Populism, Populist Democracy, and the Shifting of Meanings
Subverting – Disfiguring – Transforming

Hans-Jürgen Puhle

In a number of papers I have written during the last years I have tried to find some answers to the question of what populist aspirations and politics, on the one hand, and the newly emerging structures of "populist democracy", on the other hand, and their interactions do to democracy in general, and to political communication and intermediation more in particular (e.g. Puhle 2020, 2018, 2017, 2015a). With regard to the topic of this volume one might have to go a bit further and look more into the mechanisms of agitation and propaganda, into the factors and vectors that constitute "Deutungsmacht" (within the new constellations of the public sphere), and the various processes of resemanticization and shifting of meanings that could be noticed in the orbit of populist mobilization and politics. For a start, the basic question might be put like this: Are contemporary populisms particularly prone (and how and why) to subverting, disfiguring and transforming the terms and topoi of political discourse and propaganda? And do populists (have to) rely more on "fake news" and "alternative facts" than others?

Here, we first would have to explain what we mean by "contemporary populisms". Who are the actors (and authors)? This obviously is a complex agenda and the analysis requires two short summaries: one of the findings on the varieties of populisms through the twentieth century, and another of the relevant dimensions and repercussions of what I have called the rise of "populist democracy", as one of the consequences of

a new structural change of the public sphere ("Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit", Habermas 1962) during the last decades around the turn of the century (Puhle 2017). Then, in a third point, some populist strategies of semantic reallocation will be identified.

1.   Varieties of Populisms

There is no such thing as populism as such. What we are dealing with are varieties of populisms (the plural is important). First we find two basic types, one for more developed, and one for less developed countries. The "classic" U.S. Populists of the end of the nineteenth century have become the archetype of protest populisms in, for example, the more exclusionary peasant and protest movements in Europe since the 1920s. More or less at the same time, the Russian narodniki became (or were written into) the archetype of project populisms in less developed countries, such as the more inclusionary and mostly anti-imperialist populist (and national liberation) movements in the decolonizing world and in Latin America. In an effort to use the term in a parsimonious way, I am referring here to "populisms" (as "-isms"), i.e. particular movements with distinctive and meaningful aspirations that cannot be better characterized otherwise, e.g., by the term for their "political family" (from anarchists and communists to liberals, conservatives, or Christians), in contrast to "populist" elements, styles, mechanisms, or rhetoric which can be combined with any kind of political intentions on the Left or on the Right ("populist" as an adjective; for more details, and the following, see Puhle 2020).

There are, however, significant commonalities. As a first approximation, we might define populisms as social mobilizations and movements of protest and resistance against the status quo in the name of the "people", "the people's will", or the "common men", and not of specific classes or groups, with a corresponding ideology featuring a number or characteristic elements: Populists fight against the elites, the institutions, and the mechanisms of organized interests and politics; they see themselves as a grassroots movement voicing the sentiments of "just" indig-

nation (an old topos) against what they consider to be the conspiracies of a corrupt "establishment" or "oligarchy" and its foreign allies, and an illegitimate usurpation of power that should belong to the people. One of their most important ideological features is the fiction of an immediate relationship between the people and its leaders with direct communication in two ways that does not need any intermediaries. Hence populists antagonize and try (if they can) to circumvent and weaken all kinds of "corps intermédiaires" with functions of control or accountability: parliaments, courts of justice, political parties, interest groups, and independent media. They are anti-liberal, and mostly anti-urban, anti-intellectual, and at least rhetorically against "Big Capital", corporations, trusts, and the more (and often "better") organized capitalist actors, but they are not outright anti-capitalist.

Populist movements basically are movements of an underdog culture: They see politics in moralistic, agonistic and dichotomousc terms and they cultivate all kinds of conspiracy narratives and myths. They polarize, and their most favored political strategy is the politics of fear and hatred. They have an explicit "Feindbild" (image of the enemy): it is the honest many against the corrupt few, the small good guys against the big bad guys. The bad guys are the great national and international corporations and organizations and their agents. The good guys are "the people", i.e., the moral majority (no matter their numbers), of those who were once called the "common men" or the "forgotten men". "The people" at the same time is an entity that is considered to be homogeneous, and excludes many "others", like "corrupt" elites, interests, foreigners, migrants, people of different culture, etc. Populists often are xenophobic, and care about their "identities" (which are often considered "endangered"). And when they speak of the "rule of the people" they usually mean the rule of the populists. They can be on the Right or on the Left. Given their close affinity to nationalism (by their invocation of "the people") they mostly are on the Right, but there are exceptions, e.g., the critics of globalization and the G8 summits, anti-capitalist protesters, leftist critics of the European Union (Puhle 2015a; Priester 2012; Canovan 1999).

Populists' relationships with the state and with democracy can be characterized as highly ambivalent: They usually favor a weak state as

long as they fight it, and a strong state once they have conquered it. Furthermore, populist movements or regimes can be either democratic or undemocratic, or, in the case of regimes, tend to what we have called "defective democracies" (Merkel and Puhle et al. 2003), or what others might call "disfigured" (Urbinati 2014) or "illiberal democracies". Populist impacts on democracies oscillate between "threat" and "corrective". In many cases the mechanisms of direct acclamation and the reduction of the controlling potential of the "corps intermédiaires" inherent to populist politics have damaged the countervailing institutions and the balance of an "embedded democracy", and opened the path toward more manipulation from above, "guided" democracy, Bonapartism, or worse forms of autocracy (Merkel 2004). But there have also been other cases in which populist energies have strengthened and reinvigorated existing democratic systems. The most notable cases here have been the "classic" American Populists whose history in the longue durée has turned out to be a success story, given their lasting influence on the politics and policies of the "Progressives" in both parties that have informed American mainstream politics down to the 1990s (Puhle 1975, 142–154; Hofstadter 1955). The usual ambivalence, however, has become visible in a second line of populist legacies: in the protest movements of the right, from Father Coughlin and Huey Long via George Wallace and others all the way to Donald Trump who may not be a populist in substance, but certainly is in style and campaigning (Lipset and Raab 1970; Judis 2016).

Other "classical" cases of the twentieth century have shown more varieties. Among the protesters in the more developed world we can also find some North and Central European peasant movements, tax resisters and xenophobic protest organizations of the lower middle classes from the interwar period to the 1960s, also in Western Europe. One of the most prominent among them has been the short-lived Poujadist movement of small artisans and shopkeepers (UDCA) in France which, in 1956, got 56 Members of Parliament elected – one was Jean Marie Le Pen who later founded the Front National (Souillac 2007). Similar continuities between older movements and the more recent ones of a later wave can also be found in Scandinavia, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. The "classics" of the second type, the anti-imperialist

and national-liberation populisms of what has been called the "Third World", enjoyed their peak time between the 1930s and the 1970s. They usually organized broad multi-class movements, mobilized against the "oligarchy" and foreign colonialist or imperialist powers, and had an interventionist and developmental agenda. In many cases they established regimes of some duration, some more democratic, some more authoritarian (Hermet 2001; Hermet et al. 2001; Mény and Surel 2002, and the pioneers in: Ionescu/Gellner 1969). Here we can distinguish various groups:

- Kemalists in Turkey, Kuomintang (KMT) in China, Congress Party in India, Sukarno's movement in Indonesia,
- the secular and often socialist Arab nationalists (Nasser, National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria, Baath parties, etc.),
- the classical African movements of decolonization in the 1950s, led by Nkrumah, Kenyatta, Nyerere; the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, etc.

For many years, the best studied area had been Latin America. Here the "classical" populists have marked a longer phase of transition, usually after revolutions or previous substantial reform politics (e.g. Di Tella 1965, 1997; Laclau 1981, 2005; Knight 1998; Weyland 2001; Coniff 1999; for the context: Collier and Collier 1991; Puhle 2007).

We can distinguish between three to four types:

a) postrevolutionary stabilizers (Partido Revolucionario Institucional/ PRI in Mexico, Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario/MNR in Bolivia; Cuba 1, Nicaragua 1, both before becoming outright Marxist-Leninist),
b) authoritarian regimes (Vargas in Brazil, Perón in Argentina), and
c) democratic populist movements in two waves:
   a. a first wave from late 1920s and 1930s (APRA in Peru, Acción Democrática in Venezuela, Partido Liberación Nacional in Costa Rica, Partido Revolucionario Dominicano, and in a way also the coalition of the Unidad Popular in Chile), and

    b.   a second wave, since the 1960s (basically the Christian Democrats in Chile, Venezuela [COPEI], El Salvador, Guatemala, or Acción Popular in Peru).

The two types mentioned – xenophobic protest populisms in the U.S. and in Europe, and populisms with developmental projects in most of the rest of the world – have established clear lines of continuities throughout the twentieth century. At the same time, they have increasingly mixed with new elements, producing also discontinuities and varieties of "hybrid" phenomena which seem to dominate present day populisms. In *Latin America*, e.g., various layers of populisms, from different periods, coexist. We could find movements with a longer tradition in Argentina's Peronists, in the parties of Concertación in Chile, Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) in Peru or the Mexican PRI, and new movements, not without links to the past, in the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) in Brazil, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) in Bolivia, Correa in Ecuador, or the erratic Chavismo in Venezuela. Often mixed approaches have prevailed (Roberts 2015, 2019; Weyland 2001, 2013; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; De la Torre 2015; Abromeit et al. 2016). One interesting fusion of old and new elements has been the Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (MORENA) and the presidency of López Obrador (often referred to by his initials AMLO) in Mexico. A different and rather new type that does not follow the traditional patterns of Latin American populism has been established in the movement and regime of Bolsonaro in Brazil, their ideological set-up much resembling those of Donald Trump and some European right-wing protest movements.

Among the protest populisms of the more developed world, the movements in the *United States* have also shown many continuities, those of the progressive mainstream as well as those of the Right. Here, too, new elements have been blended into them, so far ending, in the twenty-first century, in the reiterative hollowing and the destruction of the Republican Party, first by the Neocons and later by the Tea Party, so that Donald Trump could hijack it in 2016 and has not let it go since then (Hochschild 2016; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Trump is a ruthless

populist in communication and campaigning, but not that much in substance. His politics of the rich, by the rich and for the rich has never been a populist agenda.

Varieties of populist mixes and hybrids also prevail in *Europe* where, during the last decades, from Scandinavia to the Balkans and the Mediterranean, the most numerous movements have been those whom the Germans call "Rechtspopulisten": xenophobic right-wing extremists who often have also represented some continuities of the traditional ultra-nationalisms of the respective countries (e.g. Akkerman et al. 2015; Decker et al. 2015; Kriesi/Pappas 2015; Mudde 2007). The usual suspects here are the following:

- the "Progress" or "popular" parties in Scandinavia, from Mogens Glistrup in Denmark in the 1970s to the Danish People's Party (DDP), the Sweden Democrats, or the True Finns;
- the Front/Rassemblement National, and what became of it, in France, the Vlaams Blok/Belang in Belgium, the Democratic Center, Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom, PVV) and the movements of Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Blocher's Schweizerische Volkspartei (Swiss People's Party, SVP) in Switzerland, the FPÖ and its secessions in Austria, and in Great Britain the English Defence League, UK Independence Party (UKIP), many of the Tory Brexiteers, and the Brexit Party;
- in Italy the Lega; Berlusconi's Forza Italia seems to be a random case, and the Cinque Stelle (M5S) may be populists but not necessarily populists of the Right.
- In Spain, the rise of VOX began rather late in 2018;
- In Hungary FIDESZ (Hungarian Civic Alliance), and in Poland Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and justice, PiS), if we do not count them, like some groups in Ireland, as traditional catholic ultra-nationalists, all of them modernized by new modes of communication;
- in Germany the "Republicans", the Deutsche Volksunion (*German People's Union*, DVU), the Schill Party, and finally the Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD) which was first elected into the German Bundestag in 2017.

However, not all right-wing extremists are populists, and not all populists are necessarily on the Right. We can also find them on the Left, among the critics of globalization and of the G7 (or G8) summits (attac, occupy, blockupy, the Federal Coordination of Internationalism/BUKO, Global Trade Watch), the anti-capitalist protesters and "indignados" triggered by the financial and institutional crisis of 2008/09, and the increasing number of critics of the European Union and its politics. Some of them have become influential players and parties which have significantly contributed to restructure the respective party systems. The most important among them have been SYRIZA in Greece and PODEMOS in Spain which both made it into government (Pappas 2014; Rivero 2014; Monedero 2014). They all have articulated populist aspirations, denouncing the sempiternal "conspiracies" of the banks, of capitalists and the elites, of the established parties and the "system", the European Union, the International Financial Institutions (IFI) and other agents of globalization, and asking for more justice, more direct, unmediated participation, and more respect, particularly for the "common people" (e.g. Rodrik 2017; Moffitt 2016; Knöbl 2016; Jörke and Selk 2017). Anti-EU rhetoric does, however, also come from the Right, and in some cases anti-globalist and anti-capitalist criticism overlaps or combines with traditional ultranationalist arguments.

2.   The Rise of "Populist Democracy"

The second phenomenon that ought to be summarized briefly in order to better understand the context is what could be called the rise of "populist democracy" – as one of the consequences of the structural change of the public sphere and of the conditions and constellations of political communication and mobilization that has occurred in the last decades around the turn of the century. This "Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit 2.0" has been triggered by a number of factors that have to do with: economic and institutional crises (since the late 1970s), advanced globalization, and the availability of new electronic media (particularly social media), and the various mixes of elements of "collective" and "connective

action" (with the network logic) in political communication (Bennett and Segerberg 2013). Among its outcomes have been a comprehensive mediatization of politics and another decisive push, on a broad scale, toward strengthening the elements of "populist democracy" as a real-type structure, opposed to those of "liberal" or "embedded democracy" (for more details, see Puhle 2017). Its basic characteristic is the emphasis on the direct and immediate relationship, and the fiction (or the simulacrum) of a permanent two-ways communication between the voters and the leader(s), circumventing and marginalizing the "corps intermédiaires" designed to provide channels of control and accountability. These changes also tend to favor populist actors and politics and give them significant comparative advantages. And they have affected the mode and composition of political agency and intermediation as well as the institutions, and influenced the outcomes of many interactions (Puhle 2020).

We can observe some general trends: The mechanisms of populist democracy can help to enhance direct participation of the citizens, but they can also (and often do) favor fragmentation, disorder and manipulation, particularly when democracy is reduced to mere "audience democracy" (Manin 1997). Political mobilization has become much easier than before: faster, more comprehensive, better to coordinate, but also more fragmented, less sustainable, more ad hoc and short-termish. Shit- and shamestorms may eventually be devastating, but they are reliably short. Cooperation and coalitions have become more fluid. Political campaigning, and the skills required, have substantially changed; techniques of networking, symbolic action, theatrical events, simulation (see Ingolfur Blühdorn's "simulative democracy", 2013), and good entertainment are more in demand. And the increase in recruiting political personnel from actors (beginning with Ronald Reagan), communicators, TV hosts, comedians and other "political amateurs" has been significant.

What also stands out as a correlate of the politics of permanent mobilization and unmitigated partiality (e.g., "fake news", "alternative facts"), is the high degree of emotionalization and scandalization of political communication. It has been facilitated by the ease and directness

of electronic communication which, on average, seems to favor a less formal and more brutal language, by the fragmentation conditioned by the network logic, and by the fact that traditional filters (like quality journalism or intra-organizational checks) are no longer in place. It also fits well with the populist preferences for "politics of fear", and the Freund/Feind (friend/foe) scheme which have favored polarization and radicalization from the start. The idea is that people shall even vote out of fear and guided by hate. Hence elections tend to be transformed into acclamations and plebiscites, and campaigning has become more and more "negative" (see the debates on "affective polarization", "negative partisanship", etc.; Iyengar et al. 2018; Abramowitz and Webster 2018).

These trends are further enhanced by a number of mechanisms that are related to the structure and functioning of the social media and also contribute to disfigure the perceptions of the political landscape and, e.g., of the strengths of the political competitors. In the new social media popularity, intensity and "strength" are basically measured by algorithms, and these (eventually together with a small bunch of hyperactive users) tend to favor emotions, and particularly negative emotions, such as hatred and rage. Negative emotions get more comments, more "likes", and the candidates and parties emitting them hence have unfair advantages in the net. To give just one example: At the beginning of 2022, the exchanges in Facebook conveyed the impression that the extreme right-wing AfD was the most popular party in Germany. At the same time, however, there was sufficient evidence for estimating that about one third of the top commentators for the AfD were fake profiles (*Der Spiegel* 4, 22.01.2022, 36–7). It is obvious that such constellations, like many other problems that have been raised by the techniques and practices of the social networks, are in need of more systematic monitoring, policing and regulation.

Here the logics of populist democracy and the mechanisms of the new media, on the one hand, and populist politics, pressures and messages, on the other, reinforce one another triggering a process of "Veralltäglichung" (cotidianization, quotidianization) of the aggressive and dividing mechanisms populist interactions can contain. These processes and aspirations have been backed up by a general loss of trust

and solidarity and a growing disenchantment of the people with their governments and institutions (for more see Gunther/Montero/Puhle 2007, 29–74). They often appear as if they could no longer "deliver" as expected vis-à-vis the major problems at hand, such as transcultural migrations, the structural transformation from Fordist economies to knowledge economies, the impacts of advanced globalization for the labor markets, and rising inequalities, not to speak of other crises and catastrophes, like COVID-19 (Atkinson 2015; Piketty 2014; Merkel and Kneip 2018).

The structural change of the public sphere and the rise of "populist democracy" have enhanced certain trends that could already be observed earlier in the twentieth century: the tendencies toward more fragmentation, and toward more hybrids of old and new movements, as well as an increase in the mutual transcontinental and transoceanic learning processes. However, whereas in earlier times the movements became more similar and converged, up to a point, within the limits of their respective type (protest populism in the developed world, project populism in the less developed world), they now have started to go beyond: the dividing lines between the types have become blurred, and more fragmented and loose elements and molds ('Versatzstücke') are traveling around (which also contributes to the characteristic constellations of our time that have been labeled as "postmodern"). We can now find more project populisms in Europe and the U.S., and more protest populisms also in Latin America. The Bolsonaro movement in Brazil has been the first populist movement that has no longer followed the typical lines of Brazilian and Latin American populist traditions (which have been anti-imperialist, "desarrollista", and in a way "progressive"), but has taken the Trump movement for a model. The U.S. populists as well have taken in foreign influences and suggestions (often undemocratic ones).

3.   Some Populist Strategies of Semantic Reallocation

Coming back to my initial question of whether and why contemporary populisms may have a greater affinity to (or a greater need of) rear-

ranging, disfiguring and redefining the terms and topoi of political discourse and agitation, and whether and how they might succeed in this practice, we are facing a broad variety of phenomena differing in degree. First, we find an extended field of varieties of populisms, eventually even with blurred borderlines to non-populist, or not-so-much populist movements and politicians: more or less democratic and undemocratic, of the right and of the left, extremist and moderate, in opposition and in government. Second, we are facing different degrees of intensities with which the populists are mobilizing, prioritizing, occupying, subverting, disfiguring, and transforming the basic agendas of political discourse and agitation. How far they could go, and whether and how they might reach the lines of "fake news", "alternative knowledge" ("facts", "truth"), or of a complete "alternative reality" of their own, depends on how much interpretive power / Deutungsmacht they can muster. The amount of interpretive power, in its turn, usually will be conditioned by (1) the societal, political and cultural constellations and contexts of the situation, (2) the influence and power of the populist actors, and (3) the constellations of receptivity in the field. It basically is a question of influence and power (and of power differentials and power relations) in a given situation.

The easiest and least sophisticated way of political propaganda has always been what Hitler recommended in *Mein Kampf*: repeat simplistic propaganda formulae and outright lies again and again, so that some of it will stick in the end (Hitler 1925, ch. 6). Donald Trump appears to be a fan of this basic version one of whose advantages lies in its being operable at a reduced level of literacy. It has been done before, e.g., by Karl Rove in the last days of the Bush campaign of 2004 in rural areas, with reference to the Democrats' alleged plans for gay marriage. Such campaigns have also demonstrated that strategies like this will usually work easier and more smoothly and get more momentum in case they are backed up by a specific "creed" or ideology, at least by some of its patterns, or loose bits and pieces which can be referred to (there is no need to be too demanding here). These elements would not only invoke the standard mechanisms of prejudice (as it was understood by the early Frankfurt School) and outright partiality; they would also mobilize the

logic of fundamentalist convictions and quasi-religious believing. Even if many details of fundamentalist beliefs may be exchangeable, the logic implied remains the same: What you believe is, in principle, no longer open to critical assessment or rational argument, not to speak of scientific evidence, so that the scope of what might be considered as being "true" or "real" widens enormously and becomes more arbitrary. "Facts" and "alternative facts" then play in the same league, and you may have your choice, without any scruples. Hence proceeding, e.g., from the classic labeling of the New Dealers as "socialists", or of welfare as a collectivist straitjacket, to the statements that Obama is a Muslim, or Joe Biden a Commie at the service of foreign interests and conspiracies, will become just a matter of degree, opening up innumerable possibilities for representing the world not as it is, but as you need it to appear in order to promote your campaign.

Populist belief systems, creeds and ideologies usually also display a peculiar subversiveness: It is, however, not the "good" and productive subversiveness of critique and reason that serves as a permanent "mole" triggering, between our "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectations", dialectical processes of change and potential "progress" (Koselleck 1979). In contrast, the subversiveness of populism is negative, and impregnated by one of its most salient characteristics which Nadia Urbinati (2019) has called its intransigent "antiestablishmentarianism". Populists hate and fight the "establishment" and what they might call the "system". Many of them, in the name of "the people", and of the people's democratic participation and empowerment, have subverted the guarantees and the institutional firmness and stability of democracies. It is, however, interesting that, in Western democracies, only a few of them have presented themselves as being outright and completely disloyal to democratic values and procedures, whereas the majority has preferred strategies of semi-loyalty, with much "doublespeak", purged or "re-invented" and re-defined terminology, and techniques of semantic reallocation (cf. the rhetoric of Jörg Haider, Marine Le Pen or Giorgia Meloni). Most of populist "Umdeutung" ("resemanticization") and the shifting of meanings has followed the lines of semi-loyalty with regard to democracy, taking advantage of strategies of piecemeal (and

somewhat furtive) change and salami slicing tactics. (For the concept of semiloyalty, first Linz 1978.)

In these processes key terms of political communication, programmatic articulation and campaigning are disfigured and transformed, often gradually, but increasingly and continuously. They are semantically rearranged, adapted to and integrated into the populist vocabulary and belief system, so that in the end they reflect and correspond to the essentials of contemporary populism, in the average mostly on the right and not or not completely democratic. Coming back to what has been outlined in the beginning of this essay, these "essentials" (of a tendentially maximalist ideal type) could be summarized as follows (Puhle 2020):

- protest against the status quo, in the name of the "people";
- "people" conceived as homogeneous (also underdogs);
- agonistic schemes, dichotomous view of society, conspiracy narratives, moralistic indignation, polarization and politics of fear and hatred;
- antipluralistic, antiliberal positions;
- against elites, institutions, and experts;
- against intermediaries (parliaments, parties, courts of law, independent media);
- fiction of direct, unmediated relationship and communication between leaders and followers;
- (mostly) exclusionary nationalism or nativism.

Besides the protest against the "establishment" and the "system" the first key element is the invocation of "the people". For populists this is not a statistical term, or the ensemble of the citizens, but rather a subjective and affective term: It is "We the people", the "good" or "common" people, often underdogs who are all alike and all "friends". In an agonistically structured world where friends fight foes, and "us" fight "them", the good guys (mostly the smaller ones) fight the bad guys (mostly the bigger ones). So, the term "people" has to be redefined, and the criteria for belonging are changing. Not all of those who may live next door and speak our language belong to the "people", and to the respective "nation": The

elites usually do not, and eventually many others, too, particularly minorities and immigrants, the more so if they are culturally different. The populist concept of the "people" has an exclusionary, often xenophobic bias. The elites, in particular, are considered to be allies of foreign interests and (oligarchic or cosmopolitan) protagonists of the conspiracies against the common, hard-working and underprivileged people.

The same happens to other key terms of the political discourse referring to concepts like freedom, security, culture, citizenship, or "the system", to institutions such as parliaments, parties, pressure groups, courts of law, the media (e.g., the press becoming the "Lügenpresse"), or to the various vehicles of mobilization, not to speak of all the affective symbols of an inward-looking community. In a polarized world, characterized by politics of fear and hatred between friend and foe, there is only black and white, good and evil, and almost every term can become a voluntaristic "Kampfbegriff" (battle term) which is either occupied or "captured" (for the "good" cause), or disfigured and rearranged. This is particularly the case with the notion and the meaning of "democracy" which is completely redefined. Whatever else may be the specifics in a particular case, for populists in general an "embedded" or "liberal democracy", as it has been described, with all its checks and balances (Merkel and Puhle et al. 2003), is no longer a democracy. For them "democracy" is a simulacrum of participation with various simulations of "immediacy" (for those who belong), it is anti-pluralist, anti-liberal, anti-institutional, and at present in many cases also "anti-genderwahnsinn". "Feindbilder" have to be tangible.

One of the favored strategies of populist agitators besides resemanticization is outright reality denial, such as the denial of climate change, in the interest of the chemical agroindustry, extractivist entrepreneurs and many others, or Covid-19 denial, directed against the politics and policies of the established mainstream, or denial of electoral defeat, as in the case of Donald Trump who invented "illegal voting ballots" after the November 2020 elections. Such strategies combine repeated basic lies (as Hitler and others had recommended) with more systematic "alternative facts" and the respective conspiracy narratives, often also with an evocation of fundamentalist belief systems, in order to produce simu-

lacra of hermetic "alternative" realities that are similar to those cultivated in Mafia circles, by Mexican drug cartels, or under totalitarian rule. These inventions and fancies then would guide and channel the mobilization of the populists' followers and could be further exploited in the course of future campaigns.

On the whole, it appears that populists would have to rely more than non-populists on building their politics and communication on such mechanisms of subverting, disfiguring and transforming the terms and topoi of political discourse and agitation. Not only because they usually have less substance to offer and, due to their strategies of polarization, have a greater need for mobilization, and hence for additional vehicles of identification and legitimation. They also value affective politics of indignation and resentment over rational aspirations and arguments, and have a rather peculiar black-and-white view of the world that in most cases does not correspond to the constellations of real-existing societies and to the concepts and institutions of liberal democracy. Hence, they have to take refuge in the mechanisms of prejudice, in myths and legends of conspiracies and in fundamentalist beliefs which then have to be made plausible to potential followers and voters. Here the techniques of resemanticization, shifting of meanings and transforming existing narratives come in. They seem to be in higher demand among populist campaigners than they would be among traditional non-populist Conservatives, Liberals or Social Democrats.

If they could, and if the others let them, populist agitators would try to subvert, disfigure, transform, and re-invent the world according to their peculiar narratives and aspirations, beginning with semantics. The friends of a free society and of an embedded democracy should not let them succeed. They should criticize their language, unmask their intentions, contain their efforts and resist their aspirations, by critical discourse, critique of ideology, and not least by well communicated politics and policies that address the problems of the people adequately. No pasarán!

Works Cited

Abramowitz, Alan I. and Steve W. Webster (2018) Negative Partisanship: Why Americans Dislike Parties But Behave Like Rabid Partisans. *Political Psychology* 39(S1), 119–135, Web: https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12 479.

Abromeit, John et al. (eds.) (2016) *Transformations of Populism in Europe and the Americas. History and Recent Tendencies*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Akkerman, Tjitske et al. (eds.) (2015) *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* London: Routledge.

Atkinson, Anthony B. (2015) *Inequality. What Can Be Done?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bennett, W. Lance and Alexandra Segerberg (2013) *The Logic of Connective Action. Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berlin, Isaiah (1968) (Summary) To Define Populism. Precis of the conference held in London 1967. *Government and Opposition* 3(2), 137–179.

Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.) (2020) Transformation Index BTI 2020. Governance in International Comparison. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung. https://www.bti-project.org.

Blühdorn, Ingolfur (2013) *Simulative Demokratie. Neue Politik nach der postdemokratischen Wende*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Canovan, Margaret (1981) *Populism*. London: Junction Books.

Canovan, Margaret (1999) Trust the People! Populism and the two faces of democracy. *Political Studies* 47(1), 2–16.

Castells, Manuel (1996–1998) *The Information Age.* 3 vols. Oxford: Blackwell.

Collier, Ruth Berins and David Collier (1991) *Shaping the Political Arena. Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Conniff, Michael L. (ed.) (1999) *Populism in Latin America*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

De la Torre, Carlos (2018) Populism Revived: Donald Trump and the Latin American Leftist Populists. *The Americas* 47(4), 734–38.

De la Torre, Carlos (ed.) (2015) *The Promise and Perils of Populism. Global Perspectives.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

De la Torre, Carlos (ed.) (2019) *Routledge International Handbook of Global Populism*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Decker, Frank, Bernd Henningsen and Kjetil Jakobsen (eds.) (2015) *Rechtspopulismus und Rechtsextremismus in Europa.* Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Di Tella, Torcuato S. (1965) Populism and Reform in Latin America. In: Veliz, Claudio (ed.) *Obstacles to Change in Latin America.* London: Oxford University Press, 47–74.

Di Tella, Torcuato S. (1997) Populism into the Twenty-first Century. *Government and Opposition* 32, 187–200.

Dubiel, Helmut (ed.) (1986) *Populismus und Aufklärung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Freeden, Michael (1998) Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology? *Political Studies* 46, 748–765.

Gidron, Noam and Bart Bonikowski (2013) Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda. *Weatherhead Working Paper Series* 13–0004, Cambridge: Harvard University.

Gunther, Richard, José Ramón Montero and Juan J. Linz (eds.) (2002) *Political Parties: Old Concepts and New Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gunther, Richard, José Ramón Montero and Hans-Jürgen Puhle (eds.) (2007) *Democracy, Intermediation, and Voting on Four Continents*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gunther, Richard, Paul A. Beck, Petro C. Magalhães and Alejandro Moreno (eds.) (2016) *Voting in Old and New Democracies*. New York: Routledge.

Habermas, Jürgen (1990) *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*. 1962. Repr. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Heinisch, Reinhard C., Christina Holtz-Bacha and Oscar Mazzoleni (eds.) (2017) *Political Populism. A Handbook*. Baden-Baden : Nomos.

Hermet, Guy (1989) *Le peuple contre la démocratie* Paris : Fayard.

Hermet, Guy (2001) *Les populismes dans le monde.* Paris : Fayard.

Hermet, Guy, Soledad Loaeza and Jean François Prud'homme (eds.) (2001) *Del populismo de los antiguos al populismo de los modernos*. México: El Colegio de México.

Hitler, Adolf (1925) *Mein Kampf*. Vol. 1, München: Franz Eher Nf.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell (2016) *Strangers in Their Own Land. Anger and Mourning on the American Right. A Journey to the Heart of Our Political Divide*. New York: New Press.

Hofstadter, Richard (1955) *The Age of Reform*. New York: Vintage Books.

Ionescu, Ghita and Ernest Gellner (eds.) (1969) *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Iyengar, Shanto et al. (2018) The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States. *Annual Review of Political Science* 22(1), 1–18, DOI 10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034.

Jörke, Dirk and Veith Selk (2017) *Theorien des Populismus. Zur Einführung*. Hamburg: Junius.

Judis, John P. (2016) *The Populist Explosion. How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*. New York: Columbia Global Reports.

Katz, Richard S. and Peter Mair (2002) The Ascendancy of the Party in Public Office: Party Organizational Change in Twentieth-Century Democracies. In: Gunther, Richard, José Ramon Montero and Juan J. Linz (eds.) *Political Parties. Old Concepts and New Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 113–135.

Kirchheimer, Otto (1966) The Transformation of the Western European Party System. In: La Palombara, Joseph and Myron Weiner (eds.): *Political Parties and Political Development*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 177–200. Knight, Alan (1998) Populism and Neo-populism in Latin America, especially Mexico. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30(2), 223–248.

Knöbl, Wolfgang (2016) Über alte und neue Gespenster. Historisch-systematische Anmerkungen zum "Populismus". *Mittelweg 36* 25(6), 8–35.

Kosselleck, Reinhart (1979) "Erfahrungsraum" und "Erwartungshorizont" – zwei historische Kategorien. In: Koselleck, Reinhart, *Vergangene*

Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten. Frankfurt am Main: Suhr-kamp, 349–375.

Kriesi, Hanspeter and Takis S. Pappas (eds.) (2015) *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Laclau, Ernesto (1981) *Politik und Ideologie im Marxismus. Kapitalismus – Fa-schismus – Populismus*. Berlin: Argument-Verlag, 123–185.

Laclau, Ernesto (2005) *On Populist Reason.* London: Verso.

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt (2018) *How Democracies Die: What His-tory Reveals About our Future*. New York: Viking.

Linz, Juan J. (1978) *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lipset, Seymour Martin and Earl Raab (1970) *The Politics of Unreason. Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790–1970*. New York: Harper & Row.

Maihold, Günther (ed.) (2020) *Cultura, comunicación y crimen organizado en México*. Berlin: ed. tranvía.

Manin, Bernard (1997) *Principles of Representative Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Manow, Philip (2018) *Die Politische Ökonomie des Populismus*. Berlin: Suhr-kamp.

Marx, Karl (1960) Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte. 1852. In: *Marx-Engels-Werke* (MEW), vol. 8, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 111–207.

Mény, Yves and Yves Surel (eds.) (2002) *Democracies and the Populist Chal-lenge*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Merkel, Wolfgang (2004) Embedded and Defective Democracies. *Democ-ratization* 11(5), 33–58.

Merkel, Wolfgang and Sascha Kneip (eds.) (2018) *Democracy and Crisis. Challenges in Turbulent Times*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Merkel, Wolfgang, Hans-Jürgen Puhle et al. (2003) *Defekte Demokratie*. Vol. 1: Theorie. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Moffitt, Benjamin (2016) *The Global Rise of Populism. Performance, Political Style, and Representation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Monedero, Juan Carlos (2014) *Curso urgente de política para gente decente*. Barcelona: Seix Barral.

Mouffe, Chantal (2018) *Für einen linken Populismus*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Mounk, Yascha (2018) *The People vs. Democracy. Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Mudde, Cas (2007) *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (eds.) (2012) *Populism in Europe and the Americas. Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Müller, Jan-Werner (2016) *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Norris, Pippa and Ronald Inglehart (2019) *Cultural Backlash. Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Panizza, Francisco (ed.) (2005) *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. London: Verso.

Pappas, Takis S. (2014) Populist democracies: post-authoritarian Greece and post-communist Hungary. *Government and Opposition* 49(1), 1–23.

Piketty, Thomas (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Priester, Karin (2012) *Rechter und linker Populismus. Annäherung an ein Chamäleon*. Frankfurt: Campus.

Puhle, Hans-Jürgen (1975) *Politische Agrarbewegungen in kapitalistischen Industriegesellschaften. Deutschland, USA und Frankreich im 20. Jahrhundert* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Puhle, Hans-Jürgen (1986) Was ist Populismus? In: Dubiel, Helmut (ed.): *Populismus und Aufklärung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 12–32 (first publ. in: *Politik und Kultur* 10, 1983, 22–43).

Puhle, Hans-Jürgen (2002) Still the Age of Catch-allism? "Volksparteien" and "Parteienstaat" in Crisis and Re-equilibration. In: Gunther, Richard, José Ramón Montero and Juan J. Linz (eds.): *Political Parties: Old Concepts and New Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 58–83.

Puhle, Hans-Jürgen (2007) Zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie. Stufen der politischen Entwicklung in Lateinamerika im 20. Jahrhundert.

In: Bernecker, Walther L. et al. (eds.): *Lateinamerika 1870–2000. Geschichte und Gesellschaft*. Wien: Promedia, 15–33.

Puhle, Hans-Jürgen (2015a) Populismus: Form oder Inhalt? Protest oder Projekt? In: Puhle, Hans-Jürgen *Protest, Parteien, Interventionsstaat. Organisierte Politik und Demokratieprobleme im Wandel*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 91–117.

Puhle, Hans-Jürgen (2015b) "Embedded Democracy" und "Defekte Demokratien": Probleme demokratischer Konsolidierung und ihrer Teilregime. In: Puhle, Hans-Jürgen: *Protest, Parteien, Interventionsstaat. Organisierte Politik und Demokratieprobleme im Wandel*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 161–183.

Puhle, Hans-Jürgen (2017) Auf dem Weg zur populistischen Demokratie. Ein neuer Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit und seine Folgen. In: Croissant, Aurel et al. (eds.): *Demokratie, Diktatur und Gerechtigkeit. Festschrift für Wolfgang Merkel*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 467–484.

Puhle, Hans-Jürgen (2018) Populismos y democracia en el siglo XXI. *La Maleta de Portbou. Revista de Humanidades y Economía* 32, nov.-dic. 2018, 12–19.

Puhle, Hans-Jürgen (2020) Populism and Democracy in the 21st Century. *SCRIPTS Working Paper Series* No. 2, Cluster of Excellence "Contestations of the Liberal Script", Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin. Web: https://www.scripts-berlin.eu/publications/Publications-PDF/SCRIPTS_Working_Paper_02_Web.pdf.

Rivero, Jacobo (2014) *Conversación con Pablo Iglesias*. Madrid: Turpial.

Roberts, Kenneth M. (2014) Populism, Social Movements, and Popular Subjectivity. In: Della Porta, Donatella and Mario Diani (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199678402.013.27.

Roberts, Kenneth M. (2015) Populism, Political Mobilization and Crisis of Political Representation. In: De la Torre, Carlos (ed.): *The Promise and Perils of Populism. Global Perspectives*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 140–158.

Roberts, Kenneth M. (2019) Bipolar Disorders: Varieties of Capitalism and Populist Out-Flanking on the Left and Right. *Polity* 51(4), 641–653. Web: http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/705377.

Rodrik, Dani (2017) Populism and the Economics of Globalization. *Working Paper* 23559. Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research. Web: http://j.mp/2sowhXj.

Rovira Kaltwasser, Cristóbal, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy (eds.) (2017) *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Schmitter, Philippe C. (2018) "Real-existing" democracy and its discontents: Sources, conditions, causes, symptoms and prospects. Paper presented at the conference "The Crisis of Western Liberal Democracy?" Shanghai: Fudan University, 27–28 October.

Skocpol, Theda and Vanessa Williamson (2012) *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Souillac, Romain (2007) *Le mouvement Poujade : de la défense professionnelle au populisme nationaliste, 1953–1962*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Taggart, Paul (2000) *Populism*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Taggart, Paul and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2016) Dealing with populists in government. A framework for analysis. *Democratization* 23(2), 201–220.

Urbinati, Nadia (2014) *Democracy Disfigured. Opinion, Truth and the People*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Urbinati, Nadia (2019) *Me the People. How Populism Transforms Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Weyland, Kurt (2001) Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics. *Comparative Politics* 34(1), 1–22.

Weyland, Kurt (2013) Latin America's Authoritarian Drift. The Threat from the Populist Left. *Journal of Democracy* 24, 18–32.