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Populism in world politics: A comparative cross-regional perspective

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Abstract
Populism has become more salient in multiple regions in the world, in developed as well as developing countries. Today it is largely a reaction to social dislocations tied to processes of neoliberal globalisation. As a concept, populism has had a long and contentious history. We suggest that populism has been on the rise alongside new imaginings of what constitutes the 'people' and 'elites', as the meanings attached to these labels are continually reshaped in conjunction with new social conflicts. These conflicts are intensifying across the globe together with new kinds of social marginalisation, precarious existence and disenchantment with the broken promises of liberal modernity. The article introduces a special issue on Populism in World Politics that seeks to understand general processes involved in the emergence of populist politics along with specific circumstances that affect how it is expressed in terms of identity politics, political strategies and shifting social bases.

Keywords
Populism, neoliberal globalisation, Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa

Introduction

The rise of populism has been witnessed in multiple world regions over the last three decades. Consequently, academic research on populism has expanded significantly. This research, however, has focused overwhelmingly on developments in mature capitalist economies and liberal democracies of (Western) Europe, accompanied by a steady growth in the older strand of research into populism in the Americas (particularly Latin America). The dominant approach to populism over this period has focused on the characteristics of populism as an ideology and a phenomenon

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associated with mass electoral politics. This is usually expressed in terms of a mutation of older challenges to liberal democracy like the European far right (Minkenberg, 2000) or Latin American left-wing populists (de la Torre and Arnson, 2013).

In this special issue we propose to move beyond this dominant approach in the study of populism, both geographically and analytically. We acknowledge of course the insights of the dominant comparative approach to the study of populism in advanced democracies – not least recent efforts to initiate cross-regional comparison of populist phenomena (Mudde and Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2012). Without discarding this body of work, however, we believe that the proliferation of populist politics beyond Europe and America requires a broadening of the academic agenda on populism. A broader cross-regional perspective is an obvious next step, but the variation of political and social conditions across the globe also implies the need for analytical frameworks that can address historically diverse manifestations of populism.

Here we propose to view contemporary populism as a distinctive reaction to the social dislocations of globalisation, which can be expressed in a dizzying variety of ways depending on the local, regional and historical context. In this sense, we see commonalities between populist reactions that have emerged in the more advanced (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008) as well as less economically developed parts of the world (Conniff, 1999; Mizuno and Phongpaichit, 2009). These reactions arise as a response to two distinct but intertwined developments: frustration with the nature of political representation and participation (e.g. Urbinati, 2014), and the emergence of new kinds of social marginalisation, precarious existence (Standing, 2011) and disenchantment with the broken promises of liberal modernity. These broken promises include social mobility and improved material circumstances through the pursuit of education, new skills and sheer hard work. The fact that we see the two sources of disenchantment as intertwined is one of the novel contributions of this special issue, thus bridging views of populism in mature democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian settings, as well as in mature capitalist and developing economies.

Beyond the broadening of the geographical and empirical scope, contributions in this volume also spread the conceptual breadth further than usual in comparative studies of populism. Useful as the focus on populism as an ideological and partisan phenomenon was for comparative purposes, it was designed for the context of competitive party democracies rather than for countries outside this (still) relatively small group of regimes. It left questions about the role and relationship of the state with markets and society largely untouched. Despite some important work on the significance of globalisation (Kriesi et al., 2006), this literature largely failed to take into account global and regional processes of politics and economics as determinants of the emergence, content and success (or failure) of populism.

We believe that a reconceptualisation of the study of populism is overdue and can yield interesting insights about how populism arises, what kind of strains it responds to, and why it is successful in some cases and not in others, taking into account specific patterns of state–society relations and global and regional modes of political economy. As the case studies in this special issue include countries from regions that feature prominently in the study of populism (Europe and Latin America), it becomes obvious that our approach here aims to be something more than an assembly of idiosyncratic cases from disparate parts of the world. Instead, it seeks to add substantively to debates about the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of populism.

Setting the stage: Populism in world politics today

In spite of diverse manifestations in the present age of neoliberal globalisation, the resurgence of populism is frequently tied to two common sources. First, it is closely linked to growing distrust of the formal institutions that organise social, economic and political power within individual countries. This can be seen even in the established democracies of the West, where traditionally dominant

political parties have been faced recently with robust populist challenges, whether emanating externally or internally (Kriesi and Pappas, 2015), thereby deeply affecting the sorts of ideas and agendas that become mainstreamed in the national political discourse.

In the USA, such a development is evident in the emergence of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders as viable presidential candidates against the wishes of the 'establishment' of their respective political parties – to which they are both relative outsiders – the former with signature policies such as building a wall on the American–Mexican border. Such mainstreaming has been evident in Europe as well as in Australia, where the debate about immigration is infused with highly xenophobic views that have become 'normal', especially as they pertain to Muslims from North Africa and the Middle East (see Yilmaz, 2012). While populisms of the right have been particularly discernible, the emergence of Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece offer examples instead of what are considered populisms of the Left. These tend to reinvigorate discourses about the nature of capitalism and of the state that used to be associated with challenges offered by socialist-oriented movements.

Second, populist resurgence is commonly tied to discontent with systems of power that appear to preserve and entrench prevailing class structures. Not least in the developing world, such social inequalities can be experienced as particularly frustrating by those who bought into the project of modernisation and progress and developed self-identities tied closely to upward social mobility and material advancement. Here, we are not just referring to the multitudes of new urban poor who continue to descend upon the sprawling urban formations of much of the developing world, as they have done for the last half a century in search of jobs and a better life. Prominently included are also those that Roy (1994) memorably termed the 'lumpen-intelligentsia', a social category typically made up of younger educated people with an abundance of upwardly mobile ambitions but with limited actual prospects and whose claims to 'middle class' status could be quite tenuous, in particular because their consumerist desires are so easily thwarted by actual social circumstances. Though the reference is specifically to the Arab world, such observations have much more universal application and are arguably related to such developments as the 'Occupy' movements that claimed to represent '99%' of the people against the richest '1%'.

Importantly, these sentiments have grown in prominence as welfare regimes that had accompanied liberal politics in the West have been increasingly dismantled. Moreover, they have surfaced in a more general global environment where Left alternatives, and their associated critiques of social injustices, have been discredited due to the resounding failures of past communist projects. In this connection, it is notable that populism often becomes closely intertwined with expressions of identity politics that can develop highly exclusionary characteristics, insofar as the understanding of the 'people' is constructed against a host of foes made up of possible exploiters and oppressors. Such constructions always make use of a pool of symbolic resources that are 'culturally specific' in order to be meaningful in a given context (Anderson, 2009: 219).

Thus, populist mobilisations may be variously effective when premised on nationalist sentiment, ethnic solidarity or religious identity, or different combinations of these. Against such a background, and in a fundamental sense, the present-day resurgence of populist politics can be seen as no less than a symptom of wide-ranging and deep-seated social distress across societies evolving within post-liberal and post-socialist contexts. Particularly in the West, signs of this distress have been amplified in the aftermath of the most recent global financial crises, as depicted clearly by the articles in this volume pertaining to European cases.

Populism in social and political theory

Some of the earliest analyses of populist politics came out of the development of North American-style behaviourist scholarship. Among the most prominent of North American social scientists to

address populist politics from this tradition of social inquiry were Shils (1956) and Lipset (1955). Both scholars basically depicted it as a menace to democratic life in the United States. They underlined populism's recourse to xenophobia, isolationism and political irrationality. Together with other offerings to the literature by luminaries of 1950s USA-based social science, their work has contributed to the tendency to dismiss populist politics as a politics of irrationality, to be juxtaposed against the inherent rationality of liberal political values (see Nugent, 1963: 11–13).

As analyses of populism began to appear in the literature on developing societies, it became attached to the concerns of modernisation theory, which had absorbed the behaviourist and structural functionalist tendencies of North American social science. Thus, an otherwise critical analyst such as Stewart (1969: 187) was to suggest that '[t]he encounter between "traditional" culture and structure already affected by social change and "non-traditional" cultures and structures' was responsible for the emergence of populism, with particular reference to a number of developing countries, including in Africa. Thus, populism was often treated as an anomaly caused by a less than complete process of economic and cultural modernisation.

Interestingly, however, Nugent had noted that an even earlier tradition of historical scholarship on populism had viewed agrarian populist movements of the 1890s in a much more positive light. This tradition, which was influential in American scholarship in the 1920s and 1930s (Nugent, 1963: 4), is now virtually forgotten. In contrast to the work of Shils (1956), Lipset (1955) and others, it stressed the progressive and politically liberalising effects of these populist movements, especially in terms of upholding the economic and political rights of the most downtrodden. More recently, research on populism has entertained the possibility that populism is not necessarily a threat to democracy, and that it can even serve as a 'corrective' (Taggart and Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2016: 346). What this shows is that analysts have long come to divergent conclusions about the implications of populism, and thus, some of the present-day differences noted below are not at all surprising. In some ways, they even replicate past disagreements and competing tendencies.

Today there are richly varied approaches to the study of populist politics in the social science literature. Within this scholarship, there is again dispute about whether populism is inherently reactionary or possibly has progressive manifestations, in the sense of paving the way for fairer regimes of distributing power and economic resources. One of the currently most influential of these approaches might be called 'the discursive', which views populism as a mode of articulating 'social, political or ideological contents' that brings together diverse political demands (Laclau, 2005: 86). It is an approach that is most closely associated with the post-Marxist theoretician Ernesto Laclau, and to a lesser extent, his frequent collaborator, Chantal Mouffe (2005). Here, populist politics melds different sources of dissatisfaction with elite power, where the ambitions of the relatively marginalised find common cause with the sufferings of those who are considerably more oppressed within the social hierarchy.

Thus, Laclau's project, in spite of its evolution since the 1970s, is anchored firmly in the position that populist politics carries the potential to become the bearer of progressive agendas especially following the decline of Marxist-inspired movements of social and political change. Moreover, in a direct attack on Marxist theoretical orthodoxy, he suggests that such agendas do not have to be reducible to class politics (see Laclau, 1977). Especially through the concept of 'chains of equivalence', he has credibly argued that those occupying different social class positions could be unified by common resentment of social processes that have peripheralised them to different degrees (2005: 77–83).

Comparative work that has emerged from within this approach is represented in a number of the essays found in Panizza (2005), which utilise Laclau's conceptual armoury to dissect empirical case studies in a more historical fashion than Laclau has attempted himself. Other followers of Laclau maintain the superiority of 'symptomatic readings' of discourse to social and historical

examinations of the populist phenomenon (see Dinçşahin, 2012). A desire to conceptually and productively bridge the concerns of discursive and historically rooted analyses is found throughout this collection.

Equally influential is what might be called the 'ideational' approach to populism, which focuses on the ideological and rhetorical content of populist politics, especially as formulated by its leaders and demagogues. In this approach, much attention is given to the demands that appear in populist programmes and declarations (Canovan, 1981), resulting in characterisations of populism as an ideology that pits 'a virtuous and homogenous people' against both elites and dangerous 'others' (Mudde, 2004). The latter are depicted – in the most basic sense – as a collection of people who are 'depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice' (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008: 3). In this approach, the claim to express the 'general will' of the people is often achieved by emotive manipulation. In this way, notions like the 'heartland' become an important descriptor of the sources of support for populist politics (Taggart, 2000).

For many writing in this vein, the populist phenomenon becomes strongly identified once more with demagoguery, irrationality, and additionally, 'bad' economic policy (Conniff, 1999: 6). It is in this regard that we see the lingering influence of the literature on populism as represented by the work of Shils (1956), Lipset (1955) and the modernisation theorists mentioned earlier, who equated populism with irrationality bordering on political hysteria. Notably, when populism is mentioned in the popular press today, the portrayal favoured most closely approximates understandings that emphasise the capriciousness of populist politics. Thus populists brandishing anti-Western slogans as disparate as the socialist-inclined late Hugo Chavez of Venezuela (Hawkins, 2003), and the Islamic Republic of Iran's former president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Ansari, 2008), are both considered as charismatic leaders who presided over regimes that were irrational at their core.

One problem confronting advocates of this approach, however, is that Latin American leaders such as Alberto Fujimori in Peru (Weyland, 2003) and Carlos Menem in Argentina (Barros, 2005; Weyland, 2003) pushed through a range of purportedly 'rational' and 'market-oriented' economic policies largely by circumventing existing formal democratic institutions of political representation. They did this by recourse to political fronts and movements that had operated largely outside of these formal institutions (see, however, a dissenting view in the article on Latin America in this volume). In Turkey too, the AKP (Justice and Development Party) has strongly grafted an agenda of neoliberal reform onto many of the older social justice and populist concerns associated with Islamic politics (Tuğal, 2009) since the 20th century. Latching on to religious and provincial social interests that had long been economically and politically peripheralised, this populist project has aimed at dismantling the secularist Kemalist establishment built on close collaboration between politicians, large sections of the bureaucracy (including the judiciary), the military and state-protected large business enterprises. The result is a system of power depicted by the AKP in its narrative as excluding 'virtuous' and 'pious' ordinary people from the fruits of development and modernisation (Hadiz, 2016). Moreover, as Sawer and Laycock (2009) cogently observe, in Australia and Canada a kind of 'market' populism has emerged, resembling some aspects of right-wing American populism in its emphasis on the inherent virtues of free markets. While it presents the market as the ultimate site for exerting individual choice, the welfare state, by contrast, is presented as the site for the erosion of that choice.

Additionally, there are theorists who have been mainly concerned with the 'organisational' or institutional manifestations of populism. Mouzelis (1985: 342), for example, argues that populist politics is primarily defined by organisation and leadership that systematically attempt to by-pass formal political institutions that have become distant from the concerns of ordinary people. Jansen (2011: 82), furthermore, argues that such attempts, taking the form of political mobilisation of

marginalised 'social sectors into visible and contentious political action', are inextricably linked to matters of identity formation, though he appears mainly concerned with the aspect of national identity and sentiment. All the authors in this collection are uniformly cognisant of the impact of populist political parties or social movements on the workings, if not the very legitimacy, of the institutions of representative politics. However, they have understood the institutional expressions of populism in relation to broader social and historical developments. In some cases, for example, these expressions have impacted deeply on the organisation of state power itself and of capital accumulation.

The concerns of such an approach are well depicted too in Gill's (2013: 91–93) account of the political populism of Yeltsin in Russia, which is understood as being geared to gather personal support at the expense of established Russian political institutions, including its parliament. Similar to Mouzelis (1985), Gill's work serves to underline how the populist-inspired visions of direct democracy effectively brings into question the value of representative government to express the 'popular will'. From one point of view, therefore, populist mobilisations typically aim to permanently broaden the scope of political participation while challenging existing institutional arrangements. From another point of view, however, especially that of classical political liberals, populism is a serious threat to the tenets and procedures of representative politics and therefore to democracy itself (Urbinati, 2014).

Finally, a somewhat discarded approach to populism is associated with the tradition of class analysis. Of course, no less an authority than Laclau had written against the propensity of class analysis to conceive of populist politics as being reducible to social class and therefore to class struggle. In spite of Laclau's vehement protestations, in particular about the absence of a specific social base or set of historical conditions associated with populist politics (Laclau, 1977: 147; 159–161), the approach may yet be fruitful in certain ways. It seems to be particularly well geared for considering the sort of social circumstances that could give rise to (shifting and varied) social bases and alliances for populist political impulses and for locating these within key periods of social transformation, especially in the current age of neoliberal globalisation (see indicatively Oesch, 2008). Pursuing such a line of inquiry requires linking the fluctuating and contested bases of populist politics to broader social conflicts over power and material resources, their outcomes and the contested framework within which these take place.

An earlier attempt to deploy class analysis in the study of populism is that of Oxhorn (1998), who argues that populist movements in Latin America constitute a specific form of 'social mobilisation based on asymmetrical multi-class coalitions'. He further suggests that populist movements tap into the frustrations of lower classes produced by the inequalities of development while being led typically by members of the urban middle class (1998: 223). The latter may be less marginalised than the workers or peasants with whom they forge alliances but have similarly found upward social mobility hindered by powerful sets of interests or cliques dominating the state and the economy. In other words, these populist movements were identified with sections of the population that are peripheralised within the capitalist modernisation process even if they tended to be led by those ensconced in relatively more privileged positions. More recently, Hadiz (2016) made a similar observation about the emergence of multi-class Islamic populisms in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, in which the implications of the absence or presence of powerful and culturally Islamic factions within the domestic bourgeoisie were scrutinised.

Reassessing populism as a global phenomenon

This special issue brings together experts on the politics and societies of different regions to explore the systemic, historical and social underpinnings of populist phenomena that are becoming

increasingly prominent in world politics. Our collective undertaking is significant given that the specific manifestations of populist politics within and between regions have been quite diverse and can be identified with different and fluctuating social bases, agendas, organisational vehicles as well as strategies. They range from those typically considered 'right-wing' and 'left-wing', as mentioned, and may be intertwined with a variety of forms of identity politics. Thus, populist politics may exhibit inclusionary as well as highly exclusionary tendencies along various dimensions in different contexts, from class or ethnicity (Mudde and Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2011) to gender (Kampwirth, 2010: 5–6). Moreover, their organisational vehicles may be geared for parliamentary as well as extra-parliamentary struggles. Finally, given growing social differentiation within contemporary societies, populism may rest on increasingly complex, and inevitably shifting, social alliances.

We maintain, however, that populism is not so elusive that it cannot be productively addressed in social science research. On the contrary, the salience of populist politics on the global stage demands serious attention to make sense of the intricate ways in which it is being constructed and forged in relation to modern-day social and political conflicts.

For our purposes, it is possible to begin with the conception that populism is indeed a political tendency that seeks to separate 'the people' of an imagined 'heartland' from allegedly rapacious and corrupt 'elites', while asserting that the latter are responsible for the social and economic problems perceived to beset 'the people' or 'the nation'. Indeed, this is the starting point of all the authors in this collection. However, Laclau has rightly criticised exercises that were focused on 'merely' collecting descriptions of the characteristics of populist ideology. Interestingly, given his later aversion to historical analyses of populism, he took aim as well at the propensity of those who gather these characteristics to assume that they emerge out of 'asynchronisms' in the transition from 'traditional' to 'industrial society' (1977: 147; 154–156), a view, as mentioned earlier, closely linked to the concerns of modernisation theory.

While all of the authors in this volume agree with Laclau that various conceptions of the 'people', and its enemies, are based on the construction of 'difference' and 'equivalence', the actual process whereby this takes place remains a matter of some contention. For example, rather than following abstract discursive logic, it may be useful to understand such constructions in relation to historical contingency. From this standpoint, constructions of the people are intertwined with contests over power and resources within specific constellations of social forces and interests and related efforts at building the necessary social alliances and coalitions.

For this reason, it makes sense that populism will be less successful in some cases than in others in spite of the common presence of discontent with elite domination, social and economic exclusion and existing systems of power. In Latin America, for example, the historical and organisational legacies of populisms of an earlier age remain meaningful, thereby plausibly helping to sustain present day populist projects. Lula in Brazil, to take one prominent example, had a ready-made organisational base, replete with ideological trappings, in the country's trade union movement, which a succession of military rulers had failed to suppress completely (Bourne, 2008; Edwards, 2010). In Indonesia, on the other hand, the legacy of civil society disorganisation provide an historical impediment to successful populist movements because it has contributed to the difficulty in kick-starting effective political and organisational machineries at the grassroots level.

The international dimension is not usually taken into account in comparative analyses of populism either. This is odd since politics on the nation-state level is conditioned to varying degrees by a confluence of global and regional, structural economic and geopolitical, material and normative conditions. For example, the problems of European integration feature prominently in the message of right-wing populists (who are almost all eurosceptic) (Taggart, 1998). This shows how the international circumstances within which populists operate can be a resource for their message as well as condition the shape different populist politics will take.

As a recent analysis of populism in Europe and Latin America acknowledged, 'populist actors […] need to present themselves as outsiders and one way of doing this is by denouncing the existence of an alliance between domestic and foreign elites seeking to subvert the will of the people' (Taggart and Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2016: 356). On the other hand, variations in the global and regional context, patterns of incorporation into the present neoliberal global economy, and interaction with international and transnational actors may determine, to varying degrees, the ideological character and social bases of populist reactions to externally induced changes. Aytac and Onis (2014), for example, have shown how two populist movements that came to power at roughly the same time – the AKP in Turkey and Kirchnerismo in Argentina – developed in different directions ideologically due to variations in political economy and patterns of relations with global and regional environments. In this vein, contributors to this volume take the international political and economic context seriously as one determinant of the trajectory and content of populist mobilisations.

History, structure, discourse: A new advance in the study of populism

Our perspective is shaped by two over-riding shared concerns. First, the editors and authors seek to develop understandings of universal processes that have contributed to the rise of populist politics in distinct socioeconomic settings, while remaining cognisant of social and historical contexts that make possible a variety of expressions across regions. For this reason, each essay in this collection takes seriously both the structural and historical context within which populist politics has evolved as well as how it becomes embedded in new forms of identity politics and their evolution. Thus the main comparative insight of this special issue is that global and regional processes inform to a significant degree the shape and outlook of populist phenomena.

Second, we bring together case studies from Western and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa that conceptually address the discursive (Laclau, 2005), organisational (Mouzelis, 1985), and social and material foundations of populist politics (Oxhorn, 1998). It should be noted that comparative analyses of populism have been overwhelmingly confined to analyses of case studies within a single region (Conniff, 1999; Ibrahim, 1998; Wodak et al., 2013), in spite of some noteworthy recent endeavours where European and cases in the Americas are considered together (Abromeit et al., 2016; Mudde and Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2012). As already noted, this special issue embraces world-regions where studies of populism have not featured much in the past (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969 presents a notable exception).

The geographical broadening of comparative analysis will of course advance existing specialised knowledge of the individual regions concerned. But what links analyses of such a wide range of regions is our conception of present-day populisms as inextricably tied to the new contradictions and dislocations associated with the expansion and deepening of a globalised economy, now further accentuated by the effects of the financial crisis that have been acutely felt in various parts of the world. This is in contrast to such phenomena as agrarian populist movements in the USA in the 19th century, for example, or that of Peronism in Latin America in the 1940s and 1950s, which had been built on a domestic political economy based on import substitution industrialisation made possible within vastly different global economic circumstances. Our analysis shows the importance of the shifting international structural (political and economic) context as a factor that conditions the shape and content of populist politics. At the same time, while global constellations change, the legacies of older populist phenomena can serve as reservoirs of inspiration for new images of the 'people' – as showcased in the persistence of a populist streak in US politics or the ways the Peronist tradition has fed in the Kirchnerismo of the 2000s. Apart

from a geographical breadth then, our approach also calls for incorporation of a temporal-historical dimension of comparison.

In sum, our approach conceptualises populism as a mode of politics that relies on the juxtaposition of virtuous 'people' versus corrupt 'elites'. This discourse can emanate from official state power as much as movements outside the confines of formal political competition. The crucial point is that the different expressions of populism – the different content that the labels 'people' and 'elite' can take, as well as the different ideological ('left' or 'right') or identitarian (ethnic, religious etc.) expression populism can have – hinge on the content of the contest over power and resources in specific national and international contexts, usually characterised by closely related and mutually reinforcing processes of socioeconomic dislocation and crises of political representation.

In a nutshell, our comparative schema sees cross-case variations in:

(1) the specific domestic, regional and international structures of political economy, e.g. the passage from a period of embedded liberalism (the post-World War II system among Western economies that allowed them to pursue both increased international economic exchange and robust mechanisms of domestic compensation) to a period of unfettered globalisation;
(2) the shape of the state-market-society nexus; and
(3) historical legacies of populist mobilization

as potential explanations for within-case variability of:

(a) the shifting social bases of populist parties and movements across time;
(b) the evolving legitimacy and inclusivity of political systems in light of domestic economic transformations and international structural developments;
(c) the ultimate success or failure of populist parties and movements; and
(d) the capacity of the bearers of welfare and redistributive agendas to effectively project their demands on and pursue them via the state.

The case studies

The special issue brings together case studies on populist politics in Europe (Russia, Greece), Latin America (Argentina and Brazil), Asia (Indonesia and Thailand) as well as Africa (Zambia). These are disparate cases yet they have in common the experience of recent populist responses to the socially dislocating effects of engagement with global capitalism. In all these cases, such responses have involved newer, though not always well developed, imaginings of the nature of political participation and representation, the relationship between state and society as well as the consequences of perceived systemic social injustice. Not all of these responses have been equally robust because of the different social contexts within which populist politics evolved as well as the cultural resources available for mobilisation and the historical legacies of past social conflicts.

The Russian case study examines the relationship between populism and regime hybridity, which blends democratic and undemocratic state practices. The authors argue that populist rhetoric has been used by the Putin regime since the early 2000s, but that it was initially balanced by other discourses on state building projects, such as liberal-constitutional and pro-market ones. They also argue that the rhetoric did not as yet constitute a full official populism, which only developed after the electoral cycle of 2011–2012. At this time, the regime was threatened by the coalescence of demands arising from economic crisis that might have developed into a counter-hegemonic threat

to the regime. It was the articulation of a conservative-traditional populist discourse based on an essentialised cultural understanding of traditional values that neutralised this threat.

In Thailand, populist rhetoric has been identified by many scholars as having been instrumental in propping up the rule of a most controversial politician, the business mogul Thaksin Shinawatra. Almost all popular and academic assessments have labelled him and his time in power (2001–2006) populist. However, through a discussion of Thaksin's period campaigning for office and then in the prime ministership, it is argued that this characterisation is not entirely accurate. While he was electorally popular, Thaksin's populism was in fact slow to develop. His emergence as a populist reflected a particular configuration of political circumstances that forced him to rely increasingly on the support of an electoral base made up of the relatively less well-off from the north, northeast and central provinces. Thaksin was effectively turned into a populist by elite opposition to his rule, military coup and the demands associated with socio-economic inequality and representation.

In the next article, two of the paradigmatic cases associated with populist politics in its 'classic form', that of Brazil and Argentina, are addressed in the wake of deep changes that have occurred in those countries since the time of legendary populist leaders like Vargas and Peron. It is acknowledged that a series of governments arising from the processes of social mobilisation against neoliberalism, usually identified as a new 'Pink Tide', have sparked a renewed interest in populism in that continent. While recognising Laclau's contribution to the reshaping of debates on populism, the article proposes an interpretation of populism in Argentina and Brazil that stems more directly from a political economy approach and gives greater weight to class developments and relationships than to their associated discursive expressions. It suggests that a specific articulation of capital accumulation and capital/labour relations with a state form are key to populism and to understanding historical similarities and differences between these two cases.

An article that addresses populism in Africa then follows. Latching on to literature on 'post-socialism', where issues of discursive as well as institutional legacies are important, its author suggests that, in Zambia, those seeking to construct legitimate leadership, or to negotiate with rival elites, have frequently had to draw on styles of presentation pioneered by the long-ruling Kenneth Kaunda. Similarly, democratic culture at the grassroots level bears the imprint of the bureaucratic/democratic structures of 'one-party participatory democracy' of his era. But since democratisation in 1991, a significant challenge was posed by the rise of Michael Sata and his 'Patriotic Front', which came close to taking power following a dramatic populist campaign in 2006. Leaning on the discursive aspects of populist politics, the article suggests a way of understanding how a populist moment in Zambian politics ignited, mellowed, faded and died in parallel with Michael Sata's journey through energetic leadership, reconciliation, political failure and death in office. Placing the 2015 Zambian election in historical context, it ultimately reflects on the possibility of a 'post-populist' moment in Zambian politics.

The article that follows examines Greece, where the global financial crisis has resulted in fundamental tumult and the rise to power of a leftist populist party, Syriza. According to its author, populism is a long-standing phenomenon in Greek politics. His article emphasises populism's territorial and temporal particularism which accentuates tensions within the political community as a reaction to the dislocations of modernisation. Central to his analysis is the sometimes difficult distinction between ruptures in Greek political history that have led to genuine populist mobilisations and elite discursive strategies aimed at neutralising new social interests and demands. The article argues that the failure of the contemporary Greek state is due less to the overabundance of such interests than to the reliance of the state on divisive populist discourses. It relies on the latter instead of universalist visions of political community to validate social dislocations related to adaptation to European standards since the 1990s.

The final article looks at the emergence of President Joko Widodo in 2014, which caused scholars to think about whether he would lead a populist surge against an entrenched oligarchy in Indonesia, widely considered the third largest democracy in the world. Benefiting from personal appeal based on political outsider status, 'Jokowi' – as he is widely known – promotes a governance style that emphasises direct links to the people, delivery of social services, and eradication of poverty. However, his emergence has occurred within an entrenched system of oligarchic power that survived the shift from authoritarianism to democracy, and earlier, from state to market capitalism. Furthermore, electoral democracy remains influenced by the authoritarian era legacy of highly successful disorganisation of civil society. Yet another factor is the presence of competing populist traditions: secular nationalist populism has been strongly harnessed to oligarchy in recent times, while Islamic populism remains socially incoherent. The Indonesian case suggests a future in which key political battles may not be between populism and political liberalism but between different forms of populism.

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