**Prepared for the conference
"Populism of the Twenty-First Century"
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
Washington, D.C.
October 8, 2009**

The History of a Controversy: Populism in Latin American Politics

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In his seminal article entitled "La integración de las masas a la vida política y el totalitarismo," Gino Germani set the research agenda for the study of Latin American populism.[i] He argued that national-populist regimes, such as Peronism, were a phase in the transition to modernity. This period was linked to the economic, moral, and political crises of traditional society that produced anomic masses available for top-down mobilization. Even though national populist regimes were democratizing in so far as they incorporated previously excluded masses into political life, they had authoritarian traits. "The political incorporation of the popular masses started under totalitarianism. It gave workers an experience of political and social participation in their personal lives, annulling at the same time political organizations and the basic rights that are the pillars for any genuine democracy".[ii]

Scholars have worked with Germani's hypotheses. They analyzed the social conditions that made populism possible, the links between leaders and followers, the social bases of different populist coalitions, and the democratizing and authoritarian traits of different populist experiences. The cumulative knowledge generated by researchers working

on populism contributed to the development of national social sciences in different Latin American nations. It is impossible to understand the rise of Argentine social sciences, for example, without the study of Peronism, or of Ecuadorean sociology and historiography without the passionate debates on the meanings of *Velasquismo*.

Despite the immense and rich bibliography written on populism, there is little consensus on its definition. As with fascism, there has been conceptual inflation and thus devaluation of this concept. "Such is the welter of divergent opinions surrounding the term that it is almost *de rigueur* to open contributions to the debate…with some such observation."[iii] Some scholars even propose to get rid of the term populism altogether.[iv] Others try to solve the problems of theoretical inconsistency by restricting it to a phase in the history of the region,[v] or by conceptual approaches that detach politics from social and economic processes.[vi] This chapter will not offer a new concept of populism. It focuses on controversies in the bibliography to explore different theoretical and methodological answers to the aforementioned questions raised by Germani. The analysis of these debates will also allow us to explain the similarities and differences between what the literature classifies as classical populism, neopopulism, and radical populism of the 21st century.

This chapter has three sections. The first analyzes different theoretical models used in the study of populism, and explores how researchers explain the social conditions under which populism emerges. The second studies approaches to understanding the links between leaders and followers. Scholars have analyzed populist organizations, political clientelism, mass rallies, the media, and discourse to explain the populist bond. The third section explores the democratizing and authoritarian traits of different populist experiences. The conclusion

explains the similarities and differences between classical populism, neopopulism, and radical national populism of the 21st century.

From socioeconomic structuralism to political and discursive approaches

For Gino Germani, populism was a phase in the history of Latin America characterized by the social mobilization and political incorporation of previously excluded masses during the transition to modernity.[vii] His critics working with a dependency paradigm shared his view of this phenomenon as a stage closely tied to broader social and economic transformations. For dependency theory, populism is linked to the crisis of agro export-led development and the emergence of import substitution industrialization (ISI).[viii] Despite their different emphasis—on Marxist class analysis or on modernization theory—both approaches were based on structuralist and historicist theories of society and on explanations of politics as epiphenomena of deeper social and economic processes.[ix] According to these theories populism is tied to the incorporation of common people to the political community; to ISI that allowed for multiclass alliances between workers, the industrial bourgeoisie, and the state; and to redistributive-nationalist policies.

Other scholars noticed synergies and elective affinities between neoliberalism and populism. To explain the reemergence of populism in neoliberal contexts they decoupled politics from economics, focusing on the political characteristics of populism without linking it to particular social and economic periods or to particular policies. Kurt Weyland defined populism "as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers".[x] If populism is a strategy, the concrete mechanisms of political mobilization need to be specified. Kenneth Roberts characterizes

populism as based on top down mobilization by personalist leaders challenging elites in the name of an ill defined "people."[xi] Classical populism and neopopulism differed in the levels of organization of supporters. Whereas classical populists created organizations but kept them under personal control severely limiting their institutionalization, neopopulists "weaken established intermediary organizations and refuse to transform their own electoral vehicles into organized parties".[xii] They also differed in the mechanism for mobilizing and demonstrating mass support. Classical populists recurred to elections, and mass rallies, whereas neopopulists favored opinion polls and the mass media, particularly television.[xiii]

Populism has also been theorized as a discourse that produced "sharp political polarization and laid down deep political loyalties".[xiv] Populist discourse divides society into two antagonistic camps: the people against the oligarchy. In his classical Marxist structuralist text, Ernesto Laclau analyzes the crisis of liberal discourse in Argentina in the 1930s and '40s and how Perón transformed the criticisms of liberalism into a discourse that confronted the people against the bloc in power. The particularity of populism is to be a discourse that articulates popular-democratic interpellations as antagonistic to the dominant ideology. These contradictions that cannot be processed within the system imply the possibility of a populist rupture that could lead to reactionary regimes such as fascism, or to socialist revolutions such as Maoism.[xv] In his recent texts Laclau has abandoned Marxist class determinism. Populism is based on discursive practices that construct a popular subject built on an internal frontier that divides the social space into two camps.[xvi] As in his early theory, populism expresses the rupture of a system of differences that cannot process the demands of a popular subject. The excluded plebs that are a part of the community claim to be the only legitimate populous, and seek to represent the whole. [xvii] Populism is anti-institutional; it is based in the construction of

an enemy; and in an equivalential logic in which the name of the leader "functions as a signifier to which a multiplicity of meanings can be attributed".[xviii]

The move from economic and sociological determinism opens the links between politics, culture, and economics to empirical research. It also has the advantage of not leaving out of the picture the experiences of nations that did not follow the developmental process characterized as typical of populism. In the Andean nations of Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, for example, populism as a political and discursive phenomenon emerged without links to ISI, as these nations were agrarian.

Most studies link populism to a crisis: the crisis that accompanied the transition to modernity, the crisis of agro export-led development or of import substitution industrialization, and/or the ideological crises of liberalism and neoliberalism. Kenneth Roberts has analyzed two critical junctures when populism emerged. The first was linked to the crisis of agro export led development, and the second to the crisis of ISI and the attempts to introduce neoliberal reform. The first critical juncture is linked to the political and socioeconomic incorporation of the working and middle classes. The second juncture coincides with the crises of ISI. Whereas some advocated market reforms as answers to this crisis, others pursued the return to previous nationalist and statist policies as answers to the failures of market reform to deal with social and economic exclusions.[xix]

Even though Roberts rightly points to two key critical conjunctures were populism emerged, these phenomena has also arise during normal-non critical junctures and has been a reality in Latin America since the populist incorporation of common people in the 1930s and 40s. Whenever populist leaders have been allowed to participate in elections in nations such as Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and Venezuela they have gained votes. It is worth

remembering Alan Knight's remarks that populism is not an extraordinary phenomenon linked to crises but that it has emerged in non-critical and normal times.[xx]

"Populism is a perpetual tendency where political institutions are chronically weak".[xxi] Nations with stronger institutions, such as Chile, have been more immune, and populism "only took off when the regular party system lost support and broke down… or when populism was channeled within that system".[xxii] Scholars have also linked populism to moments where new social actors place demands on the system that could not be satisfied within existing institutions. The current wave of radical populism is explained by the process described by Samuel Huntington as when "social mobilization appears to be substantially outpacing institutional responsiveness".[xxiii] The solution appears to lie in building the capacity of the state to deliver basic social services effectively to most of the citizenry. And also to incorporate new social actors into the democratic political framework so they do not undermine the institutionalization already achieved in their nations.[xxiv]

Because "institutional factors can change with unexpected speed… they cannot easily serve as independent variables".[xxv] Institutional factors should be combined with other variables to explain the reemergence and the attraction of populism. Some scholars focus on the relationship between the state and society.[xxvi] Scott Mainwaring, for example, explains the crises of representation in the Andes by focusing on state deficiencies understood as when "the state fails to fulfill some of its basic governance, legal, and security functions".[xxvii] Latin American states "may be described as 'frustrated' because of the permanent contradiction between the voluminous paper regulations that they spawn and their inability to enforce them in practice".[xxviii] In many Latin American nations there is a duality between the official recognition of rights in Constitutions and in the rhetoric of state officials, and a weak

implementation of these same rights in everyday life. There is a distinction between common citizens who are subjects of the law, and a few important persons of the community who, in addition of enjoying their citizenship rights, could be beyond or above the law, as convenience dictates.[xxix] People who live on the margins of the law, however, are not totally ignored by the state. State agencies have labeled these populations as "informal," "land invaders," "the dangerous poor," etc. These populations are simultaneously invisible to the state and overtly visible to some state agencies and repressive institutions. Populism transforms the humiliations that the poor, the informal, the land invader have to endure in their daily lives into sources of human dignity and redemption. The poor, the informal, the marginal become *el pueblo*, understood as the virtuous incarnation of all the good attributes of the nation. And those who constantly humiliate the poor become the hideous oligarchy.

Strong rhetorical appeals to subaltern groups as *el pueblo* and as the real nation have gone together with movements that have conceived of democracy as forms of direct popular participation, as the occupation of public spaces, as the acclamation of their leader, and as the booing of opponents. These understandings of democracy that do not always respect the norms of liberal democratic procedures have become part of the political repertoires of popular collective action. Times of economic crises, change, and insecurity, or maybe distrust in models of democracy that do not deliver material goods or provide a sense of belonging to the system and that are used by elites to silence and exclude the "Other," explain why populism constantly reemerges. A combination of institutional and sociological factors might better explain why populism continues to reemerge.

Leaders and followers: how are they linked, organized, and mobilized?

Researchers distinguish five linkages between leaders and followers: populist organization, clientelism, mass rallies, the mass media–particularly television-and discourse. Populist organizations do not quite fit into Germani's model of anomie and availability for mobilization. Historians of Peronism and Varguism have shown, for example, that even tough charismatic leaders had a great power setting agendas, working class organizations used the openings of the political systems to present their own demands that sometimes differed from those of their leaders.[xxx] Similarly, ethnographic research on the poor who make a living in the informal sector has demonstrated that they have strategic capacities to negotiate with the state and with political parties.[xxxi]

Populist organizations are based on low levels of institutionalization.[xxxii] Leaders set their agendas and strategies, and it is difficult to build identities that differ from the image of the people as constructed by leaders. Even though populists actively organized supporters within their movements, these organizations are based on insularity, as they do not promote solidarity with similar organizations in civil society.[xxxiii] Populist organizations do not value pluralism because they adopt the idea of the popular as an undifferentiated fusion of "the romantic notion of the people –folk- with the Marxian idea of class… transforming the people into a unified, homogenous entity."[xxxiv] Hence the people can only be organized under loyal organizations to the leaders. Yet, sometimes common people use populist organizations, the openings of the political system under populism, and the rhetorical claims that they are the true nation to present their own demands.[xxxv]

Populist organizations created by Chávez's government such as Bolivarian Circles, Communal Councils, Urban Land Committees, and Technical Water Roundtables illustrate the tension between the organization of supporters and their subordination to a charismatic

leader. In order to promote the revolutionary process, President Chávez encouraged the formation of Bolivarian Circles in June 2001. These were "small groups of seven to fifteen people, they were intended to study the ideology of Bolivarianism, discuss local issues and defend the revolution."[xxxvi] In their heyday, Bolivarian Circles boasted approximately 2.2 million members and had an active role in the massive demonstrations rescuing President Chávez when he was temporarily removed from office in an April 2002 coup d'état. Even though the Circles have decayed in the last years, they provide an interesting lens through which to analyze the tensions between activation and autonomous participation. Kirk Hawkins and David Hansen show that mobilization of the Bolivarian Circles is not necessarily based in the "kind of autonomy that democracy requires."[xxxvii] Their study demonstrates that even though Bolivarian Circles did constitute forms of participation for poor people, they often worked as clientelistic networks to transfer resources to neighborhoods where the president had supporters. Moreover, they were based on a charismatic mode of linkage that precluded autonomy from the leader.

Communal Councils have been conceived as institutions to promote popular power and are seen as the foundation for the future establishment of a socialist direct and pyramidal democracy. The Venezuelan government had established sixteen thousand communal councils by 2006, managing roughly 30 percent of the total budget for social services.[xxxviii] Critics and supporters of the Bolivarian Revolution have agreed that communal councils so far have faced the same problems as the Bolivarian Circles, namely the persistence of clientelism in the exchange of social services for political support, and a charismatic style of rule that neutralizes or prevents autonomous grass root inputs.[xxxix]

Bolivarian Circles and Communal Councils may have experienced problems of autonomy because they were created from above. Other institutions such as the Urban Land Committees and Technical Water Roundtables, for example, have accepted more autonomous grass root inputs. In particular, the government has given squatter settlements collective titles to land on which precarious self-built dwellings are situated. Through this process, "the community forms an urban land committee to administer its new collective property and to undertake and demand support for material improvement such as water, sewerage and electricity services or road paving".[xl] Similarly, local water committees "arrange the distribution of water between neighboring communities which share the same water mains".[xli] Nevertheless, Urban Land Committees and Water Committees lack autonomy from the charismatic leader, as Chávez remains a highly visible, guiding force for these institutions.[xlii] Participation has been reduced to a cadre of committed members who have had difficulties involving other citizens.[xliii]

Populist parties and movements are organized through clientelist and informal networks that distribute resources, information, and jobs to the poor.[xliv] The first round of studies on political clientelism showed that the poor were not irrational, and that they voted instrumentally for the candidate with the best capacity to deliver goods and services.[xlv] More recent studies have documented that clientelist exchanges are not based only on instrumental rationality; they also generate identities. The resilience of Peronism among the poor, for example, is partially explained by the party's networks. In conditions of poverty and marginalization, participation in problem-solving networks allows access to resources. Brokers are the intermediaries between politicians and poor people. They hoard information and resources and are connected to wider networks and cliques of politicians and state

officials. Differently from impersonal and objective rights, favors create long lasting

personalized obligations. Formal bureaucratic rules work together with personalist cliques

and networks of friends who dispense "favors," including corruption. Because the poor can

choose to leave a broker and join a different network, broker's positions are unstable, and the

poor cannot be seen as a manipulated and captive voting base. The poor might exit a

network, they might also choose not to vote as the broker requested, or might feel compelled

to repay a favor to the broker. The unreliable nature of political support gives certain

advantages to the poor. For the system of exchanges to work, politicians have to at least

deliver some resources. They also need to maintain a name and a reputation that can be used

by the poor in order to deal with the gatekeepers of their constitutionally-prescribed rights. In

many nations politicians have constructed images of the poor as the virtuous inhabitants of

the land who need their paternalistic intermediation. The poor use these discourses on their

behalf to establish moral contracts where politicians have to continuously probe their role as

champions of the poor.

Political rallies where crowds show their adherence to populist leaders have been

conceptualized as important sites where identities and loyalties are cemented, created, and re-

created. Following Emile Durkheim´s sociology of rituals and gatherings, Randall Collins

sustains that mass meetings are key moments when commitments are strengthened, and are

important sites for the formation of collective identities and political mobilizing symbols.

Attending political events in person increases partisanship, to the extent that the

speech is a "good one" –in other words, that it involves the interplay of speaker and

crowd that builds up shared enthusiasm; and reciprocally, those persons who already

have an identification with the political leader or faction have a stronger desire to take part.[xlvi]

Research on Peronist rallies in Buenos Aires in the mid and late 1990s, on Abdalá Bucaram's rallies in Ecuador in 1996, and Álvaro Noboa's and Rafael Correa's mass meetings during the 2006 presidential campaign showed that followers had different readings of their discourses and performances.[xlvii] For brokers these elections meant the chance to be closer to the centers of power in order to gain access to goods, services, jobs, prestige, etc. Those who were already members of distribution networks attended these rallies to reciprocate the favors given by leaders, and accepted the meanings of these rallies as conveyed by their organizers. For example, people who regularly take part in the distribution networks of Álvaro Noboa interpret the distribution of gifts such as wheel chairs and money in cash as evidence of the billionaire's generosity and love of the poor. Others attend rallies out of curiosity, or in order to enjoy a free performance and not because they support these self-proclaimed leaders and champions of the poor. Most did not view these leaders as who they claimed to be, yet for many Abdalá Bucaram, for example, represented an affront to their superiors, and voting for him was a good opportunity to act on class resentment and even hatred.

Scholars of neopopulism argue that mass rallies have been replaced by television and public opinion polls. Television will have an important role in elections in contexts where common people with low levels of education are largely exposed to this media without alternative channels. Television allows for direct communication between leaders and followers, bypassing and replacing older mediations based on parties and organizations of civil society. Taylor Boas tested the hypothesis that populist appeal determined the elections

of Fernando Collor in 1989, Alberto Fujimori in 2000, and Alejandro Toledo in 2001. He shows that television was, indeed, important in the elections of Collor in 1989 and Fujimori in 2000, but its influence was based on biased election coverage, and not on populist strategies.[xlviii] This study is important because, unlike most scholars who only analyze the production of images, it actually tested their reception. Research on the reception of media images and messages in Brazil have shown that families, friends, and organizations such as the Catholic Church and neighborhood associations mediate how people interpret the messages delivered by television.[xlix] The idea of the lonely actor who decides her vote in front of a television set needs to be abandoned. Scholars should focus instead on how people who belong to networks based on family, religion, and neighborhood associations interpret media messages.

Some academics argue that television has transformed politics based on reason into media-politics based on melodrama. Analyzing Menemism, Beatriz Sarlo writes, "politics in the mass media is subordinated to the laws that regulate audiovisual flow: high impact, large quantities of undifferentiated visual information, and arbitrary binary syntax that is better suited to a matinee melodrama than to the political arena."[l] These narratives of decay are based on the old Western dualism of mind versus body and emotion versus reason.[li] Some have idealized past forms of politics based on ideologies assuming that ideological politics where devoid of emotions. These accounts—that somewhat reflect a European past of ideological and class based parties—exaggerate the absence of emotional myths and symbols in working class politics.[lii] Other scholars have assumed that the scientificization of politics and the rise of campaign technocrats, together with the deactivation of citizens and their

transformation into passive spectators, have transformed rational deliberation into media emotional manipulation.[liii]

In contrast to scholars who argued that video politics have displaced rational arguments in the public sphere, others have researched how the logics of the media and party politics have merged. As Silvio Waisbord wrote, "premature obituaries of politics in public spaces forget that partisan cultures, media favoritism, and old-time campaign habits have not been swept away by pos-tmodern telepolitics: they continue to shape communication practices."[liv] Media politics and traditional electioneering will fuse differently in distinct political cultures. Analyzing Israeli politics, Yoram Peri argues that the logic of television contributed to the personalization of politics, and gave priority to emotions over rational arguments. "The central place once occupied by party platforms, values and ideologies, and especially the candidate's political plans, was replaced by the personal characteristics of the political actors."[lv] This narrative of the decay of rational arguments and its replacement by emotions does not apply to most Latin American nations where populist leaders incorporated citizens into the political arena. By stressing the personal qualities of leaders as the embodiment of the common people and of the nation in their Manichaean struggles against the oligarchy, politics in Latin America for the most part have focused as much on personalities and emotions as on platforms.

Instead of assuming that television replaced older electoral mechanism, perhaps it is more fruitful to analyze how traditional and modern electoral techniques have become hybridized.[lvi] Scholars who analyzed Carlos Menem's electoral strategies noticed how novel uses of television coexisted with traditional mechanism of vote gathering.[lvii] Similarly, the analysis of Ecuador's 2006 presidential campaign showed how television comfortably

coexisted with and was blended with electoral rallies and clientelist networks. Even though electoral rallies are made to coincide with prime time television news and their structure has been transformed to fit with the logic of television, this media cannot be seen as the only tool to win elections.

Post-structuralist scholars argue that discourse is "the primary terrain within which the social is constituted."[lviii] Other scholars who do not accept the epistemological and ontological assumptions of their post-structuralist peers also consider discourse as one of the defining traits of populism. They claim that this particular way of framing social reality produces antagonistic conflict between groups and constitutes identities.[lix] Populism constructs the struggle between the people and the oligarchy as an ethical and moral confrontation between good and evil, redemption and downfall. The term "the people," however, is profoundly vague and elastic. In order to disentangle its ambiguities, it is important to start with Laclau's observation that the people "as operating in populist discourses is never a primary datum but a construct – populist discourse does not simply *express* some kind of original popular identity; it actually *constitutes* the latter."[lx] What needs to be researched is: Who is excluded and included in these discursive constructs? Who has created these categories? And, what are the levels of social and or political polarization produced by populist discourse?

Populist rhetoric has historically constructed the people as urban and *mestizo* (ethnically and culturally mixed folk) who had an antagonistic relationship with the oligarchy. The exaltation of poor and *mestizo* as the essence of the nation repelled white and foreign-leaning elites who were terrified by populist challenges. The populist creation of a virtuous and *mestizo* nation, however, excluded those of indigenous and African descent. In

order to belong to the people and to the nation, indigenous and Afro-descendants were encouraged to adopt national-*mestizo* values, to reject their cultural specificity, and to whiten themselves. During the 1952 Bolivian revolution, for example, the "Indian was erased in favor of a *mestizo* identity," and languages of class try to conceal ethnicity.[lxi] In recent years, due to the strength of indigenous organizations, the discursive elaborations of who belongs to the people have changed. Evo Morales and his party *Movimiento al Socialismo* have replaced "the *mestizo* as the iconic citizen with the *indígena*."[lxii] Morales' success is explained, in part, by his ability to articulate anxieties provoked by globalization while presenting indigenous people as the essence of the nation. The new confrontation is between those who have struggled to defend Bolivia's natural resources –indigenous people- and the oligarchy that has transferred them to imperialist and foreign powers.

El pueblo, however, does not only have positive images. Elite perceptions have varied from paternalistic to openly hostile and racist.[lxiii] In Venezuela, for example, the benevolent, paternalistic image of the *pueblo* as virtuous yet ignorant and naïve masses that were the foundation of democracy changed with the introduction of structural adjustment policies during Carlos Andrés Pérez's second administration (1989-93). His government ended with state subsidies, protective barriers, price controls, and wage regulations "that had constituted the populist model of development for half a century."[lxiv] The hike in the price of domestic gasoline in 1989, as Fernando Coronil shows, broke the bond between the paternalistic state and *el pueblo* based on the shared assumption of the birthright of all Venezuelans for oil rents. Massive demonstrations turned into two days of "massive rioting and looting, escalating from neighborhood groceries stores to commercial centers in Caracas and other cities."[lxv] After these events, the people were transformed into "an unruly and parasitical

mass to be disciplined by the state and made productive by the market."[lxvi] This rebellion, named the *Caracazo*, conveyed elite nightmares of the savage, uncivilized, disorganized rabble that invaded the centers of civility. These constructions of the rabble as the antithesis of reason and civilized behavior allowed or justified fierce and brutal repression by the state that ended in at least 400 deaths.

According to Fernando Coronil, common people had a different reading of these events. They viewed elites as "a corrupt '*cogollo*' [group of bigwigs] that had privatized the state, looted the nation's wealth, and abused the people… The people have been betrayed by their leaders and democracy has become a façade behind which an elite had used the state for its own advantage."[lxvii] Given the constructions of the categories "el pueblo" and "the oligarchy," Hugo Chávez was able to build himself up and to be erected by his followers as the embodiment of the anti-oligarchic popular *caudillo*.

The degree of social and political polarization produced by populist discourse allows for a differentiation between experiences. In some cases such as in Chavismo as well as in the classical populist experience of Peronism, the Manichean construction of politics ends in a total and fundamental struggle between the people, as a social and political category, and the oligarchy. Chavez's nationalism, anti-imperialism, positive glorifications of *el pueblo* as *el soberano*, and his use of mass meetings and mobilization, are similar to the afore-mentioned radical national populist experience. But most important is that his movement has politicized economic, cultural, and ethnic cleavages.[lxviii] In other cases, for instance Alberto Fujimori in the 1990s in Peru or Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador in the 1940s, the terms *pueblo* and *oligarquía* had political but not necessarily social contents. Political polarization did not lead to social polarization. Finally, there are mixed-cases, such as Abdalá Bucaram's and

Lucio Gutiérrez's elections and short administrations in Ecuador. Despite their attempts to bring traditional elites abroad into their neoliberal project, their personas brought political, social, and even cultural polarization. All of their actions, words, and performances were interpreted through class lines and were portrayed by the upper and middle class as the embodiment of the culture of the rabble.[lxix]

Populism cannot be reduced to the words, actions, and strategies of leaders. The autonomous expectations, cultures, and discourses of followers are equally important in understanding the populist bond. In order to comprehend the appeal of populism, serious attention should be paid to the words, communications, and conversations between leaders and followers as they occur during political rallies, and in the daily interactions between brokers and common followers. Populist narratives are based on the logic of "us and them," in which "us" "includes all those who have been abused, exploited, or relegated by "them" the powerful".[lxx] These narratives have empowered common people who must endure humiliations in their daily lives. Populist leaders have symbolically dignified the poor and the non-white that are portrayed by elites and the media as the rabble, the embodiment of barbarism.

Populism and Democracy

Disputes over the meaning of populism turn out to be debates over "the interpretation of democracy."[lxxi] Whereas some scholars see populism and democracy as incompatible and antagonistic,[lxxii] others understand them as intimately interdependent.[lxxiii] The incompatibilities between populism and democracy can be explained by how these traditions have conceptualized political representation, their different notions of the people, and their divergent understandings of politics as contests between rivals or as struggles between

enemies. Whereas liberals advocate for mediated forms of representation, populists argue that mediated institutions do not allow room for the expression of the voice of the people. In turn, supporters of populism promote direct and non-mediated forms based on "the unity and total identity between a representative and those who seek to be represented."[lxxiv] Populists conceive of "the people" as a homogenous body with a single political will. Liberals argue that in complex societies, "the people" cannot be conceptualized as a homogenous body with one identity and one will. Different from liberals who construct opponents as rivals who share institutional or procedural spaces, populists see opponents as enemies who need to be crushed. An enemy is "one whose demands are not recognized as legitimate and who must be excluded from the democratic debate."[lxxv]

Despite their authoritarian excesses, Latin American populist experiences have not resulted in totalitarianism, as Germani writing in the 1950s claimed. Populists have discursively constructed their adversaries as enemies, and have certainly silenced and at times prosecuted their opponents. But this is as far as they have gone because these regimes have not rejected all forms of liberal institutional politics. Instead, they have searched for a double legitimacy inside and outside institutional and procedural politics, in the streets and in elections. Populism has interacted with other democratic traditions such as liberalism and grass root demands. The interrelatedness between populism and other democratic traditions could lead to different outcomes in which authoritarianism represents just one possibility.[lxxvi] Rather than arguing that the logic of populism is inherently antidemocratic, it is more fruitful to analyze its uncertain relationship with liberal democratization.

Margaret Canovan sustains that populism is closely interrelated with democracy. She argues that democracy has a pragmatic and a redemptive phase:

From a pragmatic point of view, corresponding to the ordinary, everyday diversity of people-as-population, modern democracy is a complex set of institutions that allow us to coexist with other people and their divergent interests with as little coercion as possible. But democracy is also a repository of one of the redemptive visions (characteristic of modernity) that promises salvation through politics. The promised savior is "the people," a mysterious collectivity somehow composed of us, ordinary people, and yet capable of transfiguration into an authoritative entity that can make dramatic and redeeming political appearances.[lxxvii]

The inherent tension between these two phases of democracy explains why populism continues to reappear. Whenever the demos feel that politicians have appropriated their will, they can demand to get it back. Populism, however, does not have the same effects in different institutional settings. In institutionalized political systems, "populism can be read as a fever warning which signals that problems are not being dealt with effectively, or point to the malfunctioning of the linkages between citizens and governing elites."[lxxviii] In poorly institutionalized systems, "populist fever" can run out of control, and may not necessarily lead to an improvement of democratic governance and accountability. "In newer democracies where the 'rules of the game' are more contested and constraints on populist actors are weaker: here populism's association with charismatic leadership and organizational de-institutionalization has a natural tendency toward messianic leadership."[lxxix]

Liberal democracy is built on the uneasy coexistence between a liberal constitutionalist emphasis on pluralism and individual rights, and democratic demands for equality and for people's sovereignty.[lxxx] "Democratic systems are characterized by an intrinsic tension between the power of the people on the one hand (the popular/populist will),

and, on the other, the constitutionalist provisions which protect citizens from the power of government, and from the arbitrary exercise of power."[lxxxi] Latin American populists have appealed to the principles of equality and sovereignty. Historically they have given priority to social and political rights at the cost of civil rights. Understanding sovereignty as a function of free and open elections, populists have also expanded the franchise, incorporating previously excluded groups. But populists have not valued the liberal traditions of civil rights and pluralism. Populists' lack of regard for liberalism might be explained by the fact that, differently from the contractual bases of authority based on the individual, they have advocated for organic and holistic conceptions of community.[lxxxii] These views have allowed populist leaders to claim to embody the voices of undifferentiated communities that share the same identities and interests. Instead of arguing for the improvement of liberal representative institutions, populists have searched for alternatives to liberal democracy, yet they have not totally abandoned all the instruments of representative democracy.

Latin American populists have privileged notions of democracy based on the aesthetic and liturgical incorporation of common people in mass rallies more than the institutionalization of popular participation through the rule of law. This explains why the heyday of Latin American populism was associated with moments of collective action, such as October 17, 1945 in Argentina when crowds took over streets and plazas to show their support for Colonel Juan Perón, who claimed to be the embodiment of their will. However, as critics of populism have been arguing for a long time, mobilization and participation in mass rallies do not necessarily entail autonomy. Gino Germani, for instance, contrasted autonomous collective action with populist heteronomous collective action based on the mobilization in the name of a leader instead of on actors' own interpretations of their

interests.[lxxxiii] Critics have maintained that populist redemption tends to be based on the authoritarian appropriation of the people's will. Because populist politicians claim to embody the people, and the people's will is not given institutional channels to express itself, populist regimes have replaced rational deliberation with plebiscitary acclamation. Moreover, due to its Manichean discourse and the resulting polarization of political and social cleavages, populist moments resemble situations of war. The foes and friends of populism see each other as enemies and not as democratic rivals who seek negotiations and agreements.

Latin American populists understand sovereignty not just as plebiscitary acclamation, but also primarily as elections.[lxxxiv] Classical populism expanded the franchise. Contemporary radical populists such as Chávez, Correa, and Morales have embarked on permanent political campaigns.[lxxxv] After gaining office, they convene referendums calling for constituent assemblies to write new constitutions. They organize elections to elect representatives to constituent assemblies, to get the new constitution approved in referenda, and to elect new officers, including presidents. The electoral logic, based on a confrontation between enemies, has had primacy over the need to search for pacts and agreements with their political adversaries. The constant need to keep alive the myth of a redeeming people who is struggling against imperialism, local elites, and other enemies has led these leaders to employ a confrontational rhetoric. They have been engaged in "a 'permanent revolution' of social mobilization and confrontation" against political parties, the media, some business elites, and the U.S. government.[lxxxvi] When they exhaust external enemies, they search for enemies inside their coalitions. As a result, and as Germani argued long ago, even though populism continues to include and to mobilize common people, its understandings of sovereignty and participation continue to de-institutionalize democratic politics, and hence

has the danger of replacing mediated and institutional politics with the plebiscitary acclamation of a *caudillo*.

Conclusions: Differentiating Subtypes of Populism

Populism is based on the discursive antagonistic confrontation between the people and the bloc in power. It is also characterize by top-down strategies of mobilization. Populists share understandings of democracy as mass action on behalf of a leader constructed as the incarnation of democratic ideals, more than in the institutionalization of democracy through the rule of law and the creation of institutions. Populism is not tied to specific social and economic conditions, and might arise in nations with weak institutions and where the rule of law is weak. In nations where the poor have to endure humiliations by the rich and by state officials, the populist temptation to transform stigmas into sources of dignity and pride is always present.

As scholars have noticed, classical populism represented the first incorporation of previously excluded people into the national community. It was based on the exaltation of common people as the embodiment of the true and uncorrupted national traditions and values against foreign-oriented liberal elites. In the more developed nations such as Argentina and Brazil, it built or co-opted labor organizations and followed nationalist and redistributive social policies that coincided with import substitution industrialization. In more agrarian-based societies, populism was not linked to ISI, but represented the political inclusion of previously-excluded electors. Populists expanded the franchise, and through mass rallies and demonstrations gave a symbolic sense of inclusion and dignity to the poor and the marginalized. In many nations populism built long-lasting organizations that created strong political loyalties. In others, formal organizations were not created, and electoral coalitions

based on material distribution and symbolic empowerments were built for different electoral contests.

Neoliberal populists used discourses against political parties, portraying them as oligarchic cliques that have illegally appropriated the people's sovereignty. Unlike classical populist experiences in which political schism led to social polarization, these movements and regimes were confined to political divisions. Neopopulism in cases such as Fujimori's Perú led and coincided with the destruction of previously-existing political systems. In nations where workers' organizations were stronger, neopopulism contributed to their weakening. Yet like classical populism, neopopulism included previously-excluded people, this time those who made a living in the informal sector and were not part of working- or middle-class organizations. As with classical populism, neopopulism led to the renewal of economic elites, as business people without social recognition seek to be accepted as equals by well established elites.[lxxxvii] Even though in their rhetoric neopopulists focused on the values of common people portrayed as the essence of the nation, their policies abandoned nationalism and pursued the opening of their economies to international markets. In many instances, they privatized what their predecessors had nationalized, and, in contrast to efforts to build strong interventionist states, they reduced their sizes.

Radical populists of the 21st Century are similar to classical populists in their politicization of social and economic exclusions. As in some classical populist experiences, political and social polarizations coincided.[lxxxviii] Similar to neopopulists, radical populists have portrayed traditional political parties as the source of their country's ills, and have led and contributed to the collapse of party systems. They also share the anti-liberal rhetoric of their classical predecessors. They link neoliberal economic policies directly to liberal

politics, practices, and values. As a result, the evils of "the long night of neoliberalism," as Correa likes to say, are intimately tied to the failures of liberal democracy. Their nationalist and statist, post-neoliberal policies are similar to those of their classical predecessors. In mineral rich nations such as Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia, radical populists have reversed neoliberal policies, and are implementing nationalist and redistributive polices based on the rent from mineral resources. Yet they have retained the policies of their neopopulist cousins that target the poor who make a living in the informal sector. Rent distribution, at least in the Venezuelan case, has been motivated by political and not technical considerations.[lxxxix]

Radical populists of the 21st Century differ in their leadership styles and in the type of relationship between leaders and social movement organizations. Rafael Correa and Hugo Chávez have resorted to a leadership style based on unity and command from above, in which the leader appears to be the condensation of diverse demands made from below. These leaders claim to embody the demands of diverse constituencies, and claim to directly represent the sovereignty of the people. Evo Morales has followed a different leadership path. Like Lula in Brazil, he has pursued convergence and persuasion, allowing for more autonomy to his grass root constituency.[xc] Chávez and Correa have followed top-down strategies of mobilization, and have co-opted previously existing social movement organizations; Morales has built his leadership on a network of autonomous movement organizations. It remains to be seen whether these organizations will retain their autonomy, or if they will be included and co-opted into corporatist structures like the ones built by the MNR in the 1950s. Like previous populists, today's radical populists have promised more democracy and better democratic arrangements to improve the failures of participation and representation under liberal democratic regimes. Yet, as in previous eras of populism,

popular organizations are subordinated to the will of leaders and atmospheres of political

confrontation and polarization have been created. It is an open question whether authoritarian

or democratizing tendencies will prevail in these recent radical populist experiences.

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