two important points. Firstly, she shows that the AKP's embrace of a populist logic does not mean that its 'populist' discourse has always remained the same. She shows how a single political actor's populism may change over time by arguing that the AKP moved from a democratic to an anti-democratic mode of populism. She states that "populism may assume highly different forms depending on the

changes within its content, that is, the way the people and power categories are discursively constructed" (see Chapter 4, this volume). Taking this principle seriously, she engages in an analysis of the way the AKP initially used the signifier *millet* (people) that crystallized a series of political demands of heterogeneous social groups into an equivalential chain. According to her, the AKP's discourse was initially agonistic regarding the powers-that-be. As the AKP failed to fulfil its democratic promise it would gradually attempt to retain the loyalty of its conservative and religious electorate, progressively reserving the signifier *millet* for these groups alone: "the reconstitution of the people in a narrow way to signify Islamic/conservative segments was simultaneously accompanied by the reconstitution of the power or the common enemy, which became any entity who was not with the AKP" (see Chapter 4, this volume). Özen demonstrates how a single political project's populist logic may evolve from a democratic to an anti-democratic mode of politics – an observation that complicates an all-too-easy distinction between left and right-wing modes of populism.

Even though many European critical discourse analysts have long tended to equate populism with exclusively right-wing forms associated with xenophobia, racism and extremism, there is an increasing awareness of the fact that the populist logic can also be deployed by political actors that find themselves elsewhere in the ideological spectrum. This can be exemplified with reference to the paper by Óscar García Agustín who analyses an attempt to deploy a populist strategy by the Danish left-wing Red-Green Alliance (RGA). He focuses specifically on the way this party articulates elements of socialist and populist discourse, exploring the implications for the way it aims to constitute a new inclusive collective subject named 'community' that is always in-the-making as a counterweight to antagonistic elites. García Agustín points out how difficult it can be to construct a strong 'us' or 'people' in a way that can include a broad range of groups including unemployed citizens and refugees. According to him, the way the RGA defines the antagonistic camp is more clearly delineated than the new collective subject it proposes. García Agustín argues that we are dealing with a hybrid attempt at populism that is haunted by several difficulties including its ambiguous relation towards social democracy and its relationship towards nationalism. He points out that "all parties, from left to right, participate in the nationalist framework, which the Danish People's Party has made hegemonic" and that the search for an alternative framework remains a challenge, also for the progressive and inclusive project of the RGA (see Chapter 6, this volume).

The article by Andreas Önnerfors draws our attention to the fact that all forms of populism are historically grounded in highly specific contexts of social and political development. He does so by examining the discourse of the German PEGIDA movement tracing its emergence back to the GDR citizen movement and

to the idea of resistance against a dictatorial system still awaiting final redemption. He shows how this movement presents itself as the only legitimate representative of a German *Volk* (people) threatened by "a toxic combination of evil-minded domestic elites and trans-national migration" (see Chapter 7, this volume). He then proceeds to connect the linguistic and performative strategies of PEGIDA with the ideas circulating in the European New Right networks. As such, he demonstrates how historical contextualizations of populist projects can contribute to a better understanding of the specific directions in which specific populisms develop. He draws our attention to the fact that all too formalistic approaches to populism based on the people-elite distinction should not make us lose track of the fact that any ideology and any form of populism is always much richer than abstract models suggest. One important lesson to be drawn here is that to understand an ideology is to understand its history.

The paper by Naomi Truan provides sound empirical support for De Cleen's argument that mere mentions of the signifier 'people' in political discourse alone are not enough to distinguish populist from other political projects. Comparing the different ways in which 'the people' is articulated in German, French, and British parliamentary debates by means of a cross-linguistic corpus analysis, she raises the question to what extent people-related signifiers in different languages (e.g. *people* (English), *peuple* (French) and *Volk* (German)) can be treated as being equivalent to each other. To begin with, she points out that the lexeme *Volk* in contemporary German political discourse is underused in comparison with the relatively common *people* and *peuple*. Both of these terms are used commonly by parties across the political spectrum in the UK and in France respectively. Referring to Retterath (2016), Truan points out that as an alternative to *Volk*, German talk about the people takes the form of 'fellow citizens', 'people all over the country', ungendered phrases such as 'the ordinary person' or gendered individualized phrases such as 'the Swabian housewife', the 'nurse' and so on (see Chapter 8, this volume). The papers by Andreas Önnerfors and Miguel Ayerbe Linares provide some historical context for the historically particular (non-) use of the German label *Volk* (see Chapters 7 and 11, this volume).

Truan's paper argues that *Volk*, *peuple* and *people* are not simple equivalents in the contemporary political landscape and asks whether this implies that all or none of the speakers who use these terms should be considered populist. In the same vein, she suggests that one has to ask whether the attempt by the French far left to connect to the people by calling for referendums also constitutes a populist stance. Essex style authors would answer that the mere use of people-related signifiers is not a sufficient condition to identify the operation of a populist logic. However, this observation aside, this paper clearly demonstrates the importance of the specific ways that discursive and lexical choices carve out social meaning

and serves as a warning to anyone who naively believes political discourse to consist of elements that can be translated unproblematically and unreflexively into other languages and exported to other contexts of use. The paper shows clearly that not only 'populism' but also the notion of 'people' itself is a site of struggle, "a discursive construct subject to controversy and metadiscourse" (see Chapter 8, this volume).

Samuel Bennett's paper focuses on the way the UK Independence Party (UKIP) constructed the people during the 2016 Brexit referendum campaign via the official UKIP Twitter account. Considering populism in terms of a repertoire of performative, linguistic and non-verbal strategies aiming to mobilize a population, he combines the Laclauian concept of the 'nodal point' that fixes meaning with a discourse analytical approach based on CDA. He argues convincingly that the centrality of 'the people' is what distinguishes populist discourse from other political discourses. He also illustrates how populism implies an antagonistic bifurcation between an 'us' and a 'them' whereby the people gets homogenized into a uniform bloc with a collective and unambiguous will. Highlighting the importance of charismatic leadership in many right-wing forms of populism, Bennett analyses a multimodal form of communication and points out that the contemporary populist revival in Europe relies to a large extent on social media. Bennett provides a conceptual map of the way UKIP imagined the people in relation to sister concepts such as nation, working class, sovereignty, and borders, as well as in relation to counter-concepts such as immigrants, domestic elites and EU institutions. He concludes that UKIP's Brexit campaign is an example of prototypical right-wing populist discourse (see Chapter 9, this volume).

Raluca Levonian draws our attention to the way the people was imagined in the discourse of the Romanian government and of the opposition parties between 2011 and 2012. She is correct in pointing out that Eastern European discourses have rarely been investigated in populism studies. Nevertheless, she argues that "the end of the Soviet Union and 'the crisis of socialism and communism as ideologies of subordinate social groups' (Filc 2015: 274) may represent conditions for the emergence of populist tendencies in post-communist states" (see Chapter 10, this volume). In addition, the unstable party systems, widespread corruption, and the socio-economic contexts in these countries favor the emergence of discursive tropes that have been studied elsewhere under the header of populist discourse. At the same time, Levonian demonstrates that the label 'populism' is widely contested and is used as a way to delegitimate political opponents in Romania. She investigates the conflict between a governing coalition formed around the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL) and a coalition of opposition parties called the Social-Liberal Union (USL). The analysis focuses on the way both actors position themselves in relation to each other, to 'the people' and to the notion of populism

itself. The analysis focuses on political statements and speeches delivered in the Romanian Senate between 2011 by members of the governing parties and the political alliance formed in opposition. The latter were frequently called populist by the governing party. The governing party engaged in austerity politics and asked for sacrifices from the population, labelling the parties opposing these policies as 'populist'. Referring to Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014: 133), Levonian points out that the USL's discourse illustrates the fact that "parties resisting austerity measures, especially those representing the Left, tend to be criticized for being 'populist'" (see Chapter 10, this volume) even though the USL opposition could also be interpreted as a form of democratic resistance in the face of an increasingly authoritarian discourse.

The next two chapters take bottom-up linguistic approaches to addressing representations of the people in political discourse. These text-level studies shed light on the nature of populist discourse in a very different way from the preceding chapters by systematically interrogating the lexical and syntactic features that characterize the language used by populist politicians, thereby helping to fill in the details that complete our picture of populist discourse. First, the chapter by Miguel Ayerbe Linares focuses on the way the people is imagined by the new German right-wing political party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD). In this paper, the author asks who 'the people' are who the AfD claims to represent, by focusing on the words that are used to describe them and the way they are represented in relation to other players such as government parties, the EU, immigrants and refugees. He focuses on the lexemes used to refer to the people in the bulletin *AfD-Kompakt*, in AfD election manifestos and in the Twitter accounts of the party and its former leader Frauke Petry. Special attention is thereby devoted to the historically loaded German term *Volk*. Pointing out that this is not the only term used in order to talk about the people, Ayerbe Linares argues that the party's alternating use of signifiers such as *Volk* or *Bürger* is meant to address different sections of the party's potential electorate. Offering a linguistic analysis of the properties attributed to the German *Volk*, he shows how the party attempts to present itself as the only possible alternative to what it holds up as a supposedly problematic status quo supported by traditional political elites (see Chapter 11, this volume).

Also taking a rather micro-oriented and linguistic point of view, Maarten Van Leeuwen argues that merely talking about the people is not enough to distinguish populism from other political discourses. Even though so-called people-centrism is one of the most frequently analyzed characteristics in discourse analyses of allegedly populist discourses, he points out that there are significant differences in the grammatical place Dutch populist politicians such as Geert Wilders attribute to the people and the syntactic position granted to this term by politicians who find themselves elsewhere on the political spectrum. By contrasting the syntactic

choices made by Geert Wilders and Alexander Pechtold, he shows how insights gained from linguistically oriented modes of discourse analysis can contribute to wider discussions on the characteristics and features of populist discourse. As such he provides convincing empirical support for the claim that "the frequency in which politicians refer to 'the people' is not the only relevant measure for assessing people-centrism in (populist) political discourse – as is suggested in much of the political-scientific literature" (see Chapter 12, this volume).

The last chapter in this volume is written by Peter Furko, who conducts a case study of Hungarian parliamentary speeches in the debate on the implementation of immigration quotas in 2016. Combining insights from linguistic pragmatics and critical discourse analysis, Furko applies a taxonomy of strategies developed by Wodak et al. (2009) to the discursive strategies deployed by parliamentary actors. The analysis shows that from a linguistic point of view, pro-government and opposition MPs deploy similar discursive strategies including antagonization, selective presentation, patronizing, polarization, dramatization, and emotional appeals. However, it is also possible to identify differences in the frequencies with which particular linguistic and discursive resources are used by different political actors. For instance, Furko notices that members of centrist and left-wing political parties make more use of conversationalizing pragmatic markers than members of the conservative right-wing party Fidesz. Overall, Furko shows how different attitudes regarding the public debate on the issue of immigration manifest themselves in the way people make strategic use of pragmatic markers (see Chapter 13, this volume).

The thirteen chapters in this volume thus make an important contribution to the literature on contemporary populism. First, they provide up-to-date evidence about the way 'the people' is used in political discourse across the spectrum, showing how this term is employed to project homogeneous identities and establish antagonisms. The discursive strategies used by (potentially) populist parties or leaders are explored across a wide range of European countries, from Italy to Denmark and from Spain to Romania, with an important chapter from Turkey that opens the door to understanding how populism works in the Middle East. Left-wing parties like Podemos and the Danish Red-Green Alliance can thus be compared with movements that are harder to classify in terms of the familiar left-center-right spectrum (M5S), with right-wing parties like Alternative für Deutschland or leaders like Geert Wilders, and with Turkey's Justice and Development Party. These chapters show how populist signifiers and logics antagonize the democratic consensus, relying on political incorrectness in order to generate public outrage and guarantee media attention. Populist projects may advocate equality as well as justifying inequality, often up to the point where xenophobia and hate speech structure large chunks of discourse. Moreover, 'pure' populism does not exist,

as every populism relies on a complex articulation of ideologies. The populist logic may articulate anything from progressive neo-Marxist thought, through anti-socialist sentiments, to Islamic conservatism.

To those interested in the workings of discourse, this collection offers a useful collection of case studies including detailed linguistic studies informed by corpus evidence, studies of argumentation and dialogicity informed by Appraisal theory, as well as more theoretically-oriented discourse studies. On a comparative level, these chapters also include cross-linguistic studies taking in two or three languages and parties in different countries (France, UK and Germany, Spain and Italy).

As a whole then, this volume testifies to the fact that academic and political debates on the meaning of signifiers such as 'the people' and 'populism' are manifestations of a much broader problematic, namely the question how we should organize democracy and/or politics itself. As such, the debates about populism are decidedly metapolitical debates (Zienkowski 2019). By this, we do not mean that we are dealing with debates that stand apart from politics or seek to move beyond politics – this would be in line with the way the New Right uses this notion (Capra Casadio 2014; Bar-On 2012, 2015). Rather, we consider populism as a metapolitical strategy in the sense that we are dealing with a mode of politics that potentially transforms the face of the public sphere, mutating the identities that populate it along the way (Zienkowski 2019; Zienkowski and De Cleen 2017). Populism does not amount to politics-as-usual but to a political logic that potentially impacts on the way we relate to and shape the political itself, and the studies in this volume go some way towards showing how we can approach this important phenomenon.

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