

# Populism and Neo-populism in Latin America, especially Mexico<sup>1</sup>

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*‘In all matters of importance, style and not content is the important thing’:  
Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest.*

*Abstract.* Populism is a concept which, despite repeated critiques, refuses to disappear from Latin American studies. This article reviews some of the literature, suggesting that populism is best defined in terms of a particular political *style*, characteristically involving a proclaimed rapport with ‘the people’, a ‘them-and-us’ mentality, and (often, though not necessarily) a period of crisis and mobilisation; none of which makes it exceptional, abnormal, ‘unmediated’ or irrational. Mexican – among other – examples are invoked. The article questions some received opinions: that populism is typically urban, relates to particular historical stages of development, or distinctively derives from either multi-class alliances or elite manipulation. It also queries the fashionable notion of ‘economic populism’. Finally, the article notes the recent phenomenon of ‘neo-populism’, embodied by Salinas, Menem, Fujimori, etc., which a suitably loose (‘stylistic’) definition can usefully accommodate, thus suggesting the continued, if limited, utility of the concept.

Like Charles II, populism seems to be an ‘unconscionably long time dying’. Or, if another cliché may be permitted, reports of its demise – which are not hard to find – seem exaggerated.<sup>2</sup> Pronounced dead, buried, unlamented, with a stake through the heart, populism returns, like the living dead of Latin American politics, to haunt the sentient world, undeterred by the bright dawn of democracy and neo-liberalism. This perverse

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<sup>2</sup> John D. Wirth, ‘Foreward’, and Paul Drake, ‘Conclusion: Requiem for Populism?’, in Michael L. Conniff, (ed.), *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective* (Albuquerque, 1982), pp. ix–xiii, 217; Jeremy Adelman, ‘Post-Populist Argentina’, *New Left Review*, no. 203 (Jan.–Feb. 1994), p. 89, discerns the ‘funeral of populism’. As I shall later suggest, responsibility for the death of populism is laid at different doors: the passing of the cycle of import-substitution industrialisation; the bitter learning experience provided by ‘economic populism’; the acculturation of migrants who shed their ‘traditional’ ways in favour of a more ‘modern’ – *ergo* anti-populist – political culture. None of these explanations is entirely convincing.

perdurability is evident not only in the real world of politics, but also in the rarefied atmosphere of academic debate. Not for the first time, academics distrust the concept – maybe also the phenomenon – of populism, but they seem reluctant to ditch it.<sup>3</sup> At a stimulating 1995 session of the Conference on Latin American History, which gathered several of the leading analysts of populism, there was, it seemed to me, a pervasive unease – and certainly no theoretical consensus – concerning the concept of populism; yet there was also a residual reluctance to boot it unceremoniously out the back door.<sup>4</sup> Experts cling to the concept, even if they cannot agree what it means. Maybe the experts are wrong: there is, in the world of social science, no surefire system of natural selection guaranteeing the survival of fittest concept/theory/paradigm. Plenty of conceptual dodos have flourished (some, indeed, have been born) in defiance of rigorous natural selection. Nevertheless, the fact that populism lives on, in both theory and practice, gives pause for thought.<sup>5</sup> Maybe its staying power suggests some inherent qualities, some affinity with the Latin American reality, some genetic material which would repay further analysis.

All of this begs the question of what Latin American populism is, or was. If, for some, it is an empty concept,<sup>6</sup> for others it retains an elusive utility. Laclau, departing momentarily from his usual stance of Cartesian rationality, proclaims his ‘intuitive’ grasp of what populism means.<sup>7</sup> He also resorts to an equally uncharacteristic empiricism, attempting a headcount of definitions and meanings culled from a variety of scholars.<sup>8</sup> On this basis it is possible to collect perceived common characteristics: these would include (a) an inner core of ‘consensual’ attributes, and (b) an outer ring of ‘contested’ attributes – those imputed by some scholars, ignored or rejected by others. (Such a procedure would produce, as I understand it, a ‘radial’ category of analysis).<sup>9</sup> A round-up of the usual

<sup>3</sup> On intellectual and academic distrust and dislike of populism, see Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (London, 1981), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Panel chaired by Jeremy Adelman, American Historical Association conference, Chicago, January 1995. John D. Martz, ‘The Regionalist Expression of Populism. Guayaquil and the CFP, 1948–60’, *Journal of Interamerican and World Affairs*, 22/3 (Aug. 1980), p. 289, notes the concept’s ‘stubborn resilience in refusing to disappear’.

<sup>5</sup> As Peter Worsley observed, given the recurrent use of the term, ‘the existence of the verbal smoke might well indicate a fire somewhere’: ‘The Concept of Populism’, in Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, (eds.), *Populism* (London, 1970), p. 219. Emilio de Ipola, ‘Populismo e ideología’, *Revista mexicana de sociología*, 41/3 (julio-set., 1979), p. 928, makes a similar point.

<sup>6</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London, 1977), pp. 145–6.

<sup>7</sup> Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, p. 143.

<sup>8</sup> Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, p. 164.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth M. Roberts, ‘Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America. The Peruvian Case’, *World Politics*, 48 (Oct. 1995), p. 88, n. 21, citing David Collier and James E. Mahon Jr.

suspects would include: (a) an appeal to 'the people'; popular mobilisation; dynamic (charismatic?) leadership; and (b) a reformist rather than revolutionary programme; a multiclass constituency; an urban base.<sup>10</sup>

This, of course, is a crudely empiricist approach. As Laclau rightly points out, populism has not been the subject of rigorous theoretical analysis. (Compare others '-isms' like feudalism, capitalism, even liberalism and conservatism).<sup>11</sup> Faced with this trackless waste, social scientists – including historians – might try to return to first principles: i.e., they might try to evaluate the utility of the concept, juggling its meaning according to the theoretical/comparative demands placed upon it, in order to see whether it proves genuinely enlightening or simply obfuscatory. My own position, indeed, would be ruthlessly instrumental and nominalist: 'populism', as a concept, is useful inasmuch as it helps us order, compare, and understand the vast complexity of history. Its justification is therefore instrumental ('what has it done for me lately?'); it possesses no inherent and enduring essence. There is no Platonic 'populism' against which to evaluate a messy Aristotelian reality. (Plato, the least populist of philosophers, would no doubt approve). This does not quite mean taking a head count of scholars, however. Scholars, especially when they hunt in packs, can be highly fallible. I would therefore prefer to build my potentially useful 'populism' on the basis of *historical processes* rather than *historiographical convergences*. Indeed, some of these convergences seem to me to be mistaken – in the sense not of being 'wrong' (since I am not clear what a 'wrong' definition might be), but rather of being misleading (i.e., tending to obfuscate rather than clarify). Of course, any individual's command of historical processes will be partial and even contentious, hence the conceptual apparatus that seems to work for one individual may not work for another. Hopefully, however, the dialectic of public debate can nudge the discussion ahead, enabling us to trade, test, and improve the ideas developed in the privacy of our own studies.

If nominalism prevails and instrumentality – 'use-value' – is the criterion of a 'good' concept, the precise term we use for a given concept may not matter much. We could denote 'populism' (or class, feudalism, modernity, nationalism, the state) by a number, an abbreviation, a symbol,

<sup>10</sup> Wirth, 'Foreward', p. ix; Alistair Hennessy, 'Latin America', in Ionescu and Gellner, *Populism*, pp. 28–61; Torcuato di Tella, 'Populism and Reform in Latin America', in Claudio Véliz, (ed.), *Obstacles to Change in Latin America* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 47–74; Sagrario Torres Ballesteros, 'El populismo: un concepto escurridizo', in José Álvarez Junco, (ed.), *Populismo, caudillaje y discurso demagógico* (Madrid, 1987), pp. 159–80.

<sup>11</sup> Canovan, *Populism*, p. 5.

a nod and a wink. (Indeed, such an approach would have the advantage of stripping the concept of connotations which impair its constructive use: for many, populism retains strongly negative connotations, hence it is often more readily used in a pejorative than a positive sense).<sup>12</sup> However, that would be excessively cute. The one relatively clear conclusion which emerges from the scholarly headcount – and, though it is not much, it is something – is the etymological derivation of ‘populism’ from *populus*, hence the connotation of a movement, regime, leader, or style which claims some affinity with ‘the people’.<sup>13</sup> That is not much, since the claim may be unwarranted; ‘affinity’ can mean many things; and ‘the people’ is another notoriously vague term. (Engels reacted brusquely to a reference to ‘the people in general’ in the 1891 Erfurt Programme, asking: ‘who is that?’).<sup>14</sup> However, it is something to go on; it possesses an elementary etymological logic; and, if pursued, it does, I think offer a way to make sense of ‘populism’ such that the concept retains some utility, without losing all specificity.<sup>15</sup>

Populism therefore connotes a political *style*, what Weffort refers to as its external features.<sup>16</sup> It does not – I shall argue – relate to a specific ideology, period, or class alliance; although, I shall also argue, the style becomes more politically effective and historically relevant in some times, places, and periods than others. The style may also be gimcrack: failed, phony populisms are a good deal more common than successful, ‘genuine’ variants. Hence Paul Cammack rightly stresses the need to link discourse – often the easiest thing to research – to structures and institutions.<sup>17</sup> The populist style implies a close bond between political leaders and led (I am not keen on ‘elites’ and ‘masses’). ‘This people whose slave I was will no longer be slave to anyone’, as Vargas declared

<sup>12</sup> Michael L. Conniff, *Urban Politics in Brazil: The Rise of Populism, 1925–45* (Pittsburgh, 1981), p. 25; Canovan, *Populism*, p. 11; Di Tella, ‘Populism and Reform’, p. 47. I discuss the pejorative notion of ‘economic populism’, now much in vogue, below.

<sup>13</sup> De Ipola, ‘Populismo e ideología’, p. 934; Paul Cammack, ‘What Populism Was, What Neo-populism Is’, paper presented at the conference on ‘Old and New Populism in Latin America’, Institute of Latin American Studies, London, Nov. 1995, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Adam Przeworski and John Sprague, *Paper Stones: A History of Electoral Socialism* (Chicago, 1986), p. 49. On the polysemic quality of ‘pueblo’ in Spanish: Norberto Rodríguez Bustamante, ‘Sociología del populismo’, in José Isaacson, (coord.), *El populismo en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1974), pp. 123–4.

<sup>15</sup> Etymological logic can be a false guide; it would not help much, for example, in divining the significance of ‘fascism’; and those who preface analyses of modern revolutions with erudite references to wheels-in-motion do not necessarily advance our knowledge. In this case, however, the etymology is sufficiently clear, recent, and compelling for us to take it seriously.

<sup>16</sup> Francisco Corrêa Weffort, *O populismo na política brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro, 1980), p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Cammack, ‘What Populism Was’, p. 2.

in his suicidal valedictory; 'yo no soy un hombre, soy un pueblo', as Gaitán modestly put it.<sup>18</sup> Although such a bond may develop in the absence of populism, populism offers a particularly intense form of 'bonding', usually associated with periods of rapid mobilisation and crisis. This seems to be the case not only of 'classic' populism (e.g., Peronismo, Cardenismo), but also of neo-populism, which Panizza associates with 'times of unsettlement and dealignment'.<sup>19</sup> Such times may reflect economic upheaval (depression in the 1930s, structural adjustment and neo-liberal reform in the 1990s); and/or they may involve political crisis – party collapse and realignment, executive aggrandisement, ultimately regime transformation.<sup>20</sup> Even more than 'populism', however, 'crisis', is a vague, promiscuously used, under-theorised concept which defies measurement and lacks explanatory power.<sup>21</sup> To attribute 'populism' to 'crisis' may often be historically valid, but it does not afford a robust etiology; and trying to explain one vague concept in terms of another is hardly a promising line of inquiry.

Furthermore, this association is at best a rough tendency or correlation, not a definitional requirement or essential criterion. Populism, in short, can exist in 'normal', 'non-critical' times.<sup>22</sup> I would go further in de-linking populism from the critical, the extreme, or the *outré*. While

<sup>18</sup> John W. F. Dulles, *Vargas of Brazil, A Political Biography* (Austin, 1967), p. 10; Herbert Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán. Public Life and Urban Violence in Colombia* (Madison, 1985), pp. 101–3. The 50,000 or so *Gaitanistas* who gathered for a mass rally in Bogotá's Circo de Santamaría on 23 September 1945 went further in presuming an intimacy between leader and led: 'guste o no le guste...', was the cry, 'Gaitán será tu padre': Carlos de la Torre, 'The Ambiguous Meanings of Latin American Populisms', *Social Research*, 59/2 (summer 1992), p. 406. A recurrent rhetorical quirk of populism is to emphasise the militant, confrontational, even class-conscious significance of the (otherwise) bland term 'people', which is done by adopting pejorative (elitist, snobbish) labels and wearing them with pride: hence, Perón's *descamisados*, Gaitán's *gleba gloriosa*, Velasco Ibarra's *querida chusma* (which he borrowed from Arturo Alessandri): Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration, Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946–76* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 22–3; Braun, *Assassination of Gaitán*, p. 102; Osvaldo Hurtado, 'Populismo y carisma', in Felipe Burbano de Lara y Carlos de la Torre Espinosa, *El populismo en Ecuador* (Quito, 1989), pp. 180–1.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Cammack, 'What Populism Was', p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Bruce H. Kay, "'Fuji-populism' and the Liberal State in Peru, 1990–5", *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, 38/4 (winter, 1996), p. 57.

<sup>21</sup> I discuss the notion of 'crisis' more fully in Alan Knight, 'Crisis and Regime Change: Historical Considerations', paper given at the Coloquio Internacional 'Elite Change and Political Crises', Santa Maria de El Paular, Spain, 30 May–1 June 1996.

<sup>22</sup> 'Crisis' being a vague term, it is easily coined and devalued. Thus it is not difficult to associate 'populism' (or almost anything else) with 'crisis'. There is also a tautological tendency to impute populism (or anything else) to 'crisis', as if 'crisis' were a discernible cause, when, in fact, it is often a loose description of a bundle of phenomena which need to be disaggregated. Disaggregation sometimes reveals that it was not 'crisis' which generated populism (or mobilisation, rebellion, etc.), but rather populism (or mobilisation, rebellion, etc.) which generated crisis.

populism is associated with mobilisation, it does not follow that that mobilisation is any more 'irrational', 'emotive', or deserving of peculiar psychological explanations than non-populist mobilisations.<sup>23</sup> It is amenable to rational choice theory (if that is your methodological calling); and, even when it appears to espouse 'affective' rather than 'instrumental', 'psychological' rather than 'material' goals, this does not, in my view, set it apart from mainstream politics, which are also shot through with affective and psychological appeals. The delight of the Peronist *descamisados* who, in October 1945, invaded the public spaces of downtown Buenos Aires, cooling their feet in the fountains, seems to me no more irrational than the disgust they provoked on the part of the *porteño* elite.<sup>24</sup> I would also query the notion of 'unmediated' mobilisation, which seems to be historically difficult to envisage.<sup>25</sup> All political movements of any scale or duration have involved some kind of functional network, if not hierarchy, which necessarily transcends a simple leader/mass dichotomy: Cárdenas depended on a clutch of *caciques* scattered throughout Mexico; Perón recruited established labour leaders; Assad Bucaram built his Guayaquil machine on 'intermediaries' and 'pre-existing social and political networks at community level'.<sup>26</sup> At best, we might hypothesise that some populist movements – particularly in their infancy – are 'under-

<sup>23</sup> Here I tend to agree with Canovan, *Populism* pp. 160–71. On rational and irrational interpretations of populism, see de la Torre, 'The Ambiguous Meanings of Latin American Populisms', pp. 408–9.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel James, 'October seventeenth and eighteenth, 1945: Mass Protest, Peronism, and the Argentine Working Class', *Journal of Social History*, 21 (1988), pp. 441–61; and the same author's *Resistance and Integration*, ch. 1, especially p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Cammack, 'What Populism Was', pp. 1, 8; Roberts, 'Neoliberalism and the transformation of populism', p. 90, which sees contemporary Peruvian populism as characterised by 'the direct, unmediated mobilisation of atomised masses by personalist leaders'. (I should add that this is my only qualified point of dispute with Roberts' perceptive analysis, with which I am otherwise in full agreement). My objection to the notion of 'unmediated' mobilisation or appeal is that it reinforces the old idea of *lumpen* masses, lacking political bearings, swayed by a single spellbinding orator. In doing so, it both follows an old tradition, tracing back to Le Bon, and tends to traduce history – since we know that many adherents of populism (e.g., of Cardenismo or Peronism) were not political neophytes, members of a rudderless *masa disponible*, but people with pre-existing loyalties – to peasant community or urban sindicato, for example. Cf. Gino Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición* (Buenos Aires, 1965) and the critique of Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero, *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires, 1971). A comparable debate surrounds Ecuadorean populism: cf. Hurtado, 'Populismo y carisma', pp. 176–9, and the critique of Rafael Quintero, *El mito del populismo en Ecuador* (Quito, 1980), pp. 26–7, 29–33ff.

<sup>26</sup> Alan Knight, 'Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 26 (1994), pp. 96–8; David Tamarin, *The Argentine Labor Movement, 1930–1945. A Study in the Origins of Peronism* (Albuquerque, 1985), pp. 190–2; Amparo Menéndez-Carrión, 'Estructura y dinámica de la articulación electoral en las barriadas de Guayaquil, 1948–78: el nivel local', in Burbano de Lara and de la Torre, *El populismo en Ecuador*, p. 441.



mediated'; but then we face another challenge of tricky, if not impossible, calibration.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, as I shall suggest, growth and longevity tend to encourage 'mediation', i.e., the thickening of channels of command and representation within populist movements.

If populist movements, like other political movements, have their own cadres, command structures, and informal rules, their leaders, too, are subject to the same failings as 'mainstream' political leaders – they can be corrupt, nepotistic and hypocritical, without *necessarily* forfeiting their populist legitimacy. Some such leaders have vaunted their superior morality (Don Buca 'no se casa con nadie, ni se les canta todas'); some – Cárdenas, Vargas – were a cut above the (low) norm in terms of personal ethics.<sup>28</sup> But populists do not have to be plaster saints in order to succeed. Some made a virtue of their wordly ways. Adhemar de Barros, elected Governor of São Paulo in 1947, ran on the slogan: 'he steals but he get things done'.<sup>29</sup> In short, populist movements – not to mention regimes – are thoroughly mundane, even conventional; they do not belong to an extraneous political universe, requiring exceptional analysis or categorisation.<sup>30</sup>

Although the populist emphasis on 'the people' is a bland lower common denominator – so low that it is not confined to populism<sup>31</sup> – it does carry some further connotations. Invocation of 'the people' is regularly and logically associated with a dichotomisation of 'people' and – the permutations are endless – the 'non-people', 'anti-people', 'the other', 'the oligarchy', the 'elite', foreigners, Jews and traitors. These target groups may be domestic class or sectoral groups (e.g., the Bolivian Rosca; the 'gran prensa' of Ecuador; the 'Jockey Club crowd' of Buenos

<sup>27</sup> Like many of the criteria used by analysts of populism, 'mediation' (like 'crisis', 'mobilisation', 'charisma') is not amenable to measurement; hence analysts trade comparisons without, it seems to me, sharing an agreed methodology which would help advance the debate; and the debate therefore assumes a distinctly circular and assertive character (my contribution included).

<sup>28</sup> Menéndez-Carrión, 'Estructura y dinámica de la articulación electoral en las barriadas de Guayaquil', p. 433; Knight, 'Cardenismo', p. 80; Dulles, *Vargas*, pp. 318, 346; Robert M. Levine, *The Vargas Regime: The Critical Years, 1934–38* (New York, 1970), p. 37 quotes Oswaldo Aranha on Vargas: 'a Christ among thieves'.

<sup>29</sup> Michael L. Conniff, 'Populism in Brazil, 1925–45', in Conniff, (ed.), *Latin American Populism* p. 85.

<sup>30</sup> By the same token, I would hesitate to equate populism with 'exceptionalism', as in the familiar formula, 'the exceptional capitalist state' (e.g., the fascist, Bonapartist, or Peronist state: e.g., Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, pp. 57, 197–8). The chief problem with this formula is the assumption of a 'normal', 'unexceptional' capitalist state (presumably, a liberal-democratic bourgeois-capitalist state). But late-Victorian Britain is hardly a yardstick of historical normality. On Bonapartism, see n. 81 below.

<sup>31</sup> 'Since the advent of mass political mobilisation, virtually *any* modern regime, however, repressive, needs to have some populist elements, even if these do not go beyond rhetoric': Canovan, *Populism*, p. 148.

Aires);<sup>32</sup> political vested interests (a common pattern seems to pit populist executives against vested interests in the legislature); the *país político* – the political establishment – as against the *país nacional* (the *real* country);<sup>33</sup> ‘pointy-headed intellectuals’ (or variants on this populist theme: recall the slogans of Perón’s descamisados: ‘alpargatas sí, libros no!’; ‘menos cultura y más trabajo!’); foreign powers, foreign representatives (‘Braden or Perón’), and/or ‘foreign’ groups resident within the borders of the nation-state, against whom the interests of the (‘real’) people can be set – be they multinational corporations, like the oil companies expropriated by Toro in 1937 and Cárdenas in 1938, or immigrant communities, like the Chinese run out of Mexico by the Sonorans in early ’30s.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, populism – proclaiming the worth of the common man (it rarely champions the common woman)<sup>35</sup> – easily spills over into xenophobia and chauvinism; although again, of course, it is not alone in this. It also readily adopts both an anti-intellectual and anti-institutional cast: the populist leader/movement represents a repudiation of both entrenched vested interests (e.g., meritocratic bureaucracies or long-serving legislatures) and also effete intellectuals (Cárdenas had no love for intellectuals, or *vice versa*). Hence the relationship of intellectuals to populist movements tends to be unusually problematic: some populist movements spurn intellectuals; critics of populism often point to its crass lack of culture; but some intellectuals, espousing populism, over-compensate, becoming more populist than the populace.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Menéndez-Carrión, ‘Estructura y dinámica de la articulación electoral en las barriadas de Guayaquil’, p. 433; George I. Blanksten, *Perón’s Argentina* (Chicago, 1974, first publ., 1953), pp. 272–3.

<sup>33</sup> Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán*, pp. 100–101; John Green, ‘“Vibrations of the Collective”: The Popular Ideology of Gaitanismo on Colombia’s Atlantic Coast, 1944–48’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 76/2 (1996), p. 305.

<sup>34</sup> In fact, there may be considerable differences between these phenomena – roughly, ‘economic nationalism’ on the one hand and popular ‘xenophobia’ on the other: Alan Knight, ‘Peasants into Patriots: Thoughts on the Making of the Mexican Nation’, *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 10/1 (winter 1994), pp. 151–3. Both, however, are consonant with populist mobilisation. On Peronist anti-intellectualism, see James, ‘October seventeenth and eighteenth’, p. 452, and the same author’s *Resistance and Integration*, p. 27, which, noting the tangoesque discourse of (early) Peronism, quotes Discépolo’s ‘great tango’, Cambalache: ‘It’s better to be a jackass than a great professor’.

<sup>35</sup> The role of patriarchy and gender relations within populism would no doubt repay further consideration, although I doubt that I am the person to do it. With the obvious exception of Eva Perón, the Latin American populist pantheon is notably lacking in women; but then so, too, is the Latin American political pantheon in general. In this, as in other respects, populism may not be particularly exceptional.

<sup>36</sup> Blanksten, *Perón’s Argentina*, pp. 274–5, on populist (i.e., Peronist) ignorance, typified by a cabinet minister’s statement that 1950 was the year of the three S’s: el año Santo, the anniversary of the death of San Martín and the number Sincuenta. Intellectual populism appears to have been rarer in Latin America than, say, Russia: cf. Canovan,



This working definition, relating to political style, is, of course, vague and imprecise, capable of application in very diverse situations. Drake (sensibly) urges us to break down the Protean bulk of populism into manageable chunks: populist movements, leaders, regimes.<sup>37</sup> Canovan offers further distinctions, e.g., between ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ populism (roughly, Latin American on the one hand, Russian and North American on the other).<sup>38</sup> In particular, I would suggest that – viewed historically – populist movements/leaders/regimes should be seen in dynamic terms. Box-like categories should give way to fluid tendencies. For, like the related concept of ‘charisma’, populism – similarly defined in ‘relational’ terms<sup>39</sup> – tends to be the product of crisis and confrontation; hence it has a limited shelflife; and, over time, tends either to lose momentum and fail or, in a few cases, to undergo ‘routinisation’, whereby the initial populist surge is eventually diverted into more durable, institutional (and ‘mediated’) channels. Early Peronism – radical, spontaneous and populist – gave way to late Peronism: more conservative, controlled, and elitist. Cardenista populism laid the groundwork for the ‘institutional’ revolution of the 1940s and after. Batista, the slippery populist of the 1930s, became Batista, the unabashed conservative of the 1950s. Somocista populism lasted no more than a decade.<sup>40</sup> These mutations make any precise theory of Latin American populism difficult to sustain: ‘Peronism’ – to take a key case – is a political catch-all in terms not only of its complex make-up, but also of its chequered career over time.

However, there may be a rough pattern in this routinisation of populism. Leaving aside populisms which unequivocally fail (e.g. Alan García’s APRA), or which are cut off in their prime (e.g. Gaitanismo), it could be argued that the more durable variants, as they experience the ‘routinisation of populism’, shift from being confrontational experiences,

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*Populism*, pp. 104–5. Some Latin American intellectuals – e.g., Mexican and Andean *indigenistas* – exalted popular, Indian, folkloric values and traditions; but they did so ‘from above’, paternalistically, aiming to integrate Indians into a *mestizo* nation state (*forjando patria*, as Gamio put it); they did not envisage Indianising the nation, or transposing popular ways and customs to the elite. No more did *porteño* populist/nationalists start dressing like gauchos or eating raw beef.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Drake, *Socialism and Populism in Chile, 1932–52* (Urbana, 1978), pp. 2, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Canovan, *Populism*, pp. 13, 138. Thus, the Mexican and Argentine variants of populism tend to get separated; a point to which I will return.

<sup>39</sup> That is, ‘charisma’ does not reside, an innate quality, in the bosom of the ‘charismatic’ leader; it denotes a relationship between leader and followers. Similarly, populism must be understood as a reciprocal relationship, not a top-down imposition.

<sup>40</sup> Samuel Farber, *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba, 1933–1960* (Middletown, 1976), pp. 20–1; Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Lead As Equals, Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912–1979* (Chapel Hill, 1990), ch’s 2, 3, especially p. 81.

often the product of crisis, embodying strong, affective appeals to dissident groups, and move in the direction of a machine politics, premised on government patronage and a lingering – but less red-blooded – populist style. Indeed, Bresser Pereira proposes an explicit continuum ranging from populism through clientelism ('fisiologismo') to 'sheer corruption'.<sup>41</sup> The early appeal of Peronism, which blended material promises with a kind of psychological empowerment,<sup>42</sup> gave way to a grandiose and corrupt clientelism, richer in rhetoric than genuine reform. Nevertheless, the earlier benefits – material and psychological – were not entirely stripped away. A similar trajectory characterised Cardenismo. The reforms of the 1930s – especially the agrarian reform – coupled material benefits and important psychological rewards;<sup>43</sup> they also stimulated vigorous criticism and opposition – Cardenismo, like Peronism or even Varguismo, was no bland 'populist' placebo.<sup>44</sup> Even after the substantial right-turn of the 1940s, elements of populism – weakened and travestied, it is true – lived on in the Mexican body politic. Cárdenas remained a key figure; the ejido survived; subsequent administrations – down to the 1980s at least – continued to indulge in populist rhetoric and occasional bursts of 'populist' reform, Echeverría being the classic case.<sup>45</sup> A kind of bland institutional populism replaced the more dynamic personalised variety of the 1930s.<sup>46</sup> But it still served to maintain a (weak) legitimacy for the Mexican regime, ensuring against a descent into outright bureaucratic authoritarianism. At a regional level too, the unusual strength and stamina of Ecuadorean populism, based on Guayaquil, implied a degree of routinisation. During the 1960s, as the port city grew, and with it the populist Concentración de Fuerzas Populares (CFP), so its

<sup>41</sup> Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira, 'Populism and Economic Policy in Brazil', *Journal of Interamerican and World Affairs*, 33/2 (summer, 1991), p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> James, *Resistance and Integration*, ch. 1.

<sup>43</sup> For example, the extension of rural schooling, which could have a decisive (but often non-quantifiable) effect on local communities: Eyler Simpson, *The Ejido: Mexico's Way Out* (Chapel Hill, 1937), p. 108; Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution. Teachers, Peasants and Schools in Mexico, 1930–1940* (Tucson, 1997), pp. 193–8.

<sup>44</sup> Knight, 'Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?', develops this argument. John French, *The Brazilian Workers ABC. Class Conflicts and Alliances in Modern São Paulo* (Chapel Hill, 1992), argues for the relative autonomy of the greater São Paulo working class during the process of supposed 'populist incorporation'. Joel Wolfe, *Working Women, Working Men, São Paulo and the Rise of Brazil's Industrial Working Class, 1900–1955* (Durham, 1993), dissents from (some of) French's analysis (see pp. 262–3, n. 13), but Wolfe also depicts the São Paulo working class as rationally aware of the benefits, opportunities – and costs – of *Varguismo*: see pp. 110–114.

<sup>45</sup> Jorge Basurto, 'The Late Populism of Luis Echeverría', in Conniff, (ed.), *Latin American Populism*, pp. 103–111.

<sup>46</sup> Roger Bartra, *Agrarian Structure and Political Power in Mexico* (Baltimore, 1993), pp. 118–126, offer an interesting analysis.

leader, Assad Bucaram, 'came to rely increasingly on the role of intermediaries in order to maintain his active presence' among the urban poor.<sup>47</sup> (He relied, too, on a measure of informal coercion, as did other durable populist movements).<sup>48</sup>

Defining populism in terms of style has the virtue of flexibility and – perhaps most important – historical fidelity. That is, it seems to correspond to the historical record in a way that other – often more precise theories/models – fail to do. And it is surely preferable to have a rough rule-of-thumb which works than a high-falutin theory which defies reality. However, sceptics may require some persuading that style – and its associated features mentioned above: crisis, confrontation, personalism, mobilisation – offers a useful criterion for distinguishing between types of movement, leader or regime. Since precise measurement is (to my knowledge) impossible, we can only judge the 'usefulness' of such a criterion intuitively.<sup>49</sup> By way of illustration, therefore, I have listed pairs of leaders, each of which, I think, offers a contrast between populist and non-populist styles. I have deliberately drawn these from a wide political universe, scattered in time and place, and not confined to Latin America.<sup>50</sup> The use of individuals indicates, not some antiquated attachment to a Great Man theory of history, but rather the convenience of denoting complex political conjunctures and relationships by means of brief biographical references. 'Leaders' are surrogates for movements/parties/regimes. I should add, finally, that like many political attributions, these are not strict either/or pairings; rather than occupying discrete boxes, the contrasting cases should be seen as falling at different ends of a wide spectrum – the populist first, the (roughly) contemporary *non*-populist

<sup>47</sup> Menéndez-Carrión, 'Estructura y dinámica de la articulación electoral en las barriadas de Guayaquil', p. 441.

<sup>48</sup> Menéndez-Carrión, 'Estructura y dinámica de la articulación electoral en las barriadas de Guayaquil', p. 445, n. 143, quotes an ex-CFP militant to the effect that the party did not practice terrorism (as critics alleged) but rather resorted to 'la instigación del miedo en alguna gente'. Cardenistas and Peronistas were, of course, familiar with political violence – as perpetrators and victims alike.

<sup>49</sup> This, of course, is the normal state of affairs in history, and much of the social sciences. By 'intuitively' I mean simply that the value of a particular criterion – or 'organising concept' – has to be evaluated, justified and debated using 'impressionistic' non-quantifiable data and arguments. While we might agree that some are non-starters (e.g., populism as a movement determined by the genetic make-up of inferior peoples), there is no definitive way of proving the superiority (i.e., the superior *usefulness*) of other competing criteria/concepts which appear more promising; we are likely to conclude, lamely that there is 'some sense', hence 'some use', in several of them; and, even if we arrive at a preference for one, it may prove difficult or impossible to persuade dissenters to that effect. Hence the occasional feeling of circularity and *déjà vu* which can creep up when we reprise these old debates....

<sup>50</sup> The list is political; I have resisted the temptation to encompass 'populist' art, literature, music or film.

second. Readers may disagree with some of the pairings; they may note striking omissions.<sup>51</sup> The key question, however, is not the membership of the two clubs, but the supposed criterion by which membership is established. Does it make sense?

Juan Alvarez/<sup>52</sup>Lucas Alamán; Alvaro Obregón/Pascual Ortiz Rubio; Lázaro Cárdenas/Abelardo Rodríguez; Luis Echeverría/Gustavo Díaz Ordaz; Carlos Salinas/Miguel de la Madrid; José Artigas/Bernardino Rivadavia; Juan Perón/Raúl Alfonsín; Carlos Saúl Menem/Domingo Cavallo; Getulio Vargas/Eurico Dutra; Arturo Alessandri (1920–4)/Arturo Alessandri (1932–8); Fidel Castro/Fulgencia Batista (1952–8); Adolf Hitler/Franz Von Papen; Mahatma Gandhi/Muhammad Ali Jinnah; Margaret Thatcher/Edward Heath; Aneurin Bevan/Sidney Webb; Huey Long/Henry Cabot Lodge; FDR/Calvin Coolidge.

If the distinguishing feature of the first of these pairs is populist *style* – which, I repeat, cannot be turned on and off at will, and, if it is to succeed, must reflect deeper sociopolitical relationships and perceptions – it might help to offer a few illustrative examples, drawn chiefly from the case I know best, modern Mexico. One crucial feature of the 1910 Revolution was its destruction of the Porfirian political system and its replacement – slowly and painfully – by a new system which was more open, fluid, populist and egalitarian.<sup>53</sup> This was reflected in political style – the way of doing politics – in the 1920s and 1930s. New men came to power and they governed in new ways. The result was not formally democratic, nor was it necessarily peaceful, but it was more representative

<sup>51</sup> Or they may wish to strike some names from the list. Two additional points bear mention: first, we again note the tendency for some leaders to progress (?) over time from populism to non-populism (usually conservatism): e.g., Alessandri and Batista. Movements in the other direction appear to be rarer, at least in Latin America. It is easier – or, at least, more tempting – to foreswear a populist past than to build a belated populist following (though Vargas may be an example of the latter: Wolfe, *Working Women, Working Men*, pp. 119–24). Secondly, emblematic populists spring to mind more readily than non-populists; the latter, in fact, tend to be less celebrated – or less notorious – than their populist counterparts (note the discrepancy in stature between, say, Obregón and Ortiz Rubio, Cárdenas and Rodríguez, Vargas and Dutra). Maybe this tells us something about ‘mass politics’ in general and Latin American politics in particular?

<sup>52</sup> On the notion of nineteenth-century populist caudillos (Alvarez, Artigas, Carrera), see John Lynch, *Caudillos in Spanish America, 1800–1850* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 38, 41–4, 87, 128–9, 217–24, 364–401; and cf. pp. 201–5, 431–3.

<sup>53</sup> I am not trying to resuscitate the moribund myth of the Mexican Revolution (although I do think that myth has more to it than some recent revisionist critiques allow). The Revolution did not usher in an era of benign social-democratic – still less socialist – reform. It did, however, change Mexican politics and society in profound ways – sometimes less by virtue of planned legislation than of *de facto*, unplanned, haphazard events/processes (migration, inflation, demographic shifts, class and communal mobilisation). Hence the move towards populist politics referred to here.

– and much more populist – than the Porfiriato had ever been.<sup>54</sup> This was evident at the grassroots, where new elites – like the ‘peasant bourgeoisie’ of the Huasteca Hidalguense described by Frans Schryer – squabbled for power, capitalising on their supposedly humble backgrounds, rustic appearance, and rapport with the local peasantry.<sup>55</sup> Close by, the Huasteca Potosina fell under the sway of a classic populist ranchero *cacique*, Gonzalo N. Santos, who was equally at home managing the Federal Congress in Mexico City or engaging in the crude, violent, demagogic *política cochina* of the Huasteca.<sup>56</sup> Old-style *políticos* had to learn new ways; intellectuals – like Vasconcelos – had to ‘go to the people’: an experience which, like the Narodniki of nineteenth-century Russia, they sometimes found trying. When Vasconcelos ran for the Governorship of Oaxaca in 1924 he confronted the ‘uncultured serrano’, Onofre Jiménez, who – Vasconcelos complained – guaranteed his election with a populist one-liner: ‘the Licenciado is too big a candidate for Oaxaca; the Licenciado drinks champagne; I drink mezcal; I ought to be Governor’.<sup>57</sup> Sure enough, Jiménez won.

So, too, at national level. Alvaro Obregón, the first great post-revolutionary president, cut his political teeth in Sonoran municipal politics (where his command of Mayo – the language of the local Indian communities – had helped). He mobilised the Yaquis for the Revolution and the nascent labour unions for his 1920 presidential bid. Throughout, he displayed a bluff, gregarious, wisecracking manner,<sup>58</sup> and a talent for

<sup>54</sup> Díaz began his political career as a local *caudillo* with populist leanings, and these did not instantly disappear when he assumed the presidency. Over time, however, he went the way of many later populists, shifting to the right, spurning his popular constituency, cutting deals with Church, oligarchs and businessmen. The contrast between the populist Revolution and the oligarchic Porfiriato is therefore stronger if we compare the late Porfiriato (c. 1890–1910) with the early Revolution (1910–40). The early Porfiriato was a different matter; so, too, was (is?) the ‘late Revolution’ (since 1940), which many commentators now see as an increasingly ‘neo-Porfirian’ regime.

<sup>55</sup> Frans J. Schryer, *The Rancheros of Pisaflores. The History of a Peasant Bourgeoisie in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Toronto, 1980), pp. 7–9 and ch. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Pending the publication of Wil Pansters’ study of Santos, the best source is Santos’ own remarkable autobiography, *Memorias* (Mexico, 1986).

<sup>57</sup> Ross Parmenter, *Lawrence in Oaxaca* (G. M. Smith, 1984), p. xxx, quoting Vasconcelos.

<sup>58</sup> Linda B. Hall, *Alvaro Obregón. Power and Revolution in Mexico, 1911–1920* (College Station, 1981), pp. 19–26 on Obregón’s character and origins. One of many Obregón jokes captures something of his ‘populist’ manner: in 1926 the retired President, dressed ‘in peasant garb’ (i.e., loose pyjama-style cotton shirt and drawers), welcomed the Japanese ambassador to his Sonoran hacienda: ‘surprised, the Japanese commented: “I had difficulty in recognising you, General, in your peasant disguise”, to which Obregón replied: “No, your excellency, this is my real self (*verdadera forma de ser*). The one in disguise was the Obregón you met in the National Palace”’: Jorge Mejía Prieto, *Ab, qué risa me dan los políticos* (Mexico, 1992), p. 44. Vargas, too, ‘never put on airs as president; frequently he met visitors to his Petrópolis summer residence

populist gestures. Occupying a hungry Mexico City in 1914–15, he ransomed the clergy, distributing the proceeds to the poor; and he forced rich merchants – enemies of the revolution, exploiters of the people – to sweep the streets of the city.<sup>59</sup> Twenty years later, Lázaro Cárdenas – another parvenu of provincial, petty-bourgeois background – barnstormed the country, descending on remote regions and obscure pueblos, meeting peasant delegations, fixing local problems, inscribing his personality in the collective memory of communities which had never before seen a state governor, let alone a president. When he came to Pisaflores, oral tradition recalls, Cárdenas ‘refused to eat at an open air banquet prepared in his honour... instead, he walked over to a corner of the plaza where an old woman was selling soft drinks, took a chocolate bar from his pocket and ordered a glass of water’.<sup>60</sup> As President, Cárdenas kept up this peripatetic, populist style, leaving a legacy – in certain places, among certain groups – that verged on the reverential.<sup>61</sup> Since the 1940s, it is true, Mexican populism has wilted, experienced brief revivals, and proliferated in different directions – the likely outcome of a process of ‘routinisation’. But it has survived, and thus played an important part in the maintenance of Latin America’s most durable political system.

Elsewhere in Latin America, there has been no lack of populist style, but populist success – and institutionalisation – have been rare.<sup>62</sup> The Cuban Revolution achieved a successful institutionalisation of (charismatic and populist?) authority, albeit under very different auspices; but Bolivia’s MNR, potentially the closest parallel to the PNR/PRM/PRI, lasted only twelve years in power, leaving a tarnished ‘legacy of populism’.<sup>63</sup> More generally, of course, a claimed rapport with ‘the people’ has been a staple of political rhetoric: with the early Alessandri,

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in his pajamas, an old rural Brazilian custom’: Levine, *The Vargas Regime*, pp. 37–8. I am not, however, proposing a new pyjama-populism paradigm.

<sup>59</sup> Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1986), II, pp. 314–16.

<sup>60</sup> Schryer, *Rancheros of Pisaflores*, p. 92.

<sup>61</sup> For example, Luis González, *San José de Gracia, Mexican Village in Transition* (Austin, 1983), pp. 204–5. Echoes of the cult of Tata Lázaro are to be found, fifty years on, in Adolfo Gilly, *Cartas a Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas* (Mexico, 1989). Such peripatetic populism is quite common: consider Lula’s ‘Caravan of Citizenship’, which covered 45,000 km in 1994: Céli Regina Jardim Pinto, ‘Neo-populism in Brazilian Politics: The Rapid Exhaustion of a Model’, paper presented at the LASA conference, Guadalajara, April 1997, p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Coastal Ecuador is a good example: Martz, ‘The Regionalist Expression’ and Menéndez-Carrión, ‘Estructura y dinámica de la articulación electoral en las barriadas de Guayaquil’.

<sup>63</sup> Christopher Mitchell, *The Legacy of Populism in Bolivia, From the MNR to Military Rule* (New York, 1977).



Vargas, Gaitán, Perón, Haya, Chibás, Ibáñez, Velasco Ibarra. What is more, the rapport was, in some cases, genuine, and paralleled by a tellingly hostile reaction on the part of elites. Hence the conflagration of the *Bogotázo*, or the long, slow brushfire of Peronism. In this respect, populism was not a bland, superficial multiclass mélange, as sometimes claimed; it involved sharp political polarisation and laid down deep political loyalties. Methods reminiscent of the Mexican model have also been evident: nationalist rabble-rousing; moralistic denunciations of corrupt vested interests; barnstorming tours and rallies; the incipient use of radio.<sup>64</sup> Populist rapport does not, however, *require* tub-thumping demagoguery: Cárdenas was no more a flamboyant speaker than was Vargas; both acquired support by virtue of their policies, image, and career – and despite (or because of?) their dour personalities.<sup>65</sup> Effective populism, in other words, derived from lived experience rather than rhetorical extravagance.

In contrast to the above ‘model’ (if we can dignify it with such a name) we find alternative definitions and theories which, as I said, gain in precision and sophistication, but fail on the crucial criterion of historical fidelity. They are neat but wrong. Or, to put it more accurately, the neater they are the wronger they are. Thus, while they do not entirely lack insight or explanatory power, they cannot form the basis of a generic model. The most common posits a populist era, roughly spanning the period c. 1930–c. 1970. (Drake offers a more sophisticated periodisation, oddly reminiscent of Mesoamerican archaeology: ‘early’ populism, pre-1930; ‘classic’, c. 1930–c. 70; and ‘late’, post-1970).<sup>66</sup> Populism becomes, roughly, the political counterpart of import substitution industrialisation; it involves a repudiation of the old exporting oligarchy, the mobilisation of new social groups, particularly the urban working class and the national bourgeoisie, and a greater commitment to state intervention in the economy.<sup>67</sup> It is therefore a multiclass political movement, characterised by personalist, charismatic leadership, *ad hoc* reformist policies, and a repudiation of revolution (indeed, it may offer itself as an antidote to real

<sup>64</sup> E.g., Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán*, pp. 83–103, 121–2; Green, ‘Gaitanismo on the Atlantic Coast’, pp. 298–309; Steve Stein, ‘Populism in Peru: APRA, the Formative Years’, in Conniff (ed.), *Latin American Populism*, pp. 113–34; and the same author’s *Populism in Peru* (Madison, 1980), ch. 5, on Sanchezcerismo.

<sup>65</sup> Dulles, *Vargas*, pp. 9 (‘cold, reserved, cautious, impersonal’), 18 (‘no extrovert...and apparently unemotional’). Osvald Bayer, ‘Un movimiento popular en un gobierno populista’, in Isaacson, *El populismo en la Argentina*, p. 17, notes that Hipólito Irigoyen – ‘el ejemplo más puro de un gobernante populista’ – ‘llega a ser un caudillo popular sin saber hablar, sin tener balcón’.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Drake, ‘Comment’, in Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards, *The Macroeconomics of Populism in Latin America* (Chicago, 1991), pp. 38–9.

<sup>67</sup> Adelman, ‘Post-Populist Argentina’, pp. 66–7.

revolution: 'we make the revolution before the people do', as Antonio Carlos de Andrada put it).<sup>68</sup> While this composite picture, culled from several well-known sources, clearly embodies elements of the populist political style which I have described, its attempts to connect (and subordinate) style to social structure, class relations, and economic project seem to me to be well-intentioned but unsuccessful. There are several objections. The emphasis on ISI immediately removes several cases which might deserve inclusion: the Peruvian populism of Haya, Sánchez Cerro, and Odría; Ecuadorean populism from Velasco Ibarra to Assad Bucaram; and the putative populisms of Batista in the 1930s and Somoza in the 1930s and after.<sup>69</sup> It also leads to the inescapable conclusion that populism was buried along with ISI<sup>70</sup> – a conclusion which I will question later. While it could well be argued that the crisis of the 1930s created conditions particularly propitious for populism – above all, perhaps, in the larger industrialising countries where the rise of the *estado rector* afforded populist regimes ample sources of patronage – it would be rather crudely reductionist to tie populism to a single economic period and project. At most, that period and project *favoured* populist politics, which is not to say that the latter was conceived, nurtured, brought to maturity and finally killed off by the inexorable economic cycle of ISI.

A second problem concerns the class nature of populist coalitions and regimes. The common argument is that these are 'multiclass'; they do not conform to the (European?) model of single-class parties; hence they are (in characteristic Latin American fashion?) fickle, shifting, *ad hoc*, dependent on the arbitrary will of the *caudillo*. This argument (or prejudice) is a familiar variant of a broader tendency, whereby Latin American phenomena – parties, regimes, unions, revolutions – suffer by comparison with a mythical European standard.<sup>71</sup> Yet most European parties – and one might add all *successful* European parties – have been class coalitions. Even the British Labour party – the implicit or explicit model against which Peronism is sometimes judged – required a sizeable

<sup>68</sup> Weffort, *O populismo*, p. 15. Compare Perón's wheedling of the Buenos Aires Bolsa in 1944: Paul H. Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism* (Chapel Hill, 1990), p. 146.

<sup>69</sup> On Somocista populism: Gould, *To Lead as Equals*, ch's 4, 5. Farber, *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba*, p. 20, denotes (the early) Batista a 'Bonapartist Conservative'; Hennessy, 'Latin America', p. 48, refers to Batista's 'urban populism'; but a case could also be made for a rural dimension, e.g., in light of Batista's protection of Cuba's *colono* class. In general, Batista's 1930s/40s populism remains a neglected topic.

<sup>70</sup> Hence, Drake's 'requiem', Adelman's 'funeral' (both n. 2) and Gibson's 'last flexing of [Peronism's] populist muscle' in 1989: Edward L. Gibson, 'The Populist Road to Market Reform: Policy and Electoral Coalitions in Mexico and Argentina', *World Politics*, 49/3 (April 1997), p. 354.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Alan Knight, 'Viewpoint, Revisionism and Revolution: Mexico Compared to England and France', *Past and Present*, 134 (Feb. 1992), pp. 176–7.

middle class vote to get elected, e.g., in 1945. German and Swedish social democracy have similarly mobilised multiclass support. As early as 1915, Michels generalised, 'for motives predominantly electoral, the party of the workers seeks support from the petty bourgeois elements of society.... The Labour Party becomes a party of the 'people'.<sup>72</sup> Conversely, Disraeli's 'angels in marble' – working class Tories – were a constant reminder of class deviation in the other direction.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the 'classness' of a political party does not depend solely on its class make-up (consider, for example the enormous ideological range of parties – conservative, Catholic, fascist, socialist, Communist – which have elicited peasant support). 'Classness' also depends also on policies, programmes, symbols and rhetoric; 'reform' and 'revolution' – those two imposters who have bedeviled Latin American subaltern history – are often in the eye of the beholder.

A good historical guide, as I have already suggested, might be the reaction of 'bourgeois', propertied, conservative groups to the rise of a 'class' party – however vague, *ad hoc*, reformist and populist that party might be. According to these criteria, 1940s Peronism was – irrespective of the mathematical percentage of working class votes which it attracted – a party of the working class, vigorously opposed by 'bourgeois', propertied, conservative groups. Gaitanismo, too, evoked strenuous C/conservative opposition.<sup>74</sup> In the case of Cardenismo there are no reliable voting figures to serve as a guide; but ample 'impressionistic' evidence indicates both the support Cárdenas received from working class and peasant groups and the odium which he and his government enjoyed among the landed elite and the urban bourgeoisie.<sup>75</sup> Recent labour history also points to the genuine – i.e., autonomous – working class support which accrued to Getulio Vargas; and Conniff, stressing the 'populist/authoritarian' counterpoint which runs through Brazilian history since the 1930s, similarly credits populism with the capacity to rally subaltern support, while alarming elite interests.<sup>76</sup> The contrast drawn between

<sup>72</sup> Przeworski and Sprague, *Paper Stones*, pp. 41, 50–1, 61–2.

<sup>73</sup> R. McKenzie and A. Silver, *Angels in Marble* (London, 1968).

<sup>74</sup> Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán*, pp. 121–4, 128–9; Green, 'Gaitanismo on the Atlantic Coast', pp. 293, 298.

<sup>75</sup> Knight, 'Cardenismo', pp. 80–4.  
<sup>76</sup> French, *The ABC of Brazilian Workers*; Michael L. Conniff, 'The National Elite', in Michael L. Conniff and Frank D. McCann, *Modern Brazil, Elites and Masses in Historical Perspective* (Lincoln, 1989), p. 41. If 'populism' is, to a degree, a useful and discernible phenomenon, it is logical to look for its elitist counterpart, 'anti-populism', that is, a discourse/ideology/style which deplores the coarse, degenerate and feckless character of 'the people': see, for example, Barbara Weinstein, *For Social Peace in Brazil, Industrialists and the Remaking of the Working Class in São Paulo, 1920–64* (Chapel Hill, 1996), pp. 220–1, 227–8, 294–5; and Robert M. Levine, 'Elite Perceptions of the Povo', in Conniff and McCann, *Modern Brazil, Elites and Masses in Historical Perspective*, pp. 209–224.

European (socialist) parties of 'high classness', and Latin American (populist) parties of 'low classness' is therefore both overdrawn and unhelpful.

In addition, the specific class make-up of populist coalitions varies, even if we confine analysis to the 'classic' period of the 1930s and after. Peronismo – and Varguismo – were strong in the major cities; neither posed a serious threat to the landed elite.<sup>77</sup> Hence some analysts consider 'urban' to be a diagnostic feature of Latin American – as opposed to, say, Russian or United States – populism.<sup>78</sup> Yet Cardenismo had a strong rural base; it targeted – and in some cases eliminated – the landlord class; and it built a durable clientele in the country's ejidos.<sup>79</sup> The short-lived populism of Somoza and Batista also put down rural roots; the MNR promoted – but could not retain – a *campesino* clientele in rural Bolivia.<sup>80</sup>

In short, the theory/model of 'classic' populism has just enough right to offer a degree of plausibility; but viewed more closely it can be seen to encompass contrasting cases, some of which clearly depart from the supposed criteria of the model. A looser 'model', based on the notion of political style, fits rather better, precisely because it is looser. The 'classic' period should, therefore, be seen not as the sole breeding ground of populism, but simply a time when events – depression, economic introversion, urbanisation, delegitimation of 'oligarchic' regimes – particularly favoured populist methods. But the latter could assume varied forms: urban and rural; civilian, military and para-military; narrowly individual or more broadly institutional; linked to – or distinct from – a project of import substitution. Socioeconomic circumstances set certain limiting preconditions, to be sure (I am not arguing for the absolute autonomy of the political); but these circumstances varied across the Continent and populism enjoyed at least a degree of relative political autonomy *vis-à-vis* dominant classes. It was more than a political reflex of economic structures; it depended, often enough, on distinctive national

<sup>77</sup> Conniff, *Urban Politics*, pp. 19, 125–30.

<sup>78</sup> Canovan, *Populism*, p. 138; Hennessy, 'Latin America', p. 28. José Álvarez Junco, *El emperador del paralelo. Lleroux y la demagogia populista* (Madrid, 1990), p. 10 n. 3, defines (generic) populism as 'fundamentally urban' in terms of its mass constituency.

<sup>79</sup> The rural clientelism of the PRI is such a commonplace in analyses of Mexican politics (Pablo González Casanova, *Democracy in Mexico* [New York, 1970] is the locus classicus) that it is surprising to find Gibson, 'The Populist Road to Market Reform', p. 341, stating that 'Peronism and the PRI have been largely analysed as labour-based movements whose political and electoral clout resided in the most urbanised and modern regions of the country' (though the statement is then somewhat confusingly qualified: p. 341, n. 3).

<sup>80</sup> Mitchell, *Legacy of Populism*. Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena* (Princeton, 1991), p. 165, make a useful distinction between 'labour populism' (e.g., Peronism) and 'radical populism' (revolutionary Mexico), which has the advantage of preserving the common 'populist' label.

experiences (e.g., the Mexican Revolution, the Chaco War); perhaps, given its recurrent association with crisis and upheaval, it tended to flourish precisely in periods when dominant classes came under attack.<sup>81</sup> If, over time, the reassertion of class domination – in Mexico in the 1940s, Argentina in the 1950s, Bolivia and Brazil in the 1960s – attested to the opportunism and malleability of populism (failings much rehearsed in the standard literature), we should not overlook the preceding phase of populist mobilisation, advance and challenge – a phase which historians, particularly labour historians, have recently researched to good effect.<sup>82</sup>

Economic interpretations of populism have recently taken a new twist. Dornbusch and Edwards (*et al.*) have advanced the notion of economic populism, charting an economic Calvary which passes through discernible stages: an initial – ‘populist’ – commitment to growth and redistribution; an irresponsible dash for growth, powered by state spending; the experience of inflation, even hyper-inflation; ensuing economic and, perhaps, political crisis; and finally collapse, austerity, and imposed structural adjustment.<sup>83</sup> I have no quarrel with this economic narrative, which is both depressingly familiar and, it would seem, endorsed by economists of varied political persuasions.<sup>84</sup> The problem again arises, however, from the presumed fit between economic policies and political forms. Despite what some have asserted, the ‘classic’ populisms of the past did not necessarily engage in this spendthrift irresponsibility. The Cárdenas government incurred a deficit during the last period of the sexenio – though this was the result of external pressures as well as domestic spending. But the deficit was modest, inflation remained relatively low (compared to the subsequent 1940s), and no political or economic crisis ensued.<sup>85</sup> Vargas, too, managed governmental finances with a degree of prudence; the real take-off of the ‘cartorial state’ came

<sup>81</sup> This might be the moment to mention – if only to dismiss – the notion of Bonapartism, which often rubs shoulders with populism (see, for example, Farber, *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba*, pp. 16–27; Maximilien Rubel, *et al.*, *Críticas de la economía política, Los Bonapartismos* [Mexico, 1985]). Scholars have laboured long and hard to convert some of Marx and Engels’ more confused and casual writings into the capstone of a general theory; but the deficiency of the material, in my view, jeopardises the theory; and, in this case, etymological logic is less help than hindrance.

<sup>82</sup> James, *Resistance and Integration*; French, *The ABC of Brazilian Workers*; Wolfe, *Working Women, Working Men*; Jonathan Brown, (ed.), *Workers’ Control in Latin America, 1930–1979* (Chapel Hill, 1997).

<sup>83</sup> Dornbusch and Edwards, *The Macroeconomics of Populism*.

<sup>84</sup> Bresser Pereira, ‘Populism and Economic Policy in Brazil’; Eliana Cardoso and Ann Helwege, *Latin America’s Economy* (Cambridge, 1992), ch. 8.

<sup>85</sup> Enrique Cárdenas, *La industrialización mexicana durante la gran depresión* (Mexico, 1987), pp. 88–95; and the same author’s ‘La política económica en la época de Cárdenas’, in Marcos Tonatiuh Aguila M. y Alberto Enríquez Perea, (coords.), *Perspectivas sobre el Cardenismo* (Mexico, 1996), pp. 33–61.

after his fall, under military as well as civilian auspices.<sup>86</sup> Perón conformed more closely to the economic-populist model; but his fall from power came at a time when the Argentine economy had recovered from the structural adjustment of the early 1950s, and it obeyed political rather than economic causes.<sup>87</sup> If inflation serves as a rough proxy of 'economic populism', Perón's sins were venial, especially compared to what would come later.<sup>88</sup> In passing, we might also note that Odría – the supposed protagonist of Peruvian 'military populism' – was, in terms of economic policy, a neo-liberal *avant la lettre*.<sup>89</sup> And, during the 1950s and '60s, it was the 'populistic' PRI which displayed the greatest commitment to a stable currency and cautious government finance in Latin America: a recognition, perhaps, that durable 'institutional' populism precisely depends on averting major crashes and hyper-inflation.

Conversely, we should note that the aggravated 'stop-go' policies characteristic of 'economic populism' are not confined to populist governments, as I have roughly defined them. Alfonsín and Sarney – neither particularly populist in political style – presided over hyper-inflation. While successful populism may involve redistribution, public works, patronage, and thus budgetary irresponsibility, governments of all stripes and styles are tempted to take this course, especially as election time approaches. (Britain still lives with the legacy of the 'Lawson boom', engineered by an administration supposedly dedicated to monetarist rigour). It may, indeed, be a reflection of the fact that – in a sense – 'we

<sup>86</sup> Philippe C. Schmitter, *Interest Conflict and Political Change in Brazil* (Stanford, 1971), p. 33, graphically depicts 'cartorialism' ('employment in the federal government'), showing an upward move with the Estado Novo, but then a levelling-off through the 1940s and early 1950s; the real take-off starts c. 1955, accelerating dramatically through the 1960s. On Vargas' fiscal prudence see also Dulles, *Vargas*, pp. 88, 246, 297, 306–7, 310: a story which starts with Vargas 'entering office with the conservative financial ideas of one who had studied budgets and been Washington Luis's Finance Minister' and ends with the deflationary measures of 1952 which, Vargas boasted, 'freed [Brazil] from the chronic evil of continuous deficits'.

<sup>87</sup> Lewis, *Crisis of Argentine Capitalism*, ch's 9, 10; Gary W. Wynia, *Argentina in the Postwar Era* (Albuquerque, 1978), pp. 68–73.

<sup>88</sup> Average annual inflation for the (boom) years 1945–50 was 20%. Thereafter, pressured by the IMF, Peronist policy was deflationary: 1950–2 saw wage cuts, very modest increases in public expenditure, and a switch from non-economic to economic public investment (Perón now 'spent the public revenues more intelligently', a critic concedes). Indeed, the 'conventional wisdom' that Perón 'wrecked the economy by forcing or allowing a marked increase in wages, pensions, and welfare services at the expense of capital accumulation and investment' is, the same critic points out, largely mistaken: H. S. Ferns, *The Argentine Republic* (Newton Abbot, 1973), pp. 150, 160.

<sup>89</sup> Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, pp. 471–3; Stein, *Populism in Peru*, pp. 212–5; Roberts, 'Neoliberalism and the transformation of populism', p. 107; Rosemary Thorp and Geoffrey Bertram, *Peru 1890–1977. Growth and Policy in an Open Economy* (London, 1978), pp. 201, 257.



are all populists now'<sup>90</sup> that governments around the world indulge in such stop-go policies. Economic populism, in Dornbusch and Edwards' analysis, is an extreme form of stop-go; but it does not appear to be a monopoly of populist governments (politically defined), thus it does not deserve to lay particular claim – rather late in the day, and on the basis of an economically reductionist premise – to the 'populist' label. It seems even more misleading – and again reductionist – to equate populism with generic packages which combine Keynesian policies of macro-economic fine-tuning with measures to reform and regulate labour relations; for this would give us a swathe of post-war European populisms, stretching from Britain to Austria, France to Sweden.<sup>91</sup>

The importance of theories and concepts may often reside less in their inherent analytical power than in their appeal to conjunctural fashion. The old dictum – 'nothing has the force of an idea whose time has come' – may have some truth in it; but both force and timing may have little to do with intellectual cogency. So, too, with Dornbusch and Edwards' notion of 'economic populism' which, in my view, carries some heavy normative baggage, bolstering the idea that populism is a Bad Thing. For the notion of 'economic populism' implies a defence of Gladstonian financial rectitude; it tends to tar redistributionist policies with the ugly brush of 'populism'; and it implies that populism is probably dead – killed off not by the inexorable decline of ISI, but by the painful learning process of recent 'populist' administrations. Populism is dead because governments and electorate have seen the folly of their populist ways.

But is this not another premature demise? In conclusion, I will question the 'economic populism' thesis and – recalling that 'classically' populist governments were not necessarily financial profligates – suggest scenarios which readmit populism to the contemporary political agenda, even under a neo-liberal dispensation.<sup>92</sup> In doing so, I retain the distinction between

<sup>90</sup> Cammack, 'What Populism Was', p. 2; Canovan, *Populism*, pp. 148, 150, 260ff.

<sup>91</sup> Gibson, 'The Populist Road to Market Reform', p. 358, refers to 'decades-long populist commitments to maintain employment and wage levels and to use state power to bolster labour's bargaining position in the labour market and political arena': a notion of 'populism' which, from a British perspective, would make Edward Heath much more of a populist than Margaret Thatcher (compare my pairing above). It could be objected, of course, that what goes for Europe does not go for Latin America: 'commitments to maintain employment and wage levels' are sound Keynesian policies in Europe (at least, they were for a generation), but irresponsible economic 'populism' in Latin America. This seems a dangerously partial argument; similarly partial arguments have been made concerning representative democracy.

<sup>92</sup> Kurt Weyland, 'Neo-populism and Neo-liberalism in Latin America: Unexpected Affinities', paper presented at the panel on 'Neopopulism and Neoliberalism in Latin America', nineteenth annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York, September 1994, was (to my knowledge) one of the first to question the supposed 'basic divergence between populism and economic liberalism' and to note

political and (supposed) economic populism; that is to say, I concede populist politics substantial 'relative autonomy' *vis-à-vis* economics.<sup>93</sup> I therefore dissent from Cammack's dichotomisation of (neo-)populism and neo-liberalism, since I do not necessarily see the former as a 'challenge' to the latter;<sup>94</sup> however, I suspect that this difference arises less from any substantial empirical disagreement than from contrasting definitions of what 'neo-populism' entails – i.e., my definition, like my definition of populism in general, is broad and loose.

First, neo-liberals who polemicise against populism protest too much. Take the case of Carlos Salinas de Gortari and his switchback sexenio. The story has now been much rehearsed. Salinas accelerated and deepened De la Madrid's neoliberal economic project. The state sector was shrunk; subsidies were slashed; Mexico cut tariffs and entered NAFTA; the *ejido* – for years the victim of malign neglect – was offered the option of euthanasia. 'Populism' became a dirty word, a criticism – implicit or explicit – of Cardenismo and neo-Cardenismo.<sup>95</sup> Yet Salinas – like other neoliberal presidents – had his populist side. Like Menem, he broke with the traditions of a nationalist, 'populist' party; but, like Menem (and Fujimori), he elevated the power of the executive, rode roughshod over political and economic vested interests, and adopted an arbitrary, personalist and populist style of government.<sup>96</sup> Fujimori staged his own

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'unexpected affinities'; the latter have been further explored by Roberts, 'Neoliberalism and the transformation of populism'; Kay, "'Fuji-populism'"; Catherine M. Conaghan, James M. Malloy and Luis A. Abugattas, 'Business and the "Boys": The Politics of Neoliberalism in the Central Andes', *Latin American Research Review* (25/2), 1990, pp. 3–30.

<sup>93</sup> This argument is reinforced by considerations of, say, contemporary Russian, Eastern European, and United States populism, since in each case the economic correlates of populist – including nationalist, xenophobic and 'fundamentalist' – attitudes are hugely divergent. Populism may sometimes have an economic rationale – e.g., the free silver movement of the 1890s in the US – but, equally, it may not; an indeterminacy which is the logical consequence of a broad 'politico-stylistic' definition.

<sup>94</sup> Cammack, 'What Was Populism', p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> Rolando Cordera, 'Solidaridad y su problemática', in *Solidaridad a debate* (Mexico, 1991), p. 142.

<sup>96</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell, 'Hacia la democracia delegativa? Una entrevista a Guillermo O'Donnell por Jorge Heine', *LASA Forum*, 23/2 (summer 1992), pp. 7–9, and O'Donnell, 'Delegative Democracy?', Kellogg Institute Working Paper no. 172 (1992). Compare Conniff, 'The National Elite', p. 41, on the populist tendency to 'vault ahead in politics without following the usual paths... ignoring the rules of the game'; or Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (London, 1963), on the 'dangers to "due process" inherent in populist ideology' (dangers which, of course, will be differently perceived by those for whom 'due process' remains a legal fiction; as a Peronist worker responded to a (middle-class) questioner in 1945: 'freedom of speech is to do with you people. We have never had it': James, *Resistance and Integration*, p. 17).

presidential coup; Salinas gaoled La Quina, decided state gubernatorial elections by presidential fiat, and ran PRONASOL out of Los Pinos. The PRI, shaken by the schism of 1987 and the election of 1988, made an electoral comeback, but largely on Carlos Salinas' coat-tails. Presidentialism flourished as never before; a veritable cult of Salinas, justified by the faith of *gobiernista* intellectuals and the good works of PRONASOL, sprang up in Mexico and, before long, began to win converts abroad. Foreign converts were usually drawn by Salinas' economic mastery (and deft cultivation of foreign opinion);<sup>97</sup> the turnaround in domestic opinion, however, owed more to PRONASOL – and the administration's (conjunctural) conquest of inflation.<sup>98</sup>

All this involved a hefty dose of populism – though none in the administration dare speak its name. Populism was evident in both the systematic distribution of patronage and public works and in the personal style of Salinas: institutional and individual populism therefore dovetailed. Despite its claims to novelty, PRONASOL followed old Mexican traditions, suitably updated and blended with the new neoliberal project.<sup>99</sup> Thus, in a nice touch, the proceeds from the sale of Mexicana de Aviación were earmarked for the Solidarity showpiece of Chalco. (Compare Fujimori's allocation of Peru's telecommunications windfall to the government's 'war on poverty').<sup>100</sup> Meantime, Salinas toured the country like some latter-day Cárdenas, distributing government largesse, glad-handing the people, marching down dusty streets in casual shirtsleeves or leather jacket, communing with an admiring people. Of course, much of this was stage-managed (the administration's incestuous relationship with Televisa became notorious); but there was also a kernel of populist reality. Salinas *was* popular in many quarters. Solidarity *was* a political success (as even its critics conceded). As a result, it was said, having lost his own

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On the 'democratic deficit' of Menem's Argentina – which, the author points out, is common to many Latin American democracies – see Atilio A. Borón, 'El experimento neoliberal de Carlos Saul Menem', in Borón *et al.*, *Peronismo y menemismo. Avatares del populismo en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1995), p. 17ff.

<sup>97</sup> Jesús Velasco, 'Selling Ideas, Buying Influence: Mexico and American Think Tanks in the Promotion of NAFTA', in Rodolfo O. de la Garza and Jesús Velasco, *Bridging the Border. Transforming Mexico–U.S. Relations* (Lanham, 1997), pp. 125–48 (especially pp. 134–9) is a revealing analysis of orchestrated research-cum-lobbying.

<sup>98</sup> Juan Molinar Horcasitas and Jeffrey A. Welton, 'Electoral Determinants and Consequences of National Solidarity', in Wayne A. Cornelius, Ann L. Craig and Jonathan Fox, (eds.), *Transforming State-Society Relations in Mexico* (San Diego, Center for US–Mexican Studies, 1994), pp. 123–42.

<sup>99</sup> Alan Knight, 'Solidarity: Historical Continuities and Contemporary Implications', in Cornelius, Craig and Fox, (eds.), *Transforming State-Society Relations*, pp. 29–46.

<sup>100</sup> Roberts, 'Neoliberalism and the transformation of populism', p. 104.

election in 1988, Salinas managed to win Zedillo's in 1994.<sup>101</sup> Paradoxically, the administration held up as the model of neo-liberal rectitude, run by apolitical technocrats, engineered a successful political recovery, but got its macroeconomics disastrously wrong.<sup>102</sup>

Salinas showed, therefore, that a controlled economic populism was compatible with neoliberal economics. Solidarity, as Dresser put it, offered 'neopopulist solutions to neoliberal problems'.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Salinas' final débâcle was not the result of this bold balancing act. These were not populist chickens coming home to roost in December 1994. Mexico's economic crisis, which coincided with Zedillo's inauguration but which obeyed more distant causes, derived from macroeconomic miscalculations: specifically, the maintenance of an overvalued peso and a burgeoning balance of trade deficit, which in turn was covered by an excessive inflow of skittish foreign money. It was not PRONASOL, economic populism, or government deficit spending which caused the crisis; however, the crisis – and the chaotic change of administration – seems to have put an end to PRONASOL.<sup>104</sup> Not surprisingly, Salinista populism died along with it, and Zedillo appears personally and politically incapable of reviving the populist offensive. Mexico now experiences the ravages of continued neo-liberalism and renewed austerity without the healing balm of presidential populism. Indeed, it is the opposition which, capitalising on the PRI's discomfiture, now trails its populism, promising honest, down-to-earth government, conducted by dynamic leaders who claim a close rapport with the people: Alberto Cárdenas, the mayor of Guadalajara; Vicente Fox, the governor of Guanajuato, and a likely presidential candidate in 2,000; and, most recently, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, heir of an old populist tradition, whose *gestión* as mayor of Mexico City

<sup>101</sup> The 1988 election was highly contentious; probably Salinas won; but his formal 'victory' did not confer an unqualified legitimacy. In 1994, in contrast, levels of fraud were certainly lower; hence Zedillo's victory was less disputed, more legitimate. It does not appear to have helped him much.

<sup>102</sup> Of course, politics and economics cannot be neatly separated. The Chiapas revolt – a political problem which had deep economic roots – heightened the regime's vulnerability to financial crisis. So did the political assassinations of 1994. However, these political vicissitudes appeared to have been weathered by the autumn of 1994, hence the (PRIísta) euphoria which surrounded Zedillo's inauguration in December. The subsequent crash, it would seem, was an economic rather than political verdict.

<sup>103</sup> Denise Dresser, *Neopopulist Solutions to Neoliberal Problems: Mexico's National Solidarity Program* (San Diego, 1991).

<sup>104</sup> At least in its centralised, presidential-populist form. Now decentralised and reduced in scope, the programme has acquired a range of institutional personae, depending on local (state) political alignments: see the perceptive analysis of Robert R. Kaufman and Guillermo Trejo, 'Regionalism, Regime Transformation and PRONASOL: The Politics of the National Solidarity Programme in Four Mexican States', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 29/3 (Oct. 1997), pp. 717–46.

will show whether that tradition can also reconfigure itself within the constraints of the neoliberal model.<sup>105</sup>

As I mentioned at the outset, this article embodies arguments previously deployed in a 1992 paper.<sup>106</sup> Since both focus chiefly, though not solely, on Mexico, and since Mexico's political rollercoaster has upset plenty of political predictions (and reputations?) in the last two years, it is of interest to compare then and now, thus to test, with benefit of hindsight, the generalisations advanced in 1992. Then I pointed to Salinas' successful combination of neoliberalism and neo-populism: an example which, I think, retains its significance despite Salinas' fall from grace. I did not get too carried away: 'it is too early to say whether [Salinas'] popularity will endure; it will no doubt depend on major imponderables – economic performance, NAFTA, the presidential succession [sc. of 1994]'.<sup>107</sup> But I concluded that a combination of neoliberalism and neo-populism was possible and that, while it might result in a 'marriage fraught with tension' – not least, tension between neoliberal fiscal restraint and 'populist' profligacy, this was a recurrent problem in modern politics (witness Chirac) and it did not doom the experiment to inevitable failure. Nor, as I have suggested, did Salinas' own débâcle prove the inevitability of failure; rather, it proved that Salinas, Aspe, and Serra Puche, heedless of hubris, got their macroeconomic sums wrong. Salinas emerged a better *político* than *técnico*.

Salinas' downfall does not therefore discredit neo-populism; it may even nudge it forward. The PAN is now flirting with a more populist style, seeking to capitalise on the PRI's perceived betrayal of 'the people'. (And we should recall that Christian–Democratic populism has chalked up victories elsewhere in Latin America).<sup>108</sup> Elsewhere, too, in these 'times of unsettlement and dealignment', we see the phenomenon of 'delegative democracy' – of elected heads of the executive wielding ample, arbitrary, even personalist power, cultivating a populist style, and challenging supposedly anti-popular vested interests.<sup>109</sup> In Peru, Fujimori showed how rapidly traditional parties could be routed by a ('bait-and-

<sup>105</sup> The potential of PANista populism may be inhibited by two factors: first, the lack of material resources enjoyed by PANista state or municipal governments, especially in times of austerity (a constraint now shared by *regente* Cárdenas in Mexico City); and, secondly, the reactionary, moralistic tone of some (conservative Catholic) PANistas who, though they may appeal to a particular constituency, are unlikely to broaden the party's regionally limited base. Banning mini-skirts for public employees does not strike me as good populist politics.

<sup>106</sup> Knight, 'El abrigo de Arturo Alessandri'.

<sup>107</sup> Knight, 'El abrigo de Arturo Alessandri', p. 71.

<sup>108</sup> Jean Grugel, 'Populism and the Political System in Chile – *Ibañismo* (1952–1958)', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 11/2 (May 1992), p. 183.

<sup>109</sup> O'Donnell, 'Hacia la democracia delegativa?' and 'Delegative Democracy?'

switch') populist practising neoliberal economics; like Salinas, he organised a raft of new social policies ostensibly designed to target the needy and avoid profligate ('populist') hand-outs (FONCODES, PRONAA, FONAVI); like Salinas, too, he was to be found in remote Andean *pueblos*, sporting poncho and woolly cap, winning the plaudits of the *campesinos* ('Chino, Chino, el pueblo está contigo'), all under the watchful eye of network television.<sup>110</sup> In Argentina, Menem has played the populist while promoting a risky – but thus far successful – macroeconomic strategy.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, more traditional – i.e., more genuinely radical – populisms survive:<sup>112</sup> Lula and the PT have run close in two successive presidential elections in Brazil; Mexico's PRD, counted out after the 1994 election, has bounced back. Of course, there are exceptions: Chile, where economic buoyancy and strong parties negate the appeal of populism; and Colombia, where the old Liberal/Conservative dyarchy has traditionally resisted populist advance.<sup>113</sup> But the notion that populism – political or economic, traditional or neo-liberal – is dead and buried seems very questionable.

This conclusion is, of course, dictated partly by my broad – 'politico-stylistic' – definition of the phenomenon. By admitting more members to the club, I see more candidates for present and future promotion, compared to those whose criteria for entry are stricter. And, of course, looser criteria, even if they are historically and etymologically more appropriate, are less 'informative': I do not claim that my (large) population of populists are all of a kind; indeed, they are often more dissimilar than similar. But even loose labels can sometimes prove useful. As a rough guide – a *botón de muestra* – perhaps even a 'radial' category – 'populism' retains some analytical utility, not only for the past, but also for the present and, perhaps, the future.

<sup>110</sup> Drake, 'Comment', p. 36, coined the 'bait-and-switch' term; Roberts, 'Neoliberalism and the transformation of populism', pp. 104–5; Kay, "'Fuji-populism'", pp. 78–80.

<sup>111</sup> Gibson, 'Populist Road to Market Reform', pp. 357–9, 363–6. The success of the opposition in the November 1997 elections casts some doubt on the longer term electoral viability of the Menemista 'project'; but the opposition itself involves some odd bedfellows and contradictory policies.

<sup>112</sup> These 'traditional populisms' are what, I think, Cammack refers to as 'neo-populism' – whence our semantic disagreement.

<sup>113</sup> And where economic populism has also been historically weak: Miguel Urrutia, 'On the Absence of Economic Populism in Colombia', in Dornbusch and Edwards, *The Macroeconomics of Populism*, pp. 369–387.