CHAPTER 5:
FIXING THE TAXONOMY IN POPULISM RESEARCH: BRINGING FRAME, ACTOR AND CONTEXT BACK IN

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Introduction

The academic debate about populism seems to be unable to resolve some persistent conceptual and taxonomic issues. While disagreements have continued over whether populism is a style, mode of expression, political strategy, discourse, ideology, *Zeitgeist*, political logic or related construct (Roberts 2006; Stanley 2008; Barr 2009; Gidron and Bonikowski 2013), controversies still persist about the criteria that should be used to identify some current parties, movements or leaders as 'populist' and to gauge the extent of the phenomenon. One of the crucial obstacles is that the label populist is above all a creation of observers and political competitors, which has tended to infuse the term with a normative, polemic and/or pejorative connotation. Populists also often refuse to identify themselves as populist because the attribution is seen as coming entirely from outside. In fact, it is much less controversial to argue socialist parties belong to the socialist family and communist parties to the communist family. The same is equally true for liberal, confessional and fascist parties.

The historical antecedents from which the name was largely derived, the so-called Russian and American populists, belong to a completely different time and political modus operandi, especially when viewed from the vantage point of contemporary European party politics. When this term was first attributed to some parties and regimes in South America, post-colonial Asia and Africa – where masses were being mobilised as a political resource –, the concept was fairly residual and vague (Ionescu and Gellner 1969; Canovan 1981). Classifying Peronism, Nasserism, Nakrumah's regime in Ghana and that of Sukarno in Indonesia was extremely difficult by Western standards. These were neither socialist nor fascist but nonetheless egalitarian and anti-imperialist, so observers chose to categorise them as populist. The classification of some 'outsider parties' emerging in Europe in the 1970s, especially the anti-tax parties in Scandinavia, followed a similar pattern. A particular problem in developing conceptual and taxonomic categories has been the ideological and strategic heterogeneity of political actors.

Populism is always linked to ideological frameworks beyond populism itself. Thus, populist actors always embrace additional ideological positions, right-wing, centrist, or left-wing ideas, or combinations thereof. Despite belonging to the same ideological family and regardless of the stigma they carry in their own respective political systems, populists often share the same prejudices about each other and refuse to be seen as cooperating with each other. For instance,

populist parties have found it difficult to form coherent institutional expression in the EU Parliament. In fact, they prefer to 'marry up' if given a chance, as McDonnell and Werner (2018; 2020) have concluded. Importantly, populists refuse to be assigned to or belong to any known political family.

'Populist' has often been a label applied to 'homeless' actors, which probably also explains why the academic debate on the definition of populism and its classification has become so assiduous (Hubé and Truan 2017). Apart from scholars who do not consider populism a useful term, two main tendencies arose in recent years: a first and dominant tendency persists in the form of a somewhat philosophical or 'essayist' view. It suggests that democratic regimes, especially in Europe and the US are facing a sudden and unexpected proliferation of what observers and the media have labelled 'global populism'. Thus, almost every form of 'anti-establishment' or protest resentment tends to be subsumed under the label 'populism' (see Müller 2016, 1–3). This has contributed to the term populism becoming ubiquitous in its presence and allusive in its meaning, which has often resulted in normative and polemic uses of the label. The second trend, represented by scholars in political sociology, in political science, and recently in political communication, is to try to develop new analytical tools in order to understand populism as an empirical phenomenon.

Agreeing with this second approach, we argue in favour of the development of a more comprehensive framework of analysis for comparative research, which seeks to address several unresolved conceptual, taxonomic and methodical issues. First of all, we want to develop a conceptualisation that captures the intrinsically ambivalent nature of the populist claim, thus pushing beyond the constraints of the essentialist and normative approaches. Second, we suggest that the concept of ambivalence lends itself to a more gradational approach and frame-based analysis. Third, we want to draw attention to the underlying conditions, as they relate both to actor and context, so as to be able to explain the rise and diffusion of the populist frame and its employment by political actors in current democratic regimes.

From Ideological Dichotomy to Ambivalence

One of the most frequent laments in political science and political sociology regarding populism is that scholars continue to struggle to define this concept (for an overview, see Gidron and Bonikowski 2013). In response, there have been numerous attempts to render populism as a simpler and empirically oriented concept related to 'people' and the 'elite'. Broad common conceptualisations that define populism as a set of ideas that encompass anti-elitism, the belief in a general will of the people and a Manichean outlook (Hawkins 2009; Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013; Rooduijn 2014) arguably incorporate important aspects of populism and provide definitions on which most scholars agree (Rooduijn 2014). However, these categories are still rather broad and allow us mainly to distinguish clear-cut populist actors from non-populists but are less well-suited to comparing different manifestations of populism with each other. They are also often ill-equipped to assess many of the borderline cases outside Western Europe and Latin America. Although, as van Kessel (2015, 8) has argued, different interpretations of populism are not problematic from an empirical perspective 'as long as there is a consensus about the concept's attributes', we are not sure that this is necessarily the case.

In this regard, the emergence of the idea that populism is a thin-centred ideology, as proposed especially by Cas Mudde (2007), has represented something of a breakthrough because of its simplicity. Whether based on actual conviction, mere pragmatism or simply exhaustion from the interminable debates about the nature of populism, a sizeable share of the populism research community, particularly in the UK, the Netherlands and Scandinavia, has adopted this framework since the 2000s, for it provides a means of identifying populism and populist manifestation more unambiguously. In doing so, scholars have appropriated Michael Freeden's (1996) idea of ideologies with a thin centre and applied it to understanding populism. Nonetheless, Freeden (2016) himself has remained sceptical that populism would indeed fit the definition of a thin-centred ideology any more than, for example, 'nativism' and remarked about this publicly in his keynote address at the 2016 Prague conference on *Current Populism in Europe.*

The growing tendency to conceive populism as a thin-centred ideology stands in some contrast to the also widespread understanding of populism as a form of discourse drawing on Laclau (2005; see also Panizza 2005; Filc 2010). The latter has come in for increased criticism for its normative roots, its high degree of theoretical abstraction and its lack of empirical applicability, as well as its failure to link the political discourse convincingly to political practice (for example, Moffitt 2016). Nevertheless, as populist claims continue to proliferate and morph after appearing in new contexts and as they attach themselves to different parties and host ideologies in ever more settings, populism's hybridity and diversity continues to pose significant empirical challenges. Thus, the Muddean perspective, which arguably minimises populism to a parsimonious classificatory pattern, seems to show distinct disadvantages both from a theoretical and empirical perspective. Not only did Michael Freeden view populism as 'too thin' an ideology to be meaningful, but there is also new dissent from other scholars, who raise important objections.

First of all, it is worth noting that once we apply the label populism as a(n) ('thin') ideology to a political actor or group of actors, we engage in an essentialist enterprise and run the risk of treating populist parties/leaders in a derogatory and thus normative manner (Aslanidis 2016, 7). Although the intention is always to avoid normative appraisal, populism and its protagonists are often assumed to be forms of pathology to be studied in order to be eliminated rather than understood. Second, it is rather difficult to distinguish 'thin' and 'not thin' in ideological terms. Even though it may be argued that populism does not exist in a pure form as a 'full' or 'thick' ideology (like socialism or liberalism), this view still runs the risk of rendering populism as a catch-all concept (Moffitt 2016, 19), thus reducing the chances of us differentiating between a generic populist claim and those traits more or less rooted in other ideological legacies. Third, without additional criteria (often added tacitly in empirical studies, see again Moffit 2016, 19), the Muddean conception limits the opportunity to analyse the extent to which a discourse or a party is or are populist on the basis of theory. This is because a dichotomous approach avoids 'grey zones' and, more generally, refuses to recognise the possibility of a continuum between populists and non-populists.

For the reasons discussed above, mainstream quantitative research in the ideational tradition has seemingly long abandoned the binary conceptualization in favour or empirical degree-ism in the sense of employing question batteries and indicators to assess the extent to which attitudes and party manifestos or speeches conform to populist characteristics. Only recently, measuring populism on the demand side has made the development to being accessible via a

set of survey questions measuring populist attitudes (Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove, 2014; Van Hauwaert and van Kessel, 2018). In fact, the number of expert surveys including measures of supply-side populism still increases and also the survey items measuring populist attitudes has grown in numbers and are already included in many national election studies as well as in Europe-wide surveys (for an overview see Dolezal and Fölsch in this Handbook). It is also clear that populist attitudes do not exist in a vacuum but have be empirical distinguished from closely related expression and voter characteristics (Hawkins, Read and Pauwels 2017). Bakker, Rooduijn, and Schumacher (2016) and Fatke (2019) show also the existing connection to psychological traits. For example, low levels of agreeableness are associated with distrust in individuals, intolerance and unwillingness to cooperate with others (Bakker, Rooduijn and Schumacher 2016). Fatke (2019) found the effects of personality traits on vote choice to differ between countries and the strengths of the associations varies. Others have identified the inter-relationship between populist and emotional predispositions (Rico, Guinjoan and Anduiza, 2017) and their connection with specific (nativist) policy preferences (Ivarsflaten 2008; Rooduijn, Bonikowski and Parlevliet, 2021), sociodemographic characteristics (Rovira Kalt-wasser and Van Hauwaert, 2020), and conceptions of democracy (Heinisch and Wegscheider 2020). In short, the empirical research 'on the ground' became more nuanced, complex, and 'degree-ist', the big picture conceptualization has remained largely bifurcated in the sense of a populist versus non-populist dichotomy.

Until the beginning of the 2000s the dichotomy of populist versus non-populist political actors has been less of a problem in Western European party systems, where there have been clearly identifiable populist formations (typically only one) that stand apart from the other mainstream parties. However, as some right-wing populist parties are moving into the mainstream and mainstream parties have begun to integrate some of the former's issues and orientations, the borderlines are becoming less impermeable (Bale et al. 2010; De Lange 2012; Akkerman et al. 2016). Especially in Eastern and South-eastern Europe, where mainstream parties have embraced nativist, illiberal, and even populist messages, and where leftist and conservative parties have turned to a discourse on immigration, ethnicity, and the EU that largely resembles that of populist parties in Western Europe, a reductive or dichotomous conception of populism is ill-suited for global comparisons.

Moreover, treating populism as an ideology in the context of a binary classificatory scheme also ignores one of its more crucial features, namely the intrinsically *variable and ambivalent* character of populist claims. Scholars such as Paul Taggart have pointed out that populism lacks 'universal key values, taking on attributes of its environment' and instead creates 'an episodic, anti-political, empty-hearted, chameleonic celebration of heartland in the face of crisis' (Taggart 2000, 5; see also Taggart 2002, 68). At its heart is a series of ambivalent claims about the people, the elites/outgroups, democracy, the state, society, the economy and so on. For example, the 'people' may refer to 'us in general', to 'natives' but not all nationals or citizens, to 'the people of the heartland' but not of the metropolis, to so-called 'genuine citizens', or to the 'common folk', to 'hard-working taxpayers' or to certain kinds of voters alluded to in political campaigns (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2019; Biancalana and Mazzoleni 2020). Generally, the terms employed by populists remain purposefully vague and flexible. Although the term 'people' often does denote *ethnos* in the sense of 'natives', it does not always apply. For example, in the Balkans, religious affiliation matters more than language or national heritage.

Moreover, especially in left-wing populism, the 'people' include lower-class and poor people, but there is less concern about citizenship.

The ambivalence serves to divide a population in an effort to reconstitute a popular majority with which to gain political control. Thus, the kind of exclusionary rhetoric applied by populists depends on the ideological background of those making the claims and the existing opportunity structures. For example, the former Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ) governor of the Austrian province of Carinthia, Jörg Haider, called upon 'real' Carinthians to vote for him. This implied that the members of the Slovenian-speaking minority of that partially bilingual Austrian province were somehow less genuinely real citizens of Carinthia than the German-speaking majority, although both groups have been living there since the early Middle Ages and have long since intermingled. Moreover, the ubiquitous presence of Slavic family names in that state suggests that a large share of the so-called German-speaking population who voted for Haider were themselves of Slovenian ancestry but had become assimilated over the centuries. Thus, neither *ethnos* nor *demos* really mattered.

Perhaps even more ambivalent than 'the people' is the term populism uses for its enemies, who are often broadly labelled 'the elites' or the 'others'. Even people of the same ethnic ancestry may be perceived as outsiders and aliens. For example, the former Bolivian populist leader Evo Morales and his MAS party (Movement for Socialism, Movimiento al Socialismo) referred to their main electorate as the *originarios*, meaning the original inhabitants as opposed to the European colonisers and their descendants. However, the Bolivian population is nearly 70 per cent mixed (*mestizo*) and 20 per cent indigenous based on reported census figures (CIA's World Factbook 2021 data). The number of whites is quite small, amounting to only five per cent. Yet, the claims made by Morales and his party and the rhetoric employed conjure up a fictitious population of original inhabitants who speak indigenous languages, dress in traditional clothes, engage in pre-modern practices and live outside the central cities. In reality, there are few countries in Latin America in which *ethnos* and *demos* overlap as much as in Bolivia. The people in the cities may be culturally different, more likely urban, prefer Spanish to Quechua or Aymara, wear Western clothes more often and attend better schools, but ethnically speaking, they are often no less *originarios* than their fellow *mestizos* in the countryside are, even if the latter feel closer to their indigenous heritage.

Although the current literature tends to perceive the alleged opposition between the people and the elites as clear-cut, the relationship between these two categories is rather complex because of the difficulty of defining who the targeted elites actually are. Depending on the populist party and its leader, and also contingent upon the specific situation, populist claims may defend or condemn specific people, groups, institutions and arrangements. The often denounced so-called 'political class' may include (members of) the government, mainstream parties, businessmen, intellectuals, journalists, bureaucrats, judges, corporations, the EU and its officials, interest groups, international societies and so on. What is more, the populist universe includes additional 'enemies of the people', such as immigrants, minorities, refugees, 'welfare cheats', criminals of various types and others. As one of the oldest and most successful populist formations, the Austrian Freedom Party has often adapted their messages to shifting circumstances. Despite appearing outwardly consistent, it has morphed from a pro-European, German nationalist, anticlerical, pro-business party into an anti-European, welfare chauvinist, Austro-patriotic party that presents itself as the defender of Christendom and draws most of

its support from blue-collar workers. Every time the party changed, so did the subtext of what the party meant through it juxtaposing 'the people' and 'the elites'.

While scholars do not always recognise it, populists are not only opponents of the existing political reality but also present themselves as agents of change. Although this may not necessarily mean revolutionary change, the promise of a more or less radical transformation of the (economic or political) situation to restore power to the people is the central appeal of populists. In some cases, change might be a systematic goal embodied in a clear strategy, while in other cases it is rather vague. According to Mény and Surel (2000, 181; see also Canovan 2005, 81–82), populism promises change in order to provide power to the people betrayed by the elite. 'Change' may express a demand for the dismissal of a government, policy change, but also the whole transformation of a polity. Populism has an inherent plasticity and is thus politically highly malleable. Nonetheless, it entails a profound tension underlying its core promise in that it claims to deliver people from the present and lead them to a future in the name of the past. The promise of restoring popular sovereignty by acting in the present to return to a *status quo ante* in the future, that is, to a time and place before the elites allegedly usurped power, is populism's core appeal and a prerequisite for the emotional connection between populists and many of their supporters. People are not necessarily emotionally invested in populist politicians but in the vision of a time and place they cherish and seem to have lost (see Betz and Johnson 2004). It is not surprising that, according to a 2016 Pew Research Center survey, many Trump voters 'wished they had lived in the 1950s', a period which Trump singled out as a time when things were great.

Populism's fundamental promise is the salvation of ordinary people from current conditions (Canovan 2005, 89). In fact, populism's appeal for change occurs precisely in a changing context: When political trust is low and the role of the media (including the new media) as critics of the dissatisfactory *status quo* is extraordinarily strong, ambivalent populist claims about unspecific but sweeping change seem to be particularly favoured. Despite promises about sweeping change, populists know how to tailor their claims in such a way that they may achieve their intended strategic ends. Depending on the extent of change demanded, they are able to position themselves as radical anti-regime opposition far outside acceptable political norms, or they can open up the possibility of cooperating with mainstream parties and perhaps even be included in government. In the former case, a populist party may end up politically ostracised, as was, for instance, the case with Flemish Block (Vlaams Blok, VB) and Flemish Interest (Vlaams Belang) in Belgium.

The linkage between government and populism also highlights the inherently ambivalent nature of that relationship in terms of both discourse and practice. Populists often use representative institutions to change policies and engage in office-seeking strategies even though they push for plebiscitary measures and routinely denounce aspects of representative democracy. Likewise, their top-down organisational models and authoritarian tendencies contradict their claims about the importance of the sovereignty of 'the people'. Given the complexity of populism, it seems overly reductionist to employ a minimal definition of the phenomenon. Instead, we suggest populism should be understood as making inherently ambivalent claims diffused by individual and collective actors designed to challenge the *status quo* in favour of people's empowerment and of elite change. It would be heuristically and empirically useful to analyse populist claims and their variation across time and space to see how they are adapted under given circumstances.

Ambivalence is a multidimensional phenomenon: It may occur *vis-à-vis* 'the people', whom populists define in various ways (see above) or may not define at all (for instance, all non-outsiders); and it applies to 'the others', an equally nebulous category in populist rhetoric. Ambivalence is also attached to other concepts populists often invoke, such as democracy: there, populists may argue in favour of certain liberal rules such as freedom of speech but oppose others such as the power of judges and the freedom of the media. Populism's relationship to established ideologies is equally flexible. In terms of economic policy, the ambivalence expressed in populist discourse varies between deregulatory demands and criticism of capitalism and free trade. Likewise, populists claim to want to increase or restore the power of the people, while also calling for more state control, expanded police power, better security and more law and order. Moreover, while populists talk about expanding democracy, the organisational model of populist parties is often rather undemocratic, with power highly centralised in the top leadership (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016). Given that populism depends on such ambivalent claims, which form part of a carefully constructed narrative that is made to fit a specific political context, in the subsequent segment we propose that populism should be best understood as a *frame* and less as an ideology (see, for instance, Aslanidis 2016).

Gradation and Frame

Scholarship has considered populism an ideology, a discourse, a strategy, a form of political logic or a style (Laclau 2005; Moffitt and Tormey 2013; Moffitt 2016). Despite this range of approaches, only some of this research has tried to develop rigorous empirical frameworks (Pauwels 2011). Nevertheless, the aforementioned dichotomous conceptualisation has emerged as something of a standard in the field. Yet, in recent years there has been a growing interest in treating populism empirically as a gradational phenomenon (Hawkins 2009; Akkerman et al. 2014; see also Pauwels in this volume; Jagers and Walgrave 2007). Scholars working with different conceptualisations of populism seemed to converge on similar ways of analysing speeches, texts and citizens' attitudes by using content analysis and surveys to measure the extent to which populist claims are made. Despite the diversity of underlying theoretical assumptions about the nature of populism, the main unifying feature of this empirical work is that parties, leaders and activists can be more or less populist at different points in time and in comparison with other parties, leaders and activists. This means that the 'degree' of populism (whether seen as an ideology, discourse or style) depends on some quantifiable presence of certain themes, words, tones, metaphors and images (Reese et al. 2001).

Usually, the gradational approach has been justified by the necessity to understand both how the mainstreaming of populist actors occurs and how it is that mainstream politics adopts populist claims all too readily (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2009; Pauwels 2011; Mudde 2016, 15). However, one might argue that the gradational approach also corresponds very well to understanding populism as being 'chameleonic' and ambivalent by nature. By focusing on how different tactics and messages occur in different fields and at different times, the gradational approach permits us to show empirically how ambivalence is expressed. This observation leads us to our next key point: If ambivalent claims are central to this phenomenon, this would additionally support the idea that populism or populist claim-making can be conceived as a frame. Frame analysis offers a powerful tool, as an increasing number of scholars

have pointed out (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Caiani and Della Porta 2011; Ruzza and Fella 2011; Aslanidis 2016; Aalberg et al. 2017). Despite internal differences and controversies associated with this type of analysis (Benford and Snow 2000; Scheufele 1999), frames are generally seen as providing authoritative interpretation of particular social phenomena by activating larger discourses or highlighting certain properties that place the phenomenon in a particular light. Thus, 'framing becomes a strategic attempt to guide the activation of particular narratives and repertoires of understanding with the purpose of mobilising consensus' (Lindekilde 2014, 201). An extreme example would be the suggestion that immigration as the target phenomenon to be interpreted is mainly a tool used by elites to replace one people with another that is more pliant. The idea of population transfers or *Umvolkung* has been a recurring staple in FPÖ campaigns since the 1990s.

Like ideologies, frames try to explain what is wrong, whose fault it is and what has to be done (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008, 3). As such, frame analysis is compatible with most of the concepts related to populism and lends itself to both qualitative and quantitative methods. The core of the analysis is to empirically examine texts, oral speeches and images to determine to what extent a populist frame occurs. The *master populist frame* is generally expressed a) by claiming that the 'people' – typically conceived as a single homogeneous entity – are in need of defending, b) by identifying the sources of the threat and subsequently by directing criticism at the elites (and outsiders), and c) by promising deliverance from the *status quo* through radical change (Mény and Surel 2000; Canovan 2005). Given that the presence and the relevance of each of these three components vary among and within actors, we should be able to map actors, parties, movements and other populism-related attributes along a continuum in terms of the direction, salience, ideological connotation and extent of the claims employed. The same applies to sub-frames on issues such as democracy, European integration, immigration, Islam and more recently COVID-19.[1] For instance, the anti-establishment sub-frame adopted by candidates and party leaders during an electoral campaign is presumably not the same in terms of position and intensity as the one adopted by that party's representatives in government, which is likely to be closer to mainstream sub-frames. Ambivalence may thus occur within discourse and between discourse and practice. For instance, a frame analysis focusing on the relevance of anti-establishment criticisms in official party speeches may not necessarily correspond to the legislative behaviour of that party. The Trump White House provided many examples of this seeming disconnect, especially since the president continued his campaign rhetoric in office, drawing on anti-establishment sub-frames while his surrogates were simultaneously trying to assuage the fears of international allies and members of Congress by sounding more mainstream. The tension between different sub-frames – one more mainstream, the other based on the narrative of the popular insurgent outsider – were quite clearly visible as different staff, some drawn from the populist campaign, others from circles of experts and career civil servants, were intermixed when having to craft policy proposals and make public statements. At the same time, the Trump Administration also showed that discourses do have an effect on political practice itself in that populist politicians who were elected based on their outsider credentials feel the need to act as disrupters and launch a variety of initiatives designed to shake up the political *status quo*. In fact, the probably most momentous event during the Trump

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1 Despite our heuristic interest in their approach, we question whether Jagers and Walgrave's (2007) focus on three distinct types of populism – 'empty populism', 'anti-elitist populism' and 'complete' populism – is able to overcome the shortcomings of reductionism.

presidency, the storming of the US Capitol buildings in January 2021 by a Trump-friendly mob, stands in direct connection with president's campaign-style rhetoric during a visit with these groups immediately prior.

In frame analysis, it is important not to conceive populist claims as mainly a discursive phenomenon but to assess their impact on political practice. For example, when populists employ a frame depicting 'the people' with certain attributes – for instance, defined neither in terms of ethnos nor class but as a hybrid category representing an idealised community of imagined authentic people –, then this follows a strategy of dividing and reconstituting groups of voters with the purpose of creating electoral majority populations. Research has shown that the use of 'people' varies across contexts and cases. A comparative analysis of party manifestos of six Western European parties yielded the following four types of appeals concerning 'the people': ethnic-nationalist, civic, collectivist and particularistic (de Raadt et al. 2004). Thus, it is generally important to ascertain the variability of the boundaries and definition of a concept such as 'the people' and to understand why a certain meaning was employed in a particular context or in connection with other sub-frames (Betz 1994, 69–106; Kuisma 2013; Marzouki et al. 2016). In frame analysis, it is important to distinguish between supply-side and demand-side dimensions because the populist frame expresses ambivalence both with respect to the 'sender' and the 'audience' of claims. Thus, populist framing and practices have to be considered both dependent and independent variables. These mutually reinforcing linkages between party manifestos and leaders' speeches, on the one hand, and the attitudes of their various constituencies, on the other, have not yet been sufficiently explored by the scholarship on populism and represent fruitful new research avenues on populism.

Explaining the Rise and the Spread of Populism across Contemporary Democracies

In many democratic systems where actors expressing populist frames were successful in the electoral arena, societies were undergoing crises and experiencing grave uncertainties. The common linkage that has emerged is the one between populism and societal, economic and cultural change. Addressing the question of the extent to which the populism frame occurs and matters is crucial; but it is equally important to understand why populist sub-frames arise and how they spread. To answer this question, one must look at the actors engaging in a populist discourse and the context: What matters here is first of all what we may call the *endogenous condition of possibility*.

Endogenous Conditions

These conditions refer to the innate abilities, resources and structural assets available to and shaped by populist actors. These include the origin and formation of the political actors themselves, including their personality and wealth as well as the pattern of the organisation of the party or movement in which they operate. For example, populist leaders like Jörg Haider, Andrej Babiš, Christoph Blocher (although he was never actually the party leader) and Jean-Marie Le Pen each enjoyed the advantage of considerable personal wealth, which gave them a

measure of autonomy both from internal party factions and external interests. Moreover, it allowed them to shape aspects of their party to suit their preferences. However, access to a financial fortune is only one aspect: They need certain abilities and resources inherent in themselves and in their organisation to communicate their messages effectively. If they lack communicative abilities, they will not be listened to. If they lack fame or the ability to muster promotional resources, the media and public will ignore them. If they lack organisational strength, they will not be able to concentrate power in the leadership or project their claims with sufficient intensity. We need to distinguish those conditions which are under the control of actors or which may be shaped by them from those which may not be altered and to which populist actors must adapt if they want to be politically successful.

Exogenous Conditions

Exogenous conditions of possibility refer to the given context in which actors opt to express their populist claims, but which is beyond the control of the actors themselves. The experience of COVID-19 with so many restrictions and mandates placed on so many people has created numerous examples of this. These conditions are defined by a complex configuration of structural dimensions, popular predispositions and communication patterns, to which populist actors must react. In a society with an ethnic minority population, populist actors may opt to build their claims around ethnic divisions, whereas in systems with a centre-periphery cleavage, populists will likely invoke heartland mythologies. In the latter, existing local predispositions against the capital city and the national media located in the metropolises may be readily exploited. Exogenous conditions vary not only across space but also over time. As already mentioned, such conditions entail various crises and uncertainties as a result of societal, economic and cultural change. They also include the revolution in information technology, increasing economic interdependence and a changing relationship between the economy, the state, society and the individual. These are well-known factors, which drive different forms of socio-economic polarisation and growing mediatisation, both of which have an impact on everyday politics and life in general (Castells 2009).

Nonetheless, individual electoral races occur within national borders and thus in a given institutional context with defined constituencies. In order to explain how and why actors expressing populist frames emerge and succeed in electoral arenas, we have to consider more deeply how macro-level changes, such as those attributed to different forms of globalisation, become translated and framed in regional and national contexts. Although several scholars are strongly fascinated by the idea of 'global populism' or of the general *Zeitgeist* (Mudde 2004; but also see Müller 2016), comparative research on populism clearly shows that regional, systemic and epistemic differences produce different populist outcomes (for Europe, see Ignazi 1992; Betz 1994; Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Koopmans 1996; Betz and Immerfall 1998; Norris 2005; Carter 2005; Mudde 2007; Ivarsflaten 2008; Art 2011; for Latin America, see Weyland 2001; Madrid 2008; Hawkins 2009; Levitsky and Roberts 2011). One such crucial element are the political rules of the game that exist in a particular context. The election rules, government legacies and other political institutional arrangements may explain the variation in how populists frame their discursive strategy. For instance, as Katz and Mair (1995; 2009) have argued, party cartelisation, a collusion system of mainstream parties within government, may represent an

important window of opportunity for anti-establishment opponents. In other cases, the changes occurring at the macro-level are only indirectly connected with globalization and modernization but be in fact the aftermath of a transition from authoritarianism such as was the case in Eastern Europe. There in populist discourse, the contemporary elites may be the group of former dissents and anti-Communist intellectuals having brought about the changes whereas the populist leaders are oligarchy and business tycoon promising technocratic and non-ideological solutions to the nation's problems. Thus, scholars (e.g., Buštíková and Guasti, 2019) have labelled the Czech government party Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) 'technocratic populist' because of its apolitical nature (see also Engler, Pytlas and Deegan-Krause (2019, 1325). Other have pointed out the entrepreneurial dimension of ANO's populism (Maškarinec and Bláha 2014, see also the chapter by Heinisch and Saxonberg in this book).

As a result, socio-economic and cultural changes may not explain widespread populist claim-making by themselves. But if we connect these underlying factors with the erosion of old political cleavages and with associated changes in political institutional arrangements, we may develop a plausible argument for how democratic politics in consolidated political systems has been undermined and how this subsequently contributed to the creation of widespread insecurity. Such sentiments are exploited not only by protest parties but mainstream political actors as well. They too, may engage in making populist claims, to some extent using populist sub-frames to distinguish themselves in a highly competitive and strongly media-influenced political campaign environment. Candidate-centred electoral campaigns, dramatisation and sensationalism in media coverage, as well as the spread of social media may strongly enhance the rise of populist sub-frames (Mazzoleni et al. 2003; Moffitt 2016). One can also assume that the more public opinion embraces the frame of a distance between 'ordinary people' and the political elite expressed in opinion polls through waning trust in politicians and their low approval ratings, the more the populist claim is perceived by elites themselves as a tool for their competition in a communication environment shaped by media logic. Thus, populism is not necessarily a pathological symptom of societal crisis, but the most effective response by (including mainstream) actors when pursuing political power under changing – political and media-based – rules of the game.

The Role of Endogenous and Exogenous Conditions in Populist Claim-Making

Most scholars would agree that discrete contexts shape not only the perception of populism as a construct but also the perception of populist protagonists themselves in the sense that the phenomenon becomes attached to certain leaders, political parties, movements and even forms of communication (Subramanian 2007; Madrid 2008; Hawkins 2010; Jansen 2011). This means that the endogenous conditions related to actors' traits and the factors under their control are the more crucial dimensions in spreading populism. Whereas exogenous dimensions are necessary conditions, they are not enough to explain the rise, spread and the ambivalence of populist claims. The decision on whether to convincingly claim that women's liberation is under assault from Islam or to equally persuasively denounce it as undermining a community's social fabric depends on a populist protagonist's ability to read a given context and to use their available assets as effectively as possible. Overall, the claims about women remain ambivalent but different versions will be deployed to maximum effect in different contexts.

Populist frames need political entrepreneurs capable of developing and disseminating them. A crucial condition for the success of the populist discourse is the credibility of the claims maker as a challenger or change agent. The key is the populist actor's 'transformational' leadership (Burns 1978), although populist scholarship prefers to adopt the controversial term of 'charisma' (see, for instance, Barr 2009). In doing so, the claims maker can draw on the aforementioned objective resources, such as wealth, networks, celebrity status, media access and the like, to appear credible in effecting change. Depending on the actor and the context, individual and collective dimensions are relevant. The individual dimension, especially once populist leaders present themselves as outsiders, is linked to their capacity to convert non-political (economic, cultural and so on) capital into political capital (for example, public reputation), and, more generally, to mobilise all resources available to oppose (political) elites and call into question the formal/informal political rules governing the political system. The collective dimension can also play a crucial role in increasing a leader's or a party's ability to spread populist claims. The organisation of the movement or party, which varies between more or less highly centralised and cohesive models, with differing financial and/or activist resources for mobilisation (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016), and its capacity to link with more or less relevant interest groups in society and the economy all matter in this respect. Again, we notice how the endogenous condition reflected in the populists' ability to shape their party organisation intersects with the exogenous dimension of institutional rules and established practices.

In a presidential political system like the US, in which political parties are mainly fundraising vehicles but which are otherwise focused on a 'horse race' between two major party candidates, fame and financial resources are key to overcoming the threshold of public awareness. Donald Trump's fame as a media show host and celebrity, his experience in handling himself in front of an audience and his ability to communicate effectively were his assets in the endogenous condition of possibility. It was also an asset that he was able to finance his campaign independently of his party and their major donors. Moreover, Trump was able to mount a successful insurgency campaign more or less against the party that eventually nominated him without shattering the party, as would undoubtedly have been the case elsewhere. Thus, he also benefitted from the fact that the US party system is structured loosely enough to allow for considerable internal division and dissent without splitting a party altogether. In other words, the political entrepreneur Trump was able to make claims against a party whose leadership he sought, and to act on a scale that conditions elsewhere would prohibit. Subsequently, he dominated his party, especially the grassroots, like few sitting presidents and especially like no past president before him so that the loyalty to Trump continues to be an ideological litmus test for people seeking office on a Republican ticket even after 2020. Yet, the Trump's party did not undergo any formal structural changes but power is exercised by Trump's direct appeal to voters, especially his base, via social media and public statements.

By comparison, in a West European party system, populist political entrepreneurs might first try to bring the respective parties under their control by challenging the old leadership or mobilising the base, as Jörg Haider did in 1986, when he took control of the FPÖ. In that context, leader then effected formal changes to the party's organization to concentrate power and centralise decision-making in order to project polarising messages without fear of internal dissent (Heinisch 2016). In other cases of populism, economic entrepreneurs become political entrepreneurs and form their own parties which they then completely control such the Czech bil-

lionaire Andrej Babiš and his party ANO 2011 (see the chapter by Heinisch and Saxonberg in this book).

What matters is how populist actors shape the intersection of endogenous and exogenous conditions. This also extends to the populist party's position in the political system. Whether a party's place is more 'peripheral' or 'central', such as by participating in government, shaping public policy and/or using public administration for party goals, matters as it implies easy access to public resources. It also enhances a party's capacity to be recognised by allies and opponents in the political system as well as by the media and journalists (Aalberg et al. 2016; Akkerman et al. 2016). Since one crucial strategy against populist opposition parties is the *cordon sanitaire*[2], the ability of populists to ensure their centrality in the political and media system is the most effective strategy with which to protect their reputation and credibility. Nonetheless, the populists' claim of being a central player includes an important contradiction because seeking office and entering government while simultaneously advocating revolutionary change creates a tension between the constraints of public office and the populist party's operational logic (for example, Heinisch 2003). The populist frame of being a political outsider seeking power to become an insider in order to change the system on behalf of the people represents numerous challenges. The populists have to convince voters that they, as outsiders, have enough inside wherewithal to effect change without becoming system insiders themselves. Populist actors often fail in this task and pay the price for what is perceived as mainstreaming (Akkerman et al. 2016). Yet under certain circumstances, political success may occur. This happens in strongly polarised and mediatised systems, once the transformational leadership becomes strong enough to shape the rules of the institutional game in either emerging or consolidated democratic regimes.

Application and Summary

In this chapter, we argued that scholars of populism, especially those working in political science and political sociology, should overcome certain limitations of current literature by moving on to a more comprehensive framework of analysis. The growing challenges in scholarship are related to its capacity to grasp the complexity, the variety and the fluid character of populism. In contrast to proposing reductive, essentialist and normative approaches, we argued in favour of a relational structure-agency approach by asking how populist claims arise and how they may be studied empirically. In keeping with our understanding of populism as a frame, we are most interested in understanding how the populist frame varies across different arenas and constituencies.

Inspired by Taggart (2000, 5), who argued that scholars should consider populism an 'anti-political, empty-hearted, chameleonic celebration of the heartland in the face of crisis', we argued that populism can be heuristically defined as an intrinsically ambivalent claim. It is diffused by individual and collective actors to challenge the *status quo* in favour of people's empowerment and elite change. We take the ambivalence expressed in populist claims to be a dynamic and plastic multidimensional phenomenon: concepts such as people, elites, (liberal)

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2   In a *cordon sanitaire* other political actors completely refuse to cooperate with and politically isolate the populists so that the latter become politically ineffective.

democracy, constitutional rights, rule of law or the economic system, among others, are all subject to highly ambivalent expression by populists, and so their content and meaning remain purposefully vague and vary depending on circumstances and context. This makes also the relationship between populism and democracy complex and full of ambivalence (Ferrín and Kriesi 2016; Kriesi 2018; Van Hauwaert and van Kessel 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2019; Leininger and Meijers 2021). The same goes for the traditional ideologies to which populism has developed a connection full of ambiguity and flexibility. The ambivalence expressed in populist claims is not only a question of discourse but also one of political practice. This means the ambivalence reflected in populist claims finds an expression both in policymaking and political culture.

Figure 5.1: Overview of the Principal Definitions and Conceptualisation

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Definition

Populism can be defined as a frame containing intrinsically ambivalent claim(s) diffused by individual and collective actors in order to challenge the status-quo in favor of people's empowerment and elite change.

Frames are sets of concepts used to organize, perceive, and communicate about reality. Frames and underlying claims are often connected to host ideologies.

The *goal of frame analysis* is to understand the relationship between frame, actor, and context.

In order to analyse the ambivalence of populist claims, we proposed proceeding with a frame analysis (Aslanidis 2016). It begins with the assumption that the *populist master frame* is restored (Mény and Surel 2000; Canovan 2005). The research would then trace, for example, through content analysis, the variation of these concepts in populist claims: the portrayal of the 'people', the nature of the 'elites' and the extent of the 'change'. Claims can be measured at the very least in terms of their direction, extremeness, prominence and frequency. We then suggested adopting a gradational approach, which allows for the study of parties, leaders and citizens with the objective of uncovering the extent of populist sub-frames used within themes, words, tones, metaphors and images in relation to their background ideology (left-wing, centrists, right-wing), channels of communication, intended constituencies and arenas of competition.

If populism, as expressed by ambivalent claims, is the dependent construct, we suggested that a set of contextual variables can explain the emergence of such populist frames In particular, these include exogenous conditions of possibility such as social and cultural change, frames embedded in public opinion (disenchantment with politics, dwindling trust in politicians, etc.), institutional conditions, the configuration of the party system pattern (relations between governing and opposition parties, strength of cleavage politics) and the structure of the media (e.g., the increasing relevance of media logic in modern democracies). Within each respective context, it is the actor(s) that plays (play) the key role in spreading populist claims. Thus, any analysis of populism has to focus on the means of individual and collective actors and their innate abilities and acquired resources, their credibility as change agents and their capacity to shape strategies and affect political rules.

It is important to note once again that discourse and practice are linked to each other. In this sense, populism is not only a discourse but also connected to measurable political realities in terms of conditions of possibility, choices of strategy and selection of policies. In our approach, we intended to suggest a way forward designed to bridge the chasm between those who have adopted

the Muddean framework because they prefer its ideational aspects and empirical operationalis-ability, and those who see the discursive and multifaceted dimensions of populism but struggle to both link discourse and practice and measure populism's causes and effects.

Figure 5.2: Overview of the Application of Frame Analysis to Empirical Research (Example)

Hypothesis: *The rise and spread of populist claims depend on social, economic, institutional, cultural conditions of possibilities.*

Dependent Variable

Master frame: "Defense of the (virtuous) 'people' against the machination of elites and the promise of political change to restore the power of the people."

Ambivalent claims in the discursive frame:
- *People*: 'Heartlanders'/demos/ethnos/Christians/whites/working people/taxpayers
- *Elites*: The political class/politicians/bureaucrats/ financial/economic elites/media/judges
- *Democracy*: Plebiscitary decision-making/unrestraint majoritarianism/curbs on media and judiciary

Subframe 1: "Mainstream parties/Leftist parties have ab andoned the working men and women because politicians are self-serving and corrupt."

Ambivalent claims in the discursive subframe:
- *Parties*: Praise for old left/criticism of the (new) Left or the Left in general/'parties are all the same'
- *Economy*: Critique of capitalism and free trade/favor economic protectionism/favor deregulation and
  lower taxes/criticize trade unionism

Empirical Measurement: Claims can be empirically analyzed by the range of meanings assigned to its component concepts, internal consistency, radicalness, ideological connection, frequency and prominence (salience).

Sources: Manifestos, speeches, interviews, public debates, posters, billboards, political ads and commercials, and so on.

Independent Variable

Exogenous conditions of possibility
Rise and diffusion populism claims is causally linked to a) societal and cultural change; b) institutional conditions; c) party system patterns d) the main trends in public opinion and e) the (changing) pattern in media structure…

Endogenous conditions of possibility

1) Individual (actor-related) dimension
- Innate characteristics of the populist actor(s) (charisma, rhetorical ability, leadership ability)
- Economic, cultural, social capital (that can be converted to political capital)
- Credibility of the claims maker as a change agent in the given context.

2) Collective dimension
- Organizational-networking basis
- Level of centralization/control over the organization/formation supporting the populist actor
- Cohesiveness of the formation supporting the populist actor
- Financial-activist and other resources of the formation supporting the populist actor

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