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CHAPTER 9

Labelling Parties as Populist? A Critical Appraisal and an Alternative Approach

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1 Introduction

Despite the endless discussions over what populism is and how "best" to define it, the reason for labelling some parties as populist (and the way in which it is done) has not been the focus of in-depth reflection. The lack of attention to these conceptual issues reflects not only the marginal role of the debate regarding concept formation in social and political science but also the weak connections between the literature on populism and scholarship regarding party politics. However, the controversies about the definition of populism make it possible to open up the debate and tackle broader theoretical issues connected to concept formation (Outhwaite 1983; Sartori 1984; Gerring 1999; Goertz 2005). Addressing the issue of selecting and labelling populist parties can contribute to an epistemological, analytical, and normative discussion of how political phenomena should broadly be framed.

In pursuing three main goals, this chapter seeks to contribute to this debate. Firstly, it discusses the dominant approaches through which the so-called "populist parties" are selected and labelled. These approaches tend to conflate populism with party-based populism and legitimize the idea that selecting populist parties does not require an analytical definition of what a "populist party" is. Usually, populist parties are selected according to a definition of populism, along with a generic opinion by "observers", "scholars", or other actors who regard those parties as populist. This is the "circularity" paradox that Cas Mudde underlined some years ago: "We have to decide on the basis of which post facto criteria we should use to define the various parties, while we need a priori criteria to select the parties that we want to define" (2007, 12–13). Recently, a new methodological approach has attempted to overcome the circularity paradox, although it tends to remain essentialist as it neglects the observer's impact on the definition of populism and has a rather simplistic view of what a party is.

Secondly, the chapter tries to bridge the notion of populism with party politics literature by disentangling them from each other. Although there is a huge

amount of literature on populist parties, what precisely a "populist party" is often remains unclear. While we know a lot about the explanans (e.g. its electoral basis), the explanandum is only occasionally tackled. Unfortunately, one of the characteristics that some academic publications share with journalism is the lack of a precise definition of concepts, for example, once "populist parties" are labelled as such (Mudde 1996, 226). A systematic analysis of recent publications in political science demonstrates that the prevalent use of the label populism – and, in particular, the populist party – does not go along with a precise definition of the concept of populism (Hunger and Paxton 2021, 11).

The reason for this odd situation is that scholars tend to blur the distinction between the concept of populism, on which there is an astonishing amount of literature, and party-based populism. In this chapter, we will argue that the definition of populism as such is not enough to define political parties conventionally labelled as populist. Our contribution will also show the relevance and the shortcomings of the recent literature seeking to define populist parties with quantitative methodologies. Despite their advances, these attempts do not consider the complexity of party organization but instead regard political parties as a unitary phenomenon.

Finally, this contribution allows an alternative, Max Weber-inspired approach of defining, selecting, and labelling parties. With this approach, we consider the multidimensionality of both populism and political parties. The crucial epistemological point is to abandon, in Weber's words, the "naturalistic prejudice" according to which concept reflects reality. Instead, concepts and theories should be considered as ideal types (i.e. approximate attempts to capture the complexity of reality). This means the multiple facets of political parties are not necessarily consistent with an overarching label of "populist party".

The chapter is organized as follows. The first section will examine the difficulty of coping with the tension between academic labelling and party self-labelling. Next, we will focus on the problem of concept reification, which is tied to the prevalent essentialist approach in populist party labelling. In the third section, we will highlight how the belief that academic work is untethered from the social and political environment has analytical and normative consequences for party labelling. In the fourth section, we consider how the dominant approaches of populist party labelling go along with a simplistic conception of political parties as a unitary entity. And in the final section, we will try to present an alternative approach to party-based populism based on Weber's ideal type by disentangling the notions of definition, selection, and labelling.

2 Between Labelling and Self-labelling

In the current literature on populism, the most controversial issue is how the concept of populism should be defined. And yet, the link between populism and party politics has rarely been discussed. According to Kenneth Roberts, "the study of populism and political parties has often been conducted along separate tracks that occasionally connect but never truly intertwine and enrich each other as they might, or more importantly, should" (2017, 287).

There are many reasons to explain the relative lack of interest in populist scholarship in political parties. The first relates to the various definitions of populism. Generally speaking, the populist scholarship interested in the content and form of messages, discourses, or performance (e.g. Moffitt 2016) tends to avoid the association with parties, as the focus is less on the characteris- tics of the actors and more on the message they spread. When it comes to an actor, however, the emphasis is more on the leaders than their parties. Scholars who conceive populism as an ideology tend to be concerned with a political party as a collective actor. Nevertheless, until recently, the literature focused on populist ideology has been interested more in studying electoral success or the impact of parties on the party system and government (e.g. Mudde 2007; Akkerman, De Lange and Rooduijn 2016; Inglehart and Norris 2019) and less in verifying how and to what extent political parties are populist.

The second important reason for the weak connections between populism and party politics research is that academics' selection and labelling of parties as populist do not reflect the labels the parties give to themselves. Parties presented as populist by scholars do not correspond to the official label of the party, nor to its manifesto. Perhaps the only exception is the People's Party in the United States in the late nineteenth century (e.g. Kazin 1995). Consequently, in Europe, Latin America, and the US, there is no agreement on either the choice of a label or the theoretical criteria that would justify calling a contemporary party "populist".

Of course, the multitude of definitions of concepts in social and political science is usual, and party populist labelling also reflects ongoing debates and controversies about the classification of political parties in general. A relevant issue relates to the categorization of parties within ideological families and the criteria that could permit including parties within a bounded party "family". When parties provide a relatively clear ideological supply, party classification is based on the name of the party, its statutes, and its manifesto. As Mair and Mudde argue (1998, 220), "the party itself is the best judge of its own ideological identity and that it will have reflected this identity in the name or label under which it chooses to contest elections". Of course, this kind of approach

to party classification fits very well when it corresponds to the parties' ideological self-belonging and name (e.g. socialist, liberal, communist, or Christian democratic formations in Western Europe in the second part of the twentieth century, which corresponds to specific ideological families of parties).

However, the party's name is not always helpful, and difficulties arise if the different taxonomic criteria do not fit each other; for instance, this happens when the origins, ideology, transnational linkage, and policy orientation do not create a consistent configuration. In Western Europe, before the 1950s, there were some relevant cases where the link was less clear or rather contrasting. The most famous case is the National Socialist Party in Germany in the 1930s. However, in the past few decades, some "relevant" parties (according to Sartori's definition) characterizing West European party systems have also upended traditional party families, as in the cases of Forza Italia, led by former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, and République en Marche headed by President Emmanuel Macron in France.

This difficulty to connect different taxonomic criteria also produces some ambivalences, including shortcomings about the so-called "populist parties". While party families in the party politics literature are usually tied to an ideological background (e.g. Mair and Mudde 1998), ideology is far from being the only criterion used to define populist parties. Cas Mudde (2004), who supports the definition of populism as a "thin-ideology", also seems sceptical about the idea of a specific European "populist family". It would be possible to recognize some consistency within the "populist radical right-wing parties" family in some regions (e.g. Jungar and Jupskås 2014) but not "populist parties" as such. At the same time, the "populist parties" label remains widespread in the literature, although often without a theoretical discussion on what precisely "populist" parties are (Hunger and Paxton 2021).

3 Essentialist Conceptualization

In current political science, there are two prevailing justifications for labelling a party as "populist": on the one hand, a supposed "public" or "expert" consensus and, on the other hand, scholars' supposedly rational assessment of the "nature" of the party. In both cases, scholars do not engage with clear and transparent empirical selection and labelling processes based on theoretical assumptions and hypotheses to discuss and analyze whether (or to what extent) a particular party is populist, not populist, or only partially populist. Widespread opinions or the "nature" of the party itself seems sufficient to select and label a "populist party" as such.

Shortcomings are connected not only to operationalization (e.g. biases in the selection of experts) but also to concept formation, that is, epistemological issues. As Meijers and Zaslove (2020, 378) point out, the most important stream of literature devoted to populist parties is based on a dichotomic classificatory perspective inspired by Giovanni Sartori's (1984) conceptualization. In fact, the dominant approach in populist party labelling tends to adopt a naturalist or essentialist conceptualization (Fuchs 2001; Bevir and Kedar 2008).

First of all, it implies a reification effect of party labelling as populist. The rigid opposition between "populist" and "non-populist" parties stipulates that some parties are "essentially" populist. According to essentialism, populist par- ties are characterized by core or stable features conceptually defining them as such, and these traits are independent of context: "[W]e do need, ultimately, 'universal' categories – concepts which are applicable to any time and place" (Sartori 1970, 1035). Essentialism implies that meanings and actions are not historically and geographically specific; consequently, a single minimal defini- tion of populism is supposed to travel without worries among time and space, thereby allowing comparative analysis across regions and continents. In this regard, a reflection on the possibility that the significance of some aspects of populism varies across contexts – e.g. the meaning of the "people" and the "elites", but also the role of the leader (see de la Torre and Srisanga 2022) – is seen as a problem for the universal validity of the concept. Likewise, essentialist approaches do not care about the variation and contingent features of the party organization as they assume its nature is somewhat stable (e.g. based on an overarching ideological background), while party change is seen as evolutionary and following precise rules or steps. However, labelling parties as "populist" with this perspective risks neglecting the situatedness of the populist grievances expressed and performed by parties and, consequently, the changing meaning and relevance of populism across localities, regions, and countries.

Essentialism poses but does not fix the problem of the "border", that is, the distinction between the "true" populist party and a not really "populist" party. This is an epistemological and normative but also an empirical issue. In the context of populist protests growing and becoming widespread across a shifting party system, attempts to distinguish between populist and mainstream parties become rather tricky (e.g. Akkerman, De Lange and Rooduijn 2016; Blokker and Anselmi 2020; Weyland 2021). If we take these traits into account, it seems difficult to empirically substantiate why some parties are populist while others are definitively not (at all) populist. The problem is also linked to the fact that populism is not just a concept defined by the academic community, but is part of the world that scholars are supposed to study objectively.

Essentialism implies that political actors and the public do not participate in the construction of the object of the analysis. It is assumed that the scholar does not contribute to the definition of observed reality. However, it is not enough to say that scholars are independent or refuse a prescriptive approach to escaping social and political influences, especially once scholars use a controversial notion such as populism.

However, party populist labelling is not just an academic activity. The notion of populism is widespread in the public sphere and the media. Scholars who adopt an essentialist approach to party populist labelling treat themselves as independent observers and pretend that their social or political roots do not influence their academic work, while the latter does not perform the political reality. This perspective implicitly views academia as a separate and autonomous world relative to the public controversies and political struggles. However, the role of the observer is crucial in social and political science and concept building (Collier and Adcock 1999).

On the one hand, what happens in the public sphere influences scholars, including those who believe in "value-free" science. The issue becomes particularly challenging when academic labels adopt a language that serves as a point of reference and makes sense in a universe that goes well beyond the scientific field and extends to the political realm and the media. As shown by a growing body of literature, populism is also a political and media weapon. Given its global success in recent years, populism has been "hyped" by journalism and in party competition (Glynos and Mondon 2019). Recent studies show that labelling a party as populist represents a strong rhetoric resource able to undermine party competitors (Brown and Mondon 2021; Casiraghi 2021). Media broadcasts also used to adopt "populism" to target oppositional or anti-establishment parties, thereby boosting the legitimacy of mainstream parties (Brown and Mondon 2021). Academic labelling is at risk of being instrumentalized by the media and in election campaigns. However, scholars rarely recognize the necessity of comparing their own definition of populism and populism as a public label, for instance, as the latter might influence how this label is utilized in the academic sphere.

On the other hand, because of the public visibility of academic knowledge, scholars also participate in public debates and the construction of party labelling. They contribute to performing the public perception of the party, that is, confirming its political "legitimacy" or "illegitimacy". When identifying some parties as "populist", scholars play a role in constructing parties' public image (Dean and Maiguashca 2020). Thus, when scholars label parties as "populist",

they tend to avoid any normative and performative issue related to labelling them as such (but see Stavrakakis 2017; De Cleen, Glynos and Mondon 2018). However, tough academic scholarship is nowadays virtually globalized and scholars always work in a specific cultural, political, and linguistic context (Goodin and Tilly 2006).

Of course, not every scholar shares the belief in value-free science and considers it problematic to be involved in political struggles. The normative connotation of populism and its public use is not necessarily evaluated as a "danger". Some scholars engage in militant approaches to populism and, accordingly, identify some parties as populist because of what they deem to be "demagogues", "anti-democrats", or opponents of a fragile representative democracy. Militant approaches shape at least two opposing camps. While scholars argue that populism is a threat to democracy and emphasize the populist component of radical right or extreme parties, others consider populism to be an emancipatory claim at the grassroots level and tend to connect the concept of populism to egalitarian and progressive parties while leaving out exclusionary far-right parties. Why not, if we accept that political science should be militant or policy oriented? However, not all scholars accept being part of the public struggle around populism or being a supporter or opponent of some "populist" parties. More broadly, the lack of normative awareness and a clear analytical definition of what a political party is reduces the heuristic strength of populist labelling.

5 Party Complexity

The separation between the study of populism and political parties has at least three consequences: the tendency to conflate populism with party-based populism, the reduction of the party to its ideology or discourse, and the conception that designates parties as homogenous. Because the issue of the party as an organization is rarely taken up,1 once the party is labelled as populist, the question of what the party is remains a theoretical reflection. Reductionism can be seen as a conventionalist or pragmatic approach. This is a result of some routines in political research in party ideology (e.g. in the Manifesto Project), which assumes the party's official discourse or ideology – for instance, spread by the national leader and usually based on electoral manifestos – is implicitly

1 For an exception, see Heinisch and Mazzoleni (2016); Albertazzi and Van Kessel (2021).

shared by all of its members. Those perspectives have relevant consequences for party populist labelling.

Populist scholarship – especially from the western part of the European continent – has been largely interested in studying party-based populism and often avoided the mainstream legacies of party studies by adopting a simplistic (and rather non-realist) conception of political parties. One of the oldest issues in party politics literature is what political parties are in general and how they are peculiar concerning factions or associations, with a focus on their "functions" as political socialization, elite recruitment, and electoral competition. However, scholars in the sub-field of party politics have started to recognize that relevant political parties are heterogeneous in terms of organization, networking, (national and local) leadership, activism, sympathizers, and voters.

As usual in democratic regimes in different regions of the world, enduring political parties are moulded by internal diversity – for instance, between parties in public office, the party's central office, and the party on the ground, as well as informal networks (Levitsky 2001; 2003; Katz and Mair 2002; Hellmann 2011). Moreover, to some degree, parties are shaped by intra-party factionalism and characterized by variations in their constituencies (Janda 1980; Boucek 2009). Parties with massive numbers of followers have social and territorial roots and shape party systems, parliaments, and governments, and their ideological stances cannot reduce their official supply. For decades, scholarship has focused on Western European democracies that were used to adopting an evolutionary party model approach and, to the same extent, avoided the relevance of the context. Moreover, recent trends in party politics literature tend to underscore the limitations of the dominant evolutionary models' approach, clearly showing how the general criteria of classification are inadequate to frame the current party complexity across liberal democracies in Western countries and beyond (Scarrow 2014; Mazzoleni and Heinisch 2023). While there is a tension between attempts to develop an overarching classification of parties based on models or ideologies, there has been a growing awareness that each party and their intra-party dynamics are peculiar, also with regard to the strong advances that have been made in data collection (e.g. Döring and Regel 2019).

Longstanding political parties might refer to a virtually singular political ideology (or, better, a doctrine), but how the ideological claims are expressed is a matter of empirical research. As there are many reasons to engage with a party and different interests in doing politics (e.g. grassroots activism and party elites), how and to what extent political parties share "populism" (discourse, ideology, etc.) should not be taken for granted. To capture party ideology, should we consider the manifesto or the speeches of the leader or the party's MPs? There is more and more interest in classifying parties as populist

with a quantitative perspective based on manifestos and speeches by leaders (e.g. Hawkins 2009; Meijers and Zaslove 2020; Di Cocco and Monechi 2022). The strength of this literature lies in overcoming one of the main shortcomings of the current literature, namely the "circularity paradox", since they include all parties and adopt a gradation approach. However, other problems arise. Is it possible to classify a party as populist based on two or three texts? When the results of a big data comparative analysis appear counter-intuitive and clearly contradict significant streams of literature – for instance, deeming Sweden Democrats, Farage and Beppe Grillo as non-populist (Hawkins and Castanho Silva 2018) – what should we conclude? And, finally, this literature assumes that parties are unitary entities and, therefore, overlooks the possibility of a multifaceted phenomenon.

6 An Alternative Approach

How do scholars fix the challenges of party selection and labelling? Because of the lack of congruence between academic labelling and part self-labelling, scholarship is usually embedded in a "circular paradox", which it tries to fix by reifying the concept and avoiding the role of the observers in performing party labelling, the situatedness of any political reality, and the normative issues related to labelling. Classifying and labelling a party as populist is far from a simple analytical or pragmatic act.

Against an essentialist and naturalist approach, one alternative is a relational perspective based on a Weberian ideal type. Weber argues against what he calls "naturalistic prejudice", that is, the belief that theoretical constructs can portray the "true" content and essence of historical and political reality (1949, 94). This is precisely what essentialist approaches hope to find out. Within those approaches, the main concern is to find a good definition of the concept based on operational or instrumental criteria, including the detection of anomalies, the lists of shared attributes, and new parties supposed to be classified into the populist "family". Instead, in a relational approach, populism turns into contingent outcomes and multifaceted accomplishments. Whether a party "is" populist is not a good question; the question should be whom it exists for, when, to what extent, and under which conditions.

Bridging a relation perspective with Weber's legacy implies, above all, an ideal-typical definition of populism and, accordingly, a distinctive attention of situational contingencies and complexities. This approach assumes parties as associations with ideological supply but is also shaped by different organizational patterns with factional logics and characterized by individuals and

groups with different interests and strategies and, consequently, different styles of communication. Thus, in the intellectual process that scholars use to classify political parties as populist, we can analytically distinguish four moments: defining populism, defining the party, selecting the party, and labelling the party:

1. Defining populism as an ideal type implies developing it as a theoretical construct that is approximate and "cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality" (Weber 1949, 90). An ideal-type is a guide for constructing hypotheses. Populism (e.g. as an ideological stance, a discourse, a style, etc.) should be distinct from party-based populism. An ideal-typical definition of populism can be more or less "minimalist", "hybrid", or "focus-oriented". The well-known minimalist definition is, of course, the ideological one, and "hybrid" is a combination of different definitions available in the literature, while "focus-oriented" definitions address populism in connection with dimensions such as economics or culture. The question here is not to define the "good" definition irrespective of time and space but to develop it with clarity and consistency (Gerring 1999) in maintaining it as provisional and focused on specific aspects of the reality.
2. Defining the party. The second step aimed at labelling a party as "populist" has to take into account the definition of the political party as such or, more precisely, with an ideal-typical definition of a political party. To take party complexity seriously, scholars might assume that the "populist party" concept does not necessarily correspond to empirical reality. Thus, an ideal-typical party-based populist perspective can fruitfully deal with party politics literature. For instance, inspired by Kurt Weyland's strategic conceptualization (2001), a populist party could ideally be defined as a charismatic party, that is, the leader-centred party organization highlighted by the seminal contribution of Angelo Panebianco (1988). At the same time, as a guide for empirical research, an ideal type approach deals with concrete parties that are heterogeneous in terms of their organization, networking, (national and local) leadership, activism, sympathizers, and voters. Definitions of populism in the scholarship embrace discursive and ideological components, and organizational dimensions are also part of the debate, although the reflections and results emanating from party politics scholarship rarely contribute to populist literature.
3. Selecting the party. This marks a specific moment when single parties are (tentatively) identified. Based on ideal-typical features, the selection should be done according to quantitative and qualitative data and by critically considering party complexity. Scholars face a choice: on the one

hand, selecting parties that parts of international or national opinion consider somewhat "populist" or, on the other hand, adopting a systemic approach that looks at a party system and finds to what extent populist traits are more or less shared by single parties (e.g. Jagers and Walgrave 2007). To some extent, this second option offers a way to fix the circularity paradox. Moreover, where populist stances are supposed to be widespread across parties, the second strategy seems to be a logical solution from an empirical point of view as well.

4. Labelling the party is the third moment when the selected party can be classified as populist or a party with populist components. Within the context of the growing public and political use of populism as a signifier (i.e. as a political weapon), a thoughtful perspective should be developed – also in connection with the so-called "non-populist parties" with which "populist parties" are confronted. Here we assume that scientific language is not distinct from the public labelling in which political and media actors are the main players. However, using an ideal-typical definition of populism and populist parties, we provisionally clarify our point of view over reality. It seems better not to label single political parties but rather facets of the political party as "populist". Given the changing intra-party diversity, populist ideology, discourse, and style are not necessarily shared by all the party components. Consequently, the "populist party" label should be provisionally adopted and confirmed by its ideal-typical definition and how the latter is embodied by the party among its different components.

7 A Conceptual Approximation

What are the advantages of an ideal-typical approach? First of all, it contrasts the belief that there is a kind of "essence" in populist parties. Populism as a party label is a relational construct influenced by the political and media environment, as well as the definition adopted by different "schools" of scholarship. Recognizing this fact allows scholars to develop a critical self-reflection about their own role in performing stigmatization or valorization of political parties in relation to political struggles. These struggles are always – at least in part – academic struggles. Words and language are not simply a means of communication but are inherent to political struggles and strategies. The public categorization of political actors as populists plays a role in the symbolic construction of political reality and, consequently, of the political parties (Edelman 1977, 23–41).

An ideal-typical approach might be useful to classify not only oppositional parties but also parties in contexts where populist discourse or style is not purely a matter of oppositional or fringe parties, and the populist label can be used as a weapon in the public sphere. This is also the case where mainstream parties are ideologically amorphous and have an ever-changing profile beyond traditional ideologies and styles of communication, and the so-called "populist parties" achieve strong institutional success, as is currently the case in Europe and elsewhere. An ideal-typical approach favours a gradational analysis. An increasing amount of research has noted that populism is also shared by mainstream parties that adopt populist aspects, even if they are rarely labelled as populist (e.g. Rodi 2018). An ideal-typical approach that assumes that reality virtually never corresponds to the concept is also an advantage for the gradational approach, although current versions, including those using "automatic" methodologies, provide reductionist wisdom of political parties. (e.g. Di Cocco and Monechi 2022).

There is another advantage to an ideal-typical approach that relates to the definition of populist and its analytical use. Many scholars are worried that there is not a consensus over a single and universal definition; consequently, the concept of populism is seen as problematic. With a concept of populism as an ideal type, each definition is taken as provisional and as approximate with respect to the complex. The plurality of the definition of populism is an opportunity for understanding different facets of reality. The definitions of populism are not mutually exclusive (e.g. Ernst et al. 2019; Bobba and Seddone 2022).

8 Conclusion

The primary aim of this chapter was to focus on the limits of the current scholarship approaches in political science that label parties as "populist". While the current controversies over populism usually focus on what this notion means and how it is adopted in empirical analysis, this chapter discussed an issue rarely considered in academic literature, namely why and how some parties are labelled as "populist". The question might appear irrelevant to empirical research, as the usual mainstream approaches tend to avoid complicated discussions about the selection of a party and justifying the way it is labelled. Of course, political scientists are usually interested in analyzing the rise, success, and consequences of so-called populist parties. In the past few decades, some specific parties – in particular, in Western European countries – have become points of reference, and scholars recognize them as a research opportunity precisely because they have been labelled as "populist parties". The advantage

of avoiding labelling as an issue is to avoid anomalies that enhance populism as an academic sub-field.

However, the question as to whether some parties should be labelled as populist is crucial for analytical, epistemological, and normative reasons. The so-called "populist parties" never used to adopt the label of "populist" in their statutes (and rarely in public discourse) to categorize themselves. Moreover, scholars struggle to resolve the circularity paradox, namely that the selection of parties is based on a criterion that is not yet precisely defined. Mainstream strategies tend to legitimize an a priori populist party selection by avoiding any empirical verification in terms of selection and labelling.

These issues raise normative concerns. Often the scholarship is not aware that the label of "populist party" is part of a political struggle. By producing and disseminating this discourse, scholars participate in a labelling process that is also a polemical weapon, especially when dealing with parties associated with current "hot button" issues that heighten dramatization in politics and the media. While contributing to the public labelling of the party, scholars tend to confirm or challenge its political legitimacy or its image as a "public enemy" (Edelman 1988, 66–69). Although it is difficult to hypothesize a unilateral causal relation between scientific and sociopolitical worlds, the scientific labelling of political parties clearly depends on the universe of meaning and representation shaped by public actors, including party leaders and journalists. To deal with these shortcomings, the chapter illustrated a critical approach based on three features: Firstly, it distinguished populism from party-based populism, as the latter should consider the peculiar complexity of parties in terms of their intra-party dynamics, their relationship with the party system and government, and variations in time and space. From this point of view, populist scholarship has to take party-based populist analysis seriously and look beyond a reified wisdom of parties as homogenous entities.

Secondly, this alternative approach implies a provisional selection of "populist parties" through a relational approach based on ideal types and inspired by a Weberian perspective. This means that discourse, ideology, and style are seen as crucial to party selection, depending on how the party ideal type is defined. Only with an empirical investigation would it be possible to know how and to what extent each party corresponds to this ideal type. The notion of populism cannot travel in time and space without considering the contextual dimensions shaping its meaning and relevance. If the "populist" description of a party is not verified and becomes a taken-for-granted selected object, it limits the capacity to understand the phenomenon.

The act of selecting some parties as "populist" should be taken as an issue and not an assumption. Selecting a particular party does not necessarily imply

it is labelled as a "populist party", since parties that are not populist also have populist strategies, discourses, styles, and/or ideologies. While it is difficult to assume that a party is either "populist" or not without empirical analysis, it is also unlikely that all components of the party are consistent with the populist discourse or ideology. By assuming populism and parties as ideal types within a relational approach, populism defines one or more components of a single party rather than a notion embracing the party as a whole.

The approach presented in this chapter aims to contribute to a new research agenda that can boost populist scholarship and connect with recent streams in party politics literature concerned with party complexity. This also makes it possible to connect the debate in social and political sciences on concept formation, in particular with relational and constructivist approaches to concepts and theories pointing to a changing and complex reality.

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