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## **Populism and nationalism**

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### **Introduction**

This chapter disentangles the concepts of populism and nationalism and uses that theoretical clarification to shed light on the different ways in which populism and nationalism have been articulated in populist politics. Populism and nationalism have been closely related, both empirically and conceptually. Many of the most prominent instances of populist politics have been nationalist – including the populist radical right and most of the Latin American populisms – and nationalisms have often had a populist component. Moreover, both populism and nationalism revolve around the sovereignty of ‘the people’. On top of that, the nation-state remains the dominant context for democratic political representation so that populism usually operates within a national context (even if nation-states’ actual decision-making power has decreased significantly).

All this has contributed to a partial conflation of populism with nationalism. In Gellner and Ionescu’s seminal volume on populism, Stewart (1969: 183) goes as far as to call populism “a kind of nationalism”. A more recent example is the argument – based on analyses of the populist radical right – that ‘the people’ in populism refers to ethnos rather than demos (e.g. Akkerman 2003: 151) or both ethnos and demos (e.g. Jansen 2011; Taguieff 1997: 15). Including elements of nationalism in definitions of populism hinders the application of the concept to other (non-nationalist) forms of populism. And even when looking specifically at politics that are both nationalist and populist, our understanding still depends on a clear conceptual distinction between the two concepts.

Much valuable work has been done on how populism and nationalism come together in particular movements and parties. But explicit conceptual reflections on the relation between populism and nationalism that could strengthen such empirical analyses have been surprisingly uncommon (but see Canovan 2005; Hermet 1997; Mény and Surel 2000: 204-214; Stavrakakis 2005).

The key move in this chapter is to distinguish populism and nationalism as distinctive discourses and then look at how they have been articulated in different kinds of populist politics.<sup>1</sup> The theoretical backbone for this endeavour is the poststructuralist and post-Marxist discourse theory formulated by Laclau and Mouffe (2001/1985) and further developed by the so-called Essex school (see Glynos and Howarth 2007). Discourse theory approaches politics as the discursive struggle for hegemony, whereby hegemony is understood as the (always partial and temporary) fixation of meaning (Torfing 1999: 36-38). In studying political projects' attempts to fix meaning and make their views prevail, discourse theory studies how they produce a structure of meaning through the *articulation* of existing discursive elements.

In the context of discourse theory, with its focus on how meaning comes about through meaning relations between signifiers, *articulation* refers to bringing together discursive elements in a particular way to construct a more or less original structure of meaning. Each politics is necessarily tied in to existing and more encompassing structures of meaning, by drawing on, reproducing, altering, and contesting those discourses. In this fashion, political projects are always connected to political history and to the broader political context within which they operate. The agency of political projects lies in the fact that articulations are contingent relations of “no necessary correspondence” (Laclau 1990: 35) and that the process of articulation changes the meaning of that which it articulates (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 105, 113-114).

The chapter starts by disentangling the concepts of nationalism and populism. These definitions are then used to discuss the different ways in which nationalism and populism have been articulated in populist politics. This discussion starts with a brief

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter first defines nationalism and populism and then discusses the articulations of the two, but the conceptual distinction between nationalism and populism is actually the result of an iterative back-and-forth process between theory and empirical analysis in an analysis of populist radical right politics in Belgium (see De Cleen 2009, De Cleen and Carpentier 2010, De Cleen 2013, De Cleen 2015).

section on how, because of of the predominantly national organisation of political representation, most populist politics operate within a national context. After this reflection on the nation as context for populist politics, the focus shifts to the articulation of populism and actual nationalist politics that revolve around the identity, interests and sovereignty of the nation. The chapter zooms in on two main kinds of articulation: the articulation of populism with exclusionary nationalist demands, and its articulation with demands for the sovereignty of the nation as against larger state structures, colonising forces and supra-national political bodies. A final section of the chapter reflects on the possibilities of a transnational populism that supersedes the boundaries of the nation-state and constructs a transnational people.

## **Nationalism**

Theoretical confusion between populism and nationalism can mainly be found in work on the former. Despite considerable conceptual debate on nationalism, overlap with populism is not one of nationalism's major conceptual problems. Let me therefore start by defining nationalism and then move on to define populism in a way that distinguishes it clearly from nationalism.

*Nationalism is a discourse structured around the nodal point<sup>2</sup> nation, envisaged as a limited and sovereign community that exists through time and is tied to a certain space, and that is constructed through an in/out (member/non-member) opposition between the nation and its outgroups.*

The constructionist theorization of nationalism as a discourse that constructs the nation (e.g. Bhabha 1990; Day and Thompson 2004: 13-17; Jenkins and Sofos 1996: 11; Sutherland 2005: 186) implies a move away from the search for the essence of the nation – what defines national belonging – towards the identification of the particularities of how nationalism discursively constructs the nation.

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<sup>2</sup> Nodal points are the “privileged discursive points that partially fix meaning within signifying chains” (Torfing 1999: 98) and around which other signifiers within the discourse acquire their meaning (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 112).

The starting point for a discursive definition of nationalism is the signifier ‘the nation’. This does not mean that nationalists exclusively use the word ‘nation’. They also refer to ‘the people’ (das Volk, el pueblo), for example.<sup>3</sup> What matters is that nationalism is structured around a group constructed in a particular nationalist way. The nation is the “organising principle” (Greenfeld 1992: 7) that makes all different nationalisms nationalist, or in discourse-theoretical terms, the nodal point around which nationalist discourse is structured (see Sutherland 2005: 186). In nationalism, other signifiers such as state, land, freedom, democracy, and culture acquire meaning in relation to the signifier nation (see Freedon 1998: 755).

Nationalism, like racism and sexism, divides the human species in exclusive groups (Balibar 1989: 9-10). It is helpful to think about the structure of nationalist discourse in spatial terms; this will also help to distinguish it from populism (Dyrberg 2003, 2006). Nationalist discourse is structured around an in/out relation, with the ‘in’ consisting of the members of the nation and the ‘out’ of different types of non-members. As the in/out construction of group identity is not exclusive to nationalism, we need to identify the particular manner in which nationalism constructs ‘in’ and ‘out’ (see Day and Thompson 2004: 102-103). Here we can turn to Anderson's (2006) idea of the nation as a ‘imagined community’. Although Anderson was concerned “in an anthropological spirit” (2006: 6) with how the members of a nation imagine themselves as a community, his analysis of how the nation is imagined is very helpful to an understanding of how nationalism discursively constructs the nation.

Firstly, the nation is constructed as *limited*: nationalism is first and foremost a representation of the world as made up of distinct nations (Anderson 2006: 7; Vincent 2002: 10). Indeed, the nation can only be constructed through the distinction between one nation and other nations, and between members of the nation and non-members. Secondly, the nation is constructed as a *community*. Whereas to Anderson, community means that the members of the nation actually feel as if they belong together, what matters from a discursive perspective is the discursive construction of the nation as an organic community that all members of the nation are considered to

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<sup>3</sup> Although the terms nation and people are not neatly connected to different traditions of nationalist thought, and both have an ethnic-cultural and civic meaning, nation and people have come to acquire a more political and a more ethnic-cultural meaning respectively (Rémi-Giraud 1996).

be part of. Thirdly, the nation is constructed as *sovereign*: it has the rights to take decisions independently and without interference. This becomes most evident in demands for an independent state. However, it is not the state but the nation that serves as the nodal point of nationalism: the state's legitimacy depends on its representation of the sovereign nation (see Jenkins and Sofos 1996). Shared time (a shared past, present, and future) and space (a shared territory with borders and certain characteristics) – and the shared language, customs, etc. that follow from this – serve to differentiate ingroup from outgroup, to obscure the (historical) contingency of the nation, as well as to provide legitimacy for the nation's sovereignty over a territory (Freeden 1998: 752; Wodak et al. 2009: 26).

### **Populism (and why it is not nationalism)**

Populism is a *discourse centred around the nodal points 'the people' and 'the elite', in which the meaning of 'the people' and 'the elite' is constructed through a down/up antagonism between 'the people' as a large powerless group and 'the elite' as a small and illegitimately powerful group. Populism is a claim to represent 'the people' against a (some) illegitimate 'elite', and constructs its political demands as representing the will of 'the people'* (for similar definitions see Laclau 2005a, 2005b; Stavrakakis 2004, Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014).

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the various conceptualisations of populism (see the opening chapters of this handbook). The key point here is that, more so than other approaches, a discourse-theoretical definition focuses on how populism discursively constructs 'the people' through an antagonism between 'the people' and 'the elite'. This goes against the tendency to take for granted (to a more or lesser extent) the existence of the category 'the people' in definitions of populism as a political communication or performance style that speaks about and/or appeals to 'the people' (Jagers & Walgrave 2003; Kazin 1995; Moffitt and Tormey 2014). It also highlights more explicitly the construction of 'the people' than conceptualisations of populism as a set of ideas – a (thin) ideology – about what role the people and the elite should play in politics (e.g. Canovan 2008; Mudde 2007, this volume; Stanley 2008). This move away from ideology and towards how populists discursively construct and claim to represent 'the people' allows taking into account more

thoroughly the crucial *strategic* dimensions of populism (see Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014). Parties and movements can turn to populism as a strategy to acquire power, even when they were originally not populist, and that they do not necessarily remain populist once they are in power. Finally, populism is not necessarily opposed to the existence of an elite per se, but against a current and illegitimate elite that they want to replace as power holders that *do* represent the people.

This discourse-theoretical definition does strongly resemble the thin ideology definition developed by Mudde (this volume) and others in its ‘minimal’ character. It too focuses on the distinction between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ and on the populist claim to represent ‘the people’, and keeps all other characteristics of particular populist politics out. With its focus on the down/up dimension, the definition proposed here also shares Ostiguy’s (this volume) identification of the ‘low’ as central to populism. And through its attention for populism’s strategic dimensions, it bears some resemblance to Weyland’s (this volume) definition of populism as a political strategy. But it is less focused on personalistic leadership and attaches more importance to discourse than Weyland with his focus on ‘deeds’ rather than ‘words’.

Laclau’s discourse-theoretical work on populism (1977, 2005a, 2005b) obviously served as a major inspiration. However, in his recent work Laclau treats ‘populism [a]s the royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political as such’ (2005a: 67). Populism thus becomes a synonym for politics, and the question becomes how to distinguish the two concepts (see Stavrakakis 2004: 263). My aim is not to reveal something about the nature of politics as such, but to use the concept of populism to further understanding of a particular kind of politics (see Stavrakakis 2005; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014).

Populist politics are organised according to a particular political logic. Logics, Glynos and Howarth (2007: 136) argue, are ‘constructed and named by the analyst’ in order to identify and understand the ‘rules or grammar of [a] practice under study’. To look at populism as a political logic implies identifying how populism interpellates and mobilises subjects, how it formulates its demands, how it contests existing regimes or underpins power relations (Glynos 2008: 278). By looking at populism through the

prism of logics, our understanding of populism is ‘formalised’: the focus shifts from the contents of populism – what are the demands formulated by populist parties, what is their ideology – to *how* it formulates ‘those contents – whatever those contents are’ (Laclau 2005b: 33).

The question becomes what is *specific* about how populists formulate their demands. Populism revolves around the antagonistic relation between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’. Populists brings together different demands and identities in what Laclau and Mouffe (2001) call a ‘chain of equivalence’ that is symbolised by the signifier ‘the people’. What groups different demands and identities together in such a chain – what makes them ‘equivalent’ – is not something positive they have in common, but that they are all frustrated and endangered by ‘the elite’ (see Laclau 2005a, 2005b, Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014). Populists mobilise and simultaneously stimulate or reinforce dissatisfaction with ‘the elite’ for its (real and/or perceived) frustrating or endangering of a number of demands, interests or identities (see Stanley 2008: 98).

In spatial terms, populism is structured around a vertical, down/up axis that refers to power, status and hierarchical position (Dyrberg 2003; Laclau 1977; Ostiguy 2009, this volume). This down/up structure differentiates populism from other discourses that also revolve around the signifier ‘the people’ but construct ‘the people’ in a different fashion, such as democracy (the people-as-demos), and, most relevant to this chapter, nationalism (the people-as-nation) (Canovan 2005; Mény and Surel 2000: 177-222). Populist rhetoric often refers to these down/up identities with the words ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ but also uses a range of other labels. What is crucial is that populists claim to speak for ‘the ordinary people’, ‘the little man’, ‘the common man’, ‘the man in the street’ as a down-group, and reject ‘the establishment’, ‘the political caste’, ‘the ruling’ as an up-group for not representing ‘the people’ and for endangering its interests.

The demands located in ‘the people’ and the reasons for treating ‘the elite’ as illegitimate vary widely across the variety of populisms: (radical) right or left, agrarian, nationalist, fascist, democratic or authoritarian, progressive or conservative (Jansen, 2011: 82; Taguieff, 1997: 8-10). The definition of populism developed here only aims to grasp the specifically populist dimension of populist parties’ politics



(and the specifically populist meaning of the people in their rhetoric). To study the diversity of populist politics we need to treat the specificity of particular populist politics as the result of the articulation of (a shared) populism with a diverse range of other discourses.

### **The articulation of populism and nationalism in populist politics**

The remainder of this chapter discusses how certain populist politics have articulated populism with nationalism.<sup>4</sup> It studies how the nodal points of populism (the people-as-underdog and ‘the elite’) and nationalism (the (people-as-)nation) acquire meaning through the articulation of populism and nationalism with their down/up and in/out structure. Looking at the relation between populism and nationalism from a discourse-theoretical perspective it becomes clear that: a) political projects that articulate nationalism and populism draw on broader and more encompassing structures of meaning; b) the articulation of nationalism and populism produces a particular structure of meaning in which a multi-layered meaning of ‘the people’ (as underdog and as nation) plays a central role; c) the resulting structure of meaning will look different depending on the *kind* of nationalism populism is articulated with (e.g. exclusive or inclusive, ethnic or civic); and d) the resulting structure of meaning will look different depending on what *other* discourses are articulated with the populist-nationalist structure of meaning (e.g. conservatism or socialism).

### ***Populism and the nation-state***

As a consequence of the predominantly national organisation of political representation, most populist politics operate within a national context (but not all, as we will see in the section on transnational populism below). They therefore tend to define the people-as-underdog on a national level, even when nationalism does not play a structural role in their political projects.

Nationalism-as-discourse is not limited to what are usually considered ‘nationalist’ politics: radical right politics and sub-state nationalist demands for a sovereign state.

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<sup>4</sup> This discourse-theoretical focus on the articulation of populism and nationalism is not very far removed from the view of populism as a ‘thin ideology’ that is combined with full ideologies such as conservatism or socialism.

It also covers the (more implicit or banal) nationalism that underlies and reproduces existing nation-states and that can also be found in societal spheres from culture to sports (see Billig 1995). Nationalism is so hegemonic and is so firmly sedimented in our political institutions that most contemporary politics function within a national context, and thus reproduce the tenets of nationalist discourse to at least some extent. Whereas decision-making power has shifted increasingly to supra-national political levels (and to non-elected actors), the nation-state remains the principal context in which citizens' are represented, political parties operate, elections are held, and public debate and contestation is organised. Notwithstanding far-reaching supra-national integration in Europe, for example, Europeans are still mainly represented democratically as members of nation-states. Even the European Parliament is an aggregate of politicians belonging to national parties and elected on a national level.

Populist actors too, and certainly populist *parties*, are usually organised on the level of the nation-state. So, when populists claim to represent the people-as-underdog and demand that politics follow the will of this people-as-underdog, this people-as-underdog is usually, almost by default, defined on the level of the nation-state – whether these parties are nationalist or not. This becomes even clearer when populists enter national governments and especially when their leaders take up function as presidents or as prime ministers and come to represent the nation and the nation-state.

'The elite' also often refers to certain powerful groups within the nation: national politicians, but also intellectuals and artists. But it is, as we will see, much more common for populists to construct an antagonism between the (nationally defined) people-as-underdog and non-national elites. In some cases, the nation in its entirety even comes to be identified as the underdog in opposition to an international or foreign elite.

### ***Populism and nationalist demands and identities***

My interest in this chapter is mainly in the articulation of populism and more explicitly nationalist politics that formulate demands about the identity, interests and sovereignty of the nation. A first group of nationalist demands that has prominently been articulated with populism revolves around the exclusion of certain groups of

people from the nation, from the nation-state and from political decision-making power. A second group of nationalist demands that has been formulated in populist terms is about the sovereignty of the nation and its right to its own nation-state, as against larger state structures, colonising forces and supra-national political bodies. A final section of this chapter asks whether populism can function beyond the national context. It looks at the possibility of the construction of a people-as-underdog that supersedes national boundaries.

### **The articulation of exclusionary nationalism and populism**

Some of the most significant examples of populist politics have revolved around an exclusionary nationalist rejection of ethnic-cultural diversity. Populist radical right (PRR) parties such as the French Front National (National Front), the Austrian Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria), and the Belgian Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) are the prime examples here. But similar articulations of populism and exclusionary nationalism can be found in less radical and even mainstream populist right-wing rhetoric.

The rise of PRR parties was an important trigger for the renewed interest in the concept of populism in Europe. In some cases, these parties have even simply been labelled populist. This misses the point, however, for these parties cannot be understood through the notion of populism alone. Nor even is populism the most important element of their politics. At the core of these parties' projects is not populism but a radical right politics. And the very core of radical right politics is an exclusionary ethnic-cultural nationalism (also labelled nativism) (Mudde 2007, Rydgren 2005, 2007).<sup>5</sup> This chapter follows Mudde's (2007) preference for the term populist radical right (and not radical right populist or national-populist, for example). This stresses that PRR parties are a particular and historically specific manifestation of an older and more encompassing radical right tradition. It makes clear that there were and are radical right parties that are not populist (see Mény & Surel 2000: 12; Mudde 2007: 24), that PRR parties are first and foremost radical right parties, but equally that populism is vital to our understanding of these parties.

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<sup>5</sup> Next to nationalism and populism, the other central ideological components of PRR politics are authoritarianism (Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2007) and conservatism (Betz & Johnson 2004; Taggart 2004).

### ***The people-as-underdog and the exclusionary definition of the nation***

That the nodal points of populism acquire meaning through the articulation with exclusionary nationalism becomes clear, firstly, in the fact that the people-as-underdog is a sub-group of the ethnic-culturally defined nation. When PRR parties and other populist exclusionary nationalists claim to speak for the people-as-underdog, they only refer to (what they consider to be) members of the nation and exclude all others. Migrants and their descendants (including those that are national citizens) that in socioeconomic terms might be close to the ‘ordinary people’ for who they claim to speak are excluded from the category of the people-as-underdog (see Caiani & della Porta 2011; Laclau 2005a: 196-198).

Simultaneously, the people-as-underdog is pitted *against* migrants and other national(ist) outgroups. Indeed, PRR politics interpellate ordinary people primarily (but not exclusively) *as* an underdog using exclusionary nationalist arguments. ‘Ordinary people’, it is argued, are the prime victims of multicultural society. They live in poor urban areas with high immigration rates that suffer from ‘immigrant crime’ or ‘Roma crime’. They have lower education rates and lose their jobs to immigrants, or have their already low pensions threatened by the cost of providing asylum to refugees. The socio-economic dimension does play a crucial role here, but is subordinate to and used in the service of nationalism.

The articulation of populism and exclusionary nationalism thus serves to legitimate exclusionary nationalist demands as the representation of the will of the people-as-underdog. This allows PRR parties to fend off criticisms that their exclusionary nationalism is undemocratic and even to claim the signifier democracy. By presenting themselves as the voice of the people-as-underdog and by legitimising their exclusionary nationalist demands as the will of the (silent) majority, the signifier democracy is turned against the liberal democratic rights of people of foreign descent (see De Cleen & Carpentier 2011; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012b; Rydgren 2007).

### ***Against the multiculturalist and multicultural elite***

The populist signifier ‘the elite’ too acquires meaning through the articulation with exclusionary nationalism. The PRR’s main argument for calling the elite illegitimate is a nationalist one. One of the central claims of these parties has been that the political elite has furthered the rights of foreigners and immigrants to the detriment of the interests of its own nation (Mudde 2007). ‘The elite’ is argued to not represent and betray ‘the people’ (as both nation and underdog) because of its positions on immigration and multicultural society. This argument is not limited to the political elite, but is also used to criticise artists, intellectuals, journalists and academics. ‘The party of the people’ that says things as they are, ‘dares’ to speak ‘unpleasant truths’ about multicultural society, and ‘says what you [the ordinary citizen] think’ is opposed to a ‘politically correct elite’ that lives in an ‘ivory tower’.

This ‘ivory tower’ has a socio-economic dimension, but here too this is used to support nationalist arguments. The PRR systematically points to how the political establishment favours foreigners – for example through welfare allocations – and disadvantages and ‘betrays’ the ordinary ‘own’ people. In parallel to the claim that its anti-migration stance represents ‘what ordinary people think’ because it is the ordinary ‘own’ people that suffer most from multicultural society, the elite’s privileged socio-economic status serves to explain why they are so far removed from ordinary people’s concerns and fears. They do not live in the neighbourhoods that suffer from high immigration. They do not lose their jobs due to immigration. Across all of these arguments against the elite, the nationalist distinction between the nation and its outsiders serves as the main explanatory framework, not the socio-economic distinctions within the nation. The ideological dominance of nationalism over any socio-economic concerns also shows in the fact that in contrast to the political elite, the national economic elite is usually not considered to be part of an illegitimate ‘elite’ (except when they speak out against the PRR and thus ‘support the political elite’). Indeed, national economic elites have often been treated as central to national prosperity.

Whereas exclusionary nationalist populists define the people-as-underdog as a subgroup of the nation, ‘the elite’ includes members of the nation but can also include different kinds of national outgroups. It is helpful here to distinguish between

multiculturalism as an ideology and the *multicultural* reality of ethnically and culturally diverse societies. The *multiculturalist* ‘elite’ members of the ethnically defined nation still belong to the ethnic-cultural national community defined in an essentialist way. This shows the ideological dominance of nationalism over populism in PRR politics: elite members of the nation remain part of the nation, even when they betray the interests of the nation and their allegiance to the nation is questioned. As part of their rejection of *multicultural* society, exclusionary nationalists have also fiercely rejected members of the elite of the nation-state that are *not* part of the nation. Jews have been prominently rejected as a foreign and cosmopolitan elite that undermines the nation from within the nation-state, but similar arguments have also been used against Muslims and other people of foreign descent. These groups are criticised as foreign even when they are national citizens because for exclusionary nationalists national citizenship does not imply ethnic-cultural belonging. Beyond these ‘foreign’ elites on the level of the nation-state, populists have also fiercely criticised the leaders of other countries, supranational organisations as illegitimate elites, for their multiculturalist and globalist policies, for their breaches of the nation’s sovereignty over its state, and for their sheer membership of an international, cosmopolitan elite (see the section on ‘Populism and the sovereignty of the nation over its state’ below).

### ***Populism and exclusion: conceptual clarifications***

Before moving on to discussing other articulations of populism and nationalism, let me make two more conceptual reflections about populism that are strongly related to discussions about the PRR and its articulation of populism and exclusionary nationalism.

Some authors have suggested that populism has a *double* vertical structure: upwards between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’, and downwards between ‘the (good) people’ and foreigners, drug dealers, and other outgroups (Abts and Rummens 2007: 14; Mény & Surel 2002: 12). However, the distinction between ‘the people’ and foreigners is a nationalist in/out distinction, not a populist down/up distinction. The in/out distinction between the nation and its outsides does sometimes have a vertical dimension in the sense of racial, national or cultural superiority. But this is subordinate to the in/out

distinction, and of a different nature than the populist distinction between powerless and powerful. The distinction between ‘the good people’ and criminals and other deviants is not a matter of populism either, but part of an authoritarian worldview that excludes and punishes people that deviate from the norm. Populists do not necessarily further authoritarian policies regarding drugs or crime, as certain forms of left wing populism show. Populists on the right have often presented their authoritarian demands as being that what ordinary people want, but this does not make those authoritarian demands inherent to populism.

The conceptual disentanglement of populism and nationalism and the focus on the articulation of the two also helps clarify the distinction between *exclusionary (or exclusive)* and *inclusionary (or inclusive) populism*. These notions usually refer to the inclusion or exclusion of specific social classes, of specific ethnically and culturally defined groups, as well as of ‘the elite’ (e.g. Jagers & Walgrave 2007; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2012a). However, if only the down/up antagonism between the people-as-underdog and the elite is inherent to populism, then the exclusion of specific socio-economic or ethnic-cultural (or other) groups is not a matter of populism *per se*. It is the result of the articulation of populism with other discourses (socialism or nationalism for example). Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser’s (2012) comparison of European and Latin American populism shows that (the most prominently European) exclusionary populisms are exclusionary mainly because of their exclusionary nationalism, with the PRR as the clearest example. The (most prominently Latin American) inclusionary populisms are mainly situated on the left, and are inclusionary due to their focus on equality and on strengthening the political participation of lower classes and excluded groups (e.g. the poor and indigenous groups). Latin American populisms such as those of Chávez in Venezuela and of Morales in Bolivia (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012a), as well as recent European left-wing populist movements like Syriza and Podemos (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014: 213; Stavrakakis 2015) are examples here. As these illustrations clearly show, the articulation of populism with nationalism does not *necessarily* lead to exclusionary populism. But when populism is exclusionary it *is* usually because it is articulated with exclusionary nationalism.

What clouds this distinction is that both inclusionary left-wing populists and

exclusionary (right-wing) nationalist populists, according to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012: 165), ‘exclude’ ‘the elite’. This would make populisms inherently exclusionary, at least partly, even the ones they label inclusionary populisms. The question is whether it is very helpful to label both the exclusion of national outgroups (or the exclusion of religious minorities or LGBT populations for that matter) *and* the populist exclusion of ‘the elite’ a matter of ‘exclusion’. Antagonistic seems a better term for the relation between people-as-underdog and ‘elite’ in populism. The antagonism between the people-as-underdog and ‘the elite’ does symbolically exclude ‘the elite’ from the definition of the people-as-underdog. But in contrast to exclusionary nationalism’s exclusion of certain groups of people from political participation (political exclusion) and from access to state resources (material exclusion) because of their ethnic-cultural background, the antagonism between the people-as-underdog and the elite does not *in itself* exclude ‘the elite’ from the demos and from access to state resources (see Mudde and Rovira-Kaltwasser 2012a on the material, political and symbolic dimension of inclusion/exclusion).

Certain forms of populism do indeed threaten certain (formerly) powerful groups with exclusion. But this is not inherent to the populist antagonism between the people-as-underdog and ‘the elite’. It is only through the articulation with other discourses that populism becomes exclusionary in the political and material sense. This is not to say that there are no questions to be asked about the (liberal) democratic character of populism per se (e.g. Arditì 2007; Mény & Surel 2002; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012b). But it does mean that the potential populist threat to democracy is of a different character than the exclusionary nationalist threat to democracy.

### **Populism and the sovereignty of the nation over its state**

Let me now turn to a second set of nationalist demands that have frequently been formulated in populist terms: demands for the autonomy, independence and sovereignty of nations over their territory. Here too, the populist signifiers ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ acquire meaning through their articulation with nationalism. The people-as-underdog becomes equated with the nation (see Laclau 2005a: 196-198), and ‘the elite’ is opposed to the nation and its interests.



The articulation between populism and demands for national self-determination has a long history (Canovan 2005: 45; Hermet 1997). Hermet (1997, also 2001) argues, that, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, long before the term populism even existed, struggles for national autonomy have been frequently articulated with populism. This was especially so in ethnic-cultural nationalisms that legitimated their claims for autonomy and sovereignty by locating an authentic national identity in the ordinary people, and opposing this to the bourgeois culture of liberal and cosmopolitan elites that were disconnected from national culture. The fact that ethnic-cultural nationalisms tend to refer to ‘the people’ (Volk in German) rather than to ‘nation’ captures this nationalist-populist articulation, with ‘the people’ referring both to the ordinary people/classes and to the ethnic-culturally defined national group (Hermet 1997; Rémi-Giraud 1996).

This articulation could be found in German nationalism, as well as in Eastern and Central European ethnic-cultural nationalist movements striving for autonomy from large empires (e.g. Croatia and Czechoslovakia from the Austro-Hungarian empire, Poland and the Baltic states from Russia), and have been used ever since by nationalist movements and parties all over the world. This includes sub-state nationalisms that strive for the autonomy or independence from (what they consider) multi-national states (e.g. Flemish nationalism in Belgium, Scottish nationalism in the UK), and movements that strive to become independent from colonising powers and occupying forces in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

Such populist-nationalist arguments are not limited to the struggles of ‘nations without states’ either. A very similar articulation of nationalism and populism also structures the resistance against supra-national politics by nationalists in established nation-states. Here too, the interests of the people-as-underdog and the interests of the nation are equated and opposed to the interests of supra-national elites. The populist-nationalist argument used to *fight for* popular-national sovereignty from larger state structures or foreign rulers is used here to *resist* the shift of political power to supra-national bodies.

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<sup>6</sup> The categories of sub-state nationalism and decolonisation struggle partly overlap, of course, with nationalist struggles for independence being waged in the name of ethnic groups for part of much larger colonial territories. Moreover, sub-state nationalist parties have sometimes labelled as colonisers (the elite of) the ‘multinational’ state they contest.

On the elite end of this populist-nationalist antagonism there are both national and foreign elites. The former are the national elites that ‘collaborate’ with multinational states that go against the interest of the own nation (e.g. the Flemish political elite in Belgium) or collaborate with colonising forces (e.g. the national elites working with the British and the French in their many former colonies), and the national elites that fail to defend the nation’s interest on a supra-national level or ‘collaborate’ with such forces on a national level (e.g. the national politicians ‘collaborating’ with the European institutions). These national elites remain part of the nation, however, through their ethnic-cultural identity.

This is not the case for foreign elites. Foreign elites are the elites of the dominant nation in multinational states (e.g. the Francophone political elite in Belgium), the colonisers, and the non-national elites that use supra-national politics to go against the sovereignty of the nation. In the racist and exclusionary nationalist politics discussed above, this populist-nationalist articulation is also used to exclude minorities as ‘enemies within’ of both the people-as-underdog and of the nation. An example is the anti-Semitic rhetoric about the Jews as a cosmopolitan and alien elite governing the country (also through their ties with Jews around the world).

Populist political movements and parties on both the left and the right have constructed such popular-national versus elitist-supra-national antagonisms. On the left, this articulation of popular and national interests has been most prominent in the resistance against neoliberal policies ‘imposed’ by supra-national or foreign elites (in collaboration with national elites) and going against national sovereignty. This becomes clear in left-wing populist-nationalist resistance against the United States, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank in Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia and other Latin American countries under left-wing rule (Rovira Kaltwasser 2014a: 207-208, 2014b). Parties such as Syriza (Greece) and Podemos (Spain) have used a similar articulation to reject austerity measures ‘imposed’ by European and other supra-national institutions in the wake of the financial crisis that started in the late 2000s (see Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014; Stavrakakis 2015; also March 2011). In some cases, this populist-nationalist resistance against policies imposed by supra-national European institutions has also led to fierce criticisms of individual

European countries (mainly Germany) as *foreign* powers, including even parallels to the Nazi occupation of Greece. Although focused on the socio-economic interests of the people-as-underdog and the nation, left-wing populist-nationalist articulations also appeal to national (cultural) identity as well as to for example ‘the pride’ of the nation in (its attempts at) re-establishing national sovereignty over economic policy (see Halikiopoulou et al. 2012).

Matters of national cultural identity have been far more prominent on the right, where they have often been central in the resistance against foreign and supra-national (as well as national) elites. For example, in populist right-wing politics – in its radical and less radical forms – the antagonism has mainly revolved around the defence of the popular-national against multiculturalist and globalist policies imposed ‘from above’ that threaten the identity, culture and economic interests of the nation. In Europe, especially European institutions are accused of undermining national identity and interests through lenient migration policies as well as through furthering European integration and globalisation. Economic issues do play an important role here, but whereas on the left this is a matter of opposing neoliberalism, on the right the struggle is not at root one between opposing economic models. It is mainly globalisation, the free movement of workers, and the loss of national (economic and other) decision-making power *per se* that is resisted. Indeed, the populist right has also defended the free market economy in nationalist-populist terms. In the US, the Tea Party as well as Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump and other right-wing Republicans, for example, have opposed all kinds of (national and) international government interventions as well as NGO’s as elitist attacks on American identity (Rovira Kaltwasser 2014: 208). Moral and ethical demands too have been formulated in populist-nationalist terms. The Tea Party and other populist (radical) right actors have opposed foreign and supra-national elites for their cosmopolitanism and for imposing progressive (‘liberal’ in the US sense of the term) measures regarding issues such as gay rights, gender relations, and abortion.

### **Transnational populism?<sup>7</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank Benjamin Moffitt for valuable input on the idea of transnational populism.

The prominence and strength of the articulations between nationalism and populism leads to the question whether populism is necessarily nationalist, or at least national? Or to put it differently: is a transnational populism possible? So far, there has been very little true conceptual reflection on what could be called transnational populism (but see for example Gerbaudo 2014; Pelfini 2014). Theoretically, populism is certainly not necessarily national or nationalist. All that is needed to speak of transnational populism is a politics that discursively constructs and claims to represent a transnational people-as-underdog. However, whereas populism has frequently opposed a nationally defined people-as-underdog to supra-national and international *elites*, the construction of a transnational *people-as-underdog* has been far less common and straightforward.

There are two dimensions to transnational populism, the second more profoundly transnational than the first. A first dimension is the international cooperation between nationally organised populist parties and movements. Examples are the cooperation between left-wing populist leaders in Latin America (concretised for example in the foundation of the Bank of the South as an alternative to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), and the (difficult and partial) formation of political groups in the European Parliament by PRR parties. This is perhaps best labelled *international* rather than *transnational* populism: it is more about the *inter*-national ties *between* nationally organised populisms (that revolve around nationally defined people-as-underdogs) than about a truly *trans*-national politics *across* national contexts. A truly transnational populism is more profoundly transnational in that it constructs a transnational people-as-underdog as a political subject that *supersedes* the boundaries of the nation-state, rather than merely *linking up* national people-as-underdogs. In a reflection on ‘global populism’, Pelfini (2014: 199) speaks of the Occupy Movement and the Indignados as “transnational connections of protests, cyberpolitics, and mass mobilizations, claiming for more democracy and against international financial agents” (see also Gerbaudo 2014; Husted 2014). The Occupy Movement’s claim to represent the ‘99%’ against the ‘1%’ does indeed have the potential to serve as a transnational populist claim to represent a transnational people-as-underdog (but this has largely remained a potential).

The distinction between international and transnational populism is a matter of degree: international populisms do create a transnational people-as-underdog, and transnational populisms bring together nationally organised political actors and nationally defined people-as-underdogs. Let me look at these two arguments in some more detail.

When populisms in different countries revolve around similar antagonisms between the people-as-underdog and the same international, transnational and foreign elites (and similar national elites), the similarities and shared interests between nationally defined people-as-underdogs are accentuated and a transnational people is constructed *to some extent*. This is true even without actual cooperation between organisations, but is of course strengthened when nationally organised populists work together. The transnational people-as-underdog can have a socioeconomic basis, as when left-wing populisms oppose similar national economic and political elites and the same transnational (the IMF, the World Bank, the European Union, or even ‘neoliberalism’) and foreign (e.g. the US government) elites. The collaboration between left-wing Latin American populists is a case in point here. But even when the people is defined as underdog on the basis of ethnic-culturally nationalist arguments, a transnational people-as-underdog does appear to some extent. For example, PRR parties across Europe have constructed an antagonism between ordinary people who resist multiculturalism and cherish their national identity, and national and European elites that are undermining national identity through lenient integration and migration policies. Especially when these parties actually cooperate on a European level, and certainly when their European political representatives speak for the entire political group (and thus for all the nations and people-as-underdogs the group claims to represent) a claim towards the representation of a transnational people-as-underdog is made.

To different degrees, what appears through the international collaboration between populists is a sort of *meta*-populism. A populist chain of equivalence between populisms is constructed: different populisms with their specificities are brought together through the opposition to common international, transnational or foreign elites (and to similar national elites). Laclau’s remark that the articulation of demands and identities in a chain of equivalence does not eliminate the particularity of each of

the articulated demands – that articulation ‘can weaken, but not domesticate differences’ (Laclau 2005a: 79) – is helpful here. It allows us to understand how the construction of an international or even transnational populism (with a transnational people against a transnational elite) is not in contradiction with the continued existence of nationally organised populisms (with nationally defined peoples against national and transnational elites). Indeed, in the case of international cooperation between strongly nationalist populisms, it is exactly the shared demands for national particularity of all the different national(ist) populisms in opposition to the same elites that are said to threaten these national particularities that will make up the meta-populist chain of equivalence. At the same time, of course, the exclusionary nationalist character of PRR parties also limits their cooperation and the construction of a truly transnational people-as-underdog.

This is a tension that other populist movements suffer from less, so that a truly transnational populism (with a truly transnational people-as-underdog) is more likely to come from elsewhere than from exclusionary nationalists. The Left seems the most obvious candidate here. International socialist and communist collaborations like the Communist International with their appeals for Workers of the World to Unite are an obvious reference here. But whereas the proletariat does indeed transcend the boundaries of the nation-state, the focus on class struggle hindered the development of a broader populist chain of equivalence symbolised by the people-as-underdog. And despite the internationalist rhetoric, the national focus of the participating parties and movements often stood in the way of a truly transnational politics (March 2011: 149-166).

Indeed, even for populisms that are not nationalist or to whom nationalism is but one demand among many, the nation-state remains crucial. In a world in which political representation is still strongly organised on the level of nation-states, the construction of a transnational populism almost inevitably depends on nationally organised movements; and therefore on the interpellation of nationally defined people-as-underdogs (and also, but less so, on nationally defined elites). With no political institutions directly representing a transnational demos it is not easy to construct and claim to represent a transnational people-as-underdog (see Gerbaudo 2014; Pelfini 2014: 208). This is especially true for political parties. For political movements that

do not strive to operate and claim power within existing democratic political institutions, it might be easier to construct a more truly transnational people-as-underdog beyond the context of national democracies, with forms of representation that go beyond the party political and traditional democratic institutions. But this raises questions as to how they are going to use that representational claim to yield actual influence on decision-making, be it via political institutions or perhaps otherwise.

A number of attempts at forging a European-wide left-wing project are interesting in this respect, as some of them are built around populist demands for the ‘democratisation’ of European institutions (see March 2011: 155-166). For example, Yannis Varoufakis (former Greek Finance Minister in the Syriza government that entered power in 2015) has urged that it is only through the ‘democratisation’ of what he considers the thoroughly undemocratic European institutions that left-wing forces would ever stand a chance against ‘those people in Brussels’. To this end, in 2015, he founded the ‘pan-European platform’ (called DiEM25, Democracy in Europe Movement 2025) with a strong transnational character, a ‘coalition of citizens’, not a ‘coalition of parties’, with the idea ‘not to replicate national politics’ (Varoufakis and Sakalis 2015). A crucial question, for our purposes here, is whether the representation of citizens would still be supranational (indirect, via national representation) or truly transnational. Would citizens be represented as national citizens or as European citizens, or as some combination of both? Next to such attempts at ‘democratising’ existing supra-national structures, transnational populist politics can also aim to create new spaces for politics. Such spaces can range from the very local to the regional and the global, can be overlapping, and can compete with each other and with existing political institutions on different levels.

International and transnational populisms, we have seen, can continue to simultaneously construct a nationally defined people-as-underdog. But there is more. International or transnational populist resistance against a shared foreign or transnational elite has often gone hand in hand with the construction of a pan-national or regional identity. Such pan-nationalist identities, in fact, show strong similarities with nationalism as they too are based on shared territory and history, and constructed through the opposition to outgroups. What we see here is the articulation of pan-

nationalism or regionalism and populism. The pan-Americanism associated with Chavez' Bolivarismo, for example, constructs a Latin American identity, mainly in opposition to the 'imperialist' US and international financial institutions as foreign elites (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2012a: 162). And in Europe, different PRR parties do not only share a strong and exclusionary nationalism, but many of these parties simultaneously present themselves as defenders of European identity and civilisation against immigration and 'Islamisation' (through new Islamic immigrants and existing Muslim populations). This is articulated with a populist rejection of the European elites 'promoting' immigration and 'furthering' Islamisation. International and transnational populism, it appears, is not necessarily incongruous with the thorough articulation between populism and nationalism. And it points to the articulation of populism with politics that revolve around logics very similar to nationalism, only on a larger scale.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter started with a reflection on the conceptual confusion resulting from the many empirical and conceptual ties between populism and nationalism. Throughout the chapter it has become clear that populism and nationalism have been strongly articulated indeed. The chapter has provided insight into the various articulations of populism and nationalism by distinguishing between populist politics and nationalist politics as revolving, respectively, around the claim to represent the people-as-underdog, constructed through a down/up antagonism between the people-as-underdog and the elite, and the claim to represent the nation, constructed through the in/out distinction between the nation and its outgroups. It is through this clear conceptual distinction that the intricate and complex conceptual and empirical relations between populism and nationalism can be grasped.

Clearly distinguishing populism and nationalism as distinct discourses might also help us to critically evaluate contemporary debates about populism and uses of the notion of populism. By focusing attention on the populist dimension of populist forms of exclusionary nationalism, the actual roots of the democratic problems posed by such politics are missed. Moreover, this has given populism a worse name than it deserves. Quite some of the contemporary critiques of populism are actually critiques of



(exclusionary) nationalism. These critiques denounce populism not only for the potential threats of populism *per se* to liberal democracy, but also for sins that are not in fact populist (but are ‘committed’ by some populists). Because the populist logic can be used to articulate a wide range of political demands – from racist and exclusionary demands to demands for workers’ rights and for the democratization of democratic as well as undemocratic political systems – the populist character of a particular politics is insufficient not only as a basis for understanding that politics but also for evaluating it.

Whilst the use of the notion of populism in politics and journalism will come and go with the ebbs and flows of political debate, the concept of populism promises to retain its value for political analysis (even if it will certainly ebb and flow along with political reality). The concept of populism is crucial for understanding our political reality, but only if we use it to grasp one particular aspect of that political reality, and refrain from imprecision and from overloading the concept with more and broader meanings than it can bear. By looking at populism and nationalism as distinct but often closely articulated discourses, this chapter, I hope, has contributed to further strengthening the concept of populism for academic usage. A clearer distinction between populism and nationalism (and other concepts) certainly would not harm the quality of political debate either, but I do not hold very high hopes for that to happen.

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