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POPULISM
A Socio-Cultural Approach

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THIS chapter lays out a conception of populism that is fundamentally relational, emphasizing a socio-cultural dimension that has been much neglected in political studies, together with a sociological component at the level of populism's reception, absent in the conceptualizations of (for example) Mudde and Weyland. More centrally yet, it introduces a key dimension of differentiation in political appeals that we call the "high" and the "low." In several instances, the resulting high-low dimension in politics is as structuring and as defining as the conceptually orthogonal, much-used dimension of left and right. The high-low dimension is core for understanding what populism is, and it also enables one to locate it (ordinally) in a political space. Populism is characterized by a particular form of political relationship between political leaders and a social basis, one established and articulated through "low" appeals which resonate and receive positive reception within particular sectors of society for social-cultural historical reasons. We define populism, in very few words, as the "flaunting of the 'low'."

This approach does not downplay the importance of affects in populism. But neither does it reduce the phenomenon to manipulation or "demagogy."[1] It recognizes the centrality of leadership features, but does not treat populism as an exclusively "top-down" phenomenon. Instead, it regards it as a *two-way phenomenon*, centrally defined by the claims articulated and the connection established between the leader and supporters, a relation that displays both a socio-cultural and a politico-cultural component. Because populism is relational, in terms both of the relationship between people and leader and—as or more importantly—of this dyad's hostile relation to a "nefarious" Other, it ends up being about identity creation and identities more than about "world views" or "ideology"—especially if ideology is to have any decontestation effect (Freeden, 2003).

"Populism" carries highly charged normative connotations (including in most "scientific" definitions). Moreover and yet, in some settings it is often associated, in a taken-for-granted way, with either the *right* (or radical right) *or*

a popular emancipatory project—often clearly *left* of the center. For almost all European scholars, populism is "obviously" an undesirable phenomenon (for democracy, pluralism, Enlightenment, republican values, tolerance, or even rationality). In contrast, for many left-of-center scholars in the Americas, both North and especially South, populism has often been understood as a radically democratizing, equalizing, incorporating, anti-elitist and rooted, plebeian movement.

This chapter aims to provide a normatively neutral definition of populism and an explanation of its supporters' logic that is as "anthropologically commonsensical" as possible. Conceptually, this definition is based on the notion of the "low," in politics. In "flaunting 'the low,' " there is also a second element: the notion of public *flaunting*. This element recuperates, in a more subjective, identity-centered, and socially connotated way, the notion of "antagonism," so central in many definitions of populism, including that of Laclau (2005).

This approach is thus relational, particularly between popular socio-cultural identities, or traits and ways of doing which can then be articulated as identities, and an "asserting" (or "flaunting") leadership. There is an emphasis on "closeness" (whether in a spectacle or ordinary praxis way); second, and equally important because of the marked contrast with standard "high" ways of doing politics, populist appeals are transgressive, improper, and antagonistic in the sense that they are intended to "shock" or provoke. This approach thus shares many affinities with the family of authors who have understood populism as a style. Populism can be studied empirically by looking at (amongst other things) the performance and praxis of politicians. We are willing to call this approach *performative* provided that, in contrast to a certain post-modernist take on performativity, the political link populist performance creates is popularly understood as being not with the repertoire per se, but with a certain expressive self. And as with any *identification*, the relation created is both vertical and horizontal.

Independently of the populists' own claims but usually as a product of them, populism involves the creation of a very peculiar kind of *rapport*. This kind of rapport is at the core of our understanding of the culturally "low" in politics. With their performative emphasis on *closeness*, populists concretely perform—in an antagonistic way—a *representation* ("acting") of the representation ("portrayal") of the people "*as is*." This specific rapport can of course arise as a byproduct of discourse (Mudde) and of strategy (Weyland). There are thus some affinities between this approach and the other two approaches to

populism presented in this volume. Indeed, populism as an ideology can only be studied through discourse, which is, itself, a very central element of political style—a defining element our approach obviously embraces. But viewing populism as a Manichean worldview may cast the net too wide, as discussed later. Similarly, this approach is much compatible with Weyland's, in that he leaves off precisely where we begin: we name and identify the precise nature of this so-called "direct, unmediated support" and of what makes this support possible. But Weyland (2001) may cast too narrow a net to capture various *major* instances of—very organized—populism (Collier and Collier, 1991).

As to the high-low axis or dimension in politics, it is theoretically *orthogonal* to—that is, *neutral* in relation to—the left-right axis, unlike other allegedly likewise orthogonal divides, such as the libertarian-authoritarian divide of Kitschelt (e.g., 1994) or perhaps the post-materialist/materialist divide of Inglehart (e.g., 1990). High and low are analogous to left and right in being "poles," "axis," and "scale." In theory as well as in practice (depending on the polity), the left-right and high-low axes can therefore form a *two-dimensional* political space of appeals. One can therefore picture four quadrants. Defense of the high is certainly the key feature of the much under-studied phenomenon of anti-populism, while the flaunting of the low is the core feature of populism.

Let us start with concrete examples of these quadrants, as cognitive theory has made it clear that it is often easier to think with prototypes, exemplars, or even examples, provided we know they are "only" that, in concept analyses. Examples of the "low-left" would be Hugo Chávez or Huey Long. On the "low-right," one finds Carlos Menem, Sarah Palin, or Silvio Berlusconi. On the "high-left," one finds French Socialist Lionel Jospin, Argentine Socialist Hermes Binner, or George McGovern in the US. And on the "high-right," one finds such figures as Mario Vargas Llosa in Peru, Nelson Rockefeller in the US, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in France, or David Cameron in the UK. Also, some politicians are just squarely "low," as with the Latin American extreme of Abdala Bucaram in Ecuador; or simply "high," as with Javier Perez de Cuellar in Peru or Mario Monti in Italy. The categories of "high" and "low" in politics, at the core of the conception of populism introduced here, are fully detailed in the third section of this chapter (see also Ostiguy, 1999; 2005; 2009).

The next section introduces this (antagonistic) socio-cultural "performative" approach and its logic through what we call in a Weberian way an "affectual narrative" (Weber, 1978: 25). Despite the very local nature and texture of all

populisms, cross-continentally they are characterized by a surprisingly similar affectual narrative. The subsequent section, the core of the chapter, then introduces the rich and applicable notions of the "high" and the "low," in politics. Then, after a brief recapitulation of the two subdimensions empirically and theoretically making up the left-right axis, the chapter lays out the two-dimensional political space that is a product of the perpendicular, high-low and left-right axes. Coherently, we then justify the understanding of populism as an ordinal category, rather than a nominal one.

Populism's Affectual Narrative

Let us begin at the most *abstract* (and perhaps not most helpful) level, by conceptualizing populism, *independently of the continent*, as an antagonistic appropriation for political, mobilizational purposes of an "*unpresentable Other*," itself historically created in the process of a specific "proper" civilizational project. The precise nature of that "proper," civilizational project can vary widely, from liberalism, to multi-culturalism, adapting to the ways and manners of the First World or the West, orthodox "textbook" economics, European integration, racial integration, colonial France's "*mission civilisatrice*," or any other. Its specific nature is not the main point here—and populism will indeed not be the same in France, the US South, Venezuela, Southeastern Europe, or the Philippines. This project's so-called "Other" can be recognized as such if it provokes shame or embarrassment for "decent," "politically correct," "proper," or "well-educated" people. The political entrepreneurs *flaunting this Other*, in turn, claim to be speaking in the name of a "repressed truth" (especially in Europe) or (more often in Latin America) of "previously excluded social sectors" or (in the US) the "silent majority." These political entrepreneurs cast the "Other" as allegedly both *damaged* and "swept under the rug" by official discourse and policies. What these politicians represent is allegedly fetched from "under the rug" and brought to the political fore in a loud, perhaps ugly (or at best, oddly "exotic") but "proud" way—and to many, in a rather annoying way as well. While many would prefer to be without them, the populists insist quite "inappropriately" and loudly on making themselves present in the public sphere.[2] In *that* sense, populism is "performative." Third, this "ugly duckling" (that publicly rears its head this way) claims to be linked to the most profound, "truest," authentic, and most deserving part of the homeland. "Betrayed" by a current or previous well-

educated and proper elite—often painted as hypocritical or false—the populist politicians and parties claim, loudly, politically incorrectly, and often vulgarly, to be that (truly) authentic people's "fighting hero." The "Other" mentioned above is thereby in reality *not* an "Other," but rather, the "truest" (too often forgotten) Self of the nation, of "the people." Proper discourse is the reverse of what it claims to be: the Representatives are in fact not representative, and the Other is no Other but the truest Self (of the nation).

Because of the above, populism as such is almost always *transgressive*: of the "proper" way of doing politics, of proper public behavior, or of what can or "should" be publicly said. This transgression ("in bad taste"), as with the utterly incorrect Berlusconi, the speeches of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the biting insults of Hugo Chávez, or the mischievous escapades of Carlos Menem, can be appreciatively received, in certain parts of society. These transgressions, when by a male politician, always figure as "manly," with quite "home grown" elements. Populism claims to speak on behalf of a "truth" or a "reality" that is not accepted in the more official, larger circles of the world. If there is not thus some kind of "scandal," whether in terms of policy practices, public behavior, positions championed, or mode of addressing adversaries, then one is not really looking at a case of populism. When it has the wind in its sails, populism is the celebratory desecration of the "high."

Finally, the populist *script*, across continents, is as follows. There is a majority of people (individuals) of "the people" (the *pueblo*), the most "typically from here," whose authentic voice is not heard, and whose true interests are not safeguarded. They face a *three-way* coalition, comprised of a nefarious, resented minority (the object of greatest hatred and not *necessarily* the elite) at odds with "the people"; hostile (and very powerful) global/international forces; and a government in line with that minority. This situation is a source of moral indignation. These highly generic categories are filled in the most diverse ways. That nefarious minority can be the oligarchy, the Jews, a socially dominant ethnic minority, the financial sector, the immigrants, the liberal elite, white colonizers, or black minorities, depending on the casting of the social antagonist. The empirical set of powerful, allied global/international forces is more limited, but nonetheless diverse: American imperialism, an international Jewish conspiracy, global capitalism, global finance, Soviet infiltration, global migration, European colonialism, and now perhaps even "Europe" (or its "Eurocrats"). The "problem" is that the government, instead of "responding to the 'true' people," has been captured by those nefarious forces. Even in the case of right-wing populism, where the

"nefarious minority" that is not integrated with "the people" is clearly socially *subaltern* and (though corrosive) not that socially powerful, the "problem" is that the government has become "hung up" about defending and promoting them for "misguided," politically correct, "proper" reasons.

Provocatively "saying the truth" (loud and clear in public), agitation, and mobilizing are the populist remedies. Marx the social "scientist" believed in the *structurally* unavoidable triumph of the working class, in the course of history; Inglehart is certain of the long-term ascent along Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs; Kitschelt (1994) showed that a readaptation on the part of social democratic parties to a new electorate would guarantee their victory. No such "social-scientifically based" certainties or optimism exist with populism. Therefore, agitation, indignation, provocations become ontologically decisive in populism, since willful political action is absolutely "all there is."[3]

The High and the Low in Politics

The high-low axis has to do with ways of *being* and *acting* in politics. The "high-low" axis, in that sense, is "cultural" and very concrete—perhaps more concrete in fact than left and right. High and low have to do with ways of *relating* to people; as such, they go beyond "discourses" as words. They certainly include issues of accent, levels of language, body language, gestures, and ways of dressing. And as a way of relating to people, they *also* encompass the *way of making decisions*, in politics. These different traits may be in fact more difficult to *credibly* change than left-right positioning. High and low are in many ways about private expressions in the public sphere, or if one prefers, the publicization of the private man. This is why, particularly in the case of low ways and manners expressed in an impudent or imprudent way in a public sphere hegemonized by the high, the low is often about transgression. As importantly, in relation to existing social-cultural identities, high and low political appeals and positions allow the voter to recognize a politician as credibly "one of ours." High and low are thus not superficially or faddishly about style, but connect deeply with a society's history, existing group differences, identities, and resentments. They even involve different criteria for judging what is likeable and morally acceptable in a candidate.

Theoretically and conceptually, the high-low axis consists of two closely related sub-dimensions or components: the *social-cultural* and the *political-cultural*. The latter is "cultural" in the same sense that one can speak of certain

political sub-cultures. The former is cultural in a more sociological way, in the sense that Bourdieu (1979), for example, writes about cultural capital when it comes to "distinction." Both are, I argue, theoretically as well as empirically correlated. Their angle to one another, borrowing from the language of statistics, is sharper than that between the two established main dimensions of the left-right axis, i.e., one having to do with "values" and the other one with "socio-economic" issues. The high-low axis thus *appears* more unequivocally unidimensional (in a Downsian way) than the left-right one.

A last preliminary clarification regarding terminology: since our approach is basically relational, we prefer to talk (at the most general level) about *appeals*, in politics, as its main currency. Appeals in politics of course apply to both the left-right dimension and the high and low one, not to speak of other dimensions. An appeal in politics is simply a way in which a politician or a political party attempts, usually voluntarily, to *woo* supporters. Programmatic appeals or platforms, usually considered ideologies, are *also* appeals in that very same generic sense. There are, in fact, many reasons why people can feel attracted to (or repelled from) different parties or politicians.[4] Since we focus on representation, appeals are crucial.

If populism is the (antagonistic, mobilizing) flaunting of the "low," we had now better define what is the "low," in politics (Figure 4.1).

The Socio-Cultural Component

The first component of the high-low axis is the *social-cultural* appeal in politics. This component encompasses manners, demeanors, ways of speaking and dressing, vocabulary, and tastes displayed in public. On the high, people publicly present themselves as well behaved, proper, composed, and perhaps even bookish. Moreover, politicians on the high are often "well-mannered,"[5] perhaps even polished, in public self-presentation, and tend to use either a rationalist (at times replete with jargon) or ethically oriented discourse. Negatively, they can appear as stiff, rigid, serious, colorless, somewhat distant, and boring. On the low, people frequently use a language that includes slang or folksy expressions and metaphors, are more demonstrative in their bodily or facial expressions as well as in their demeanor, and display more raw, culturally popular tastes.[6] Politicians on the low are capable of being more uninhibited in public and are also more apt to use coarse or popular language. They appear—to the observer on the high—as more "colorful" and, in the

more extreme cases, somewhat grotesque.[7]

It cannot be stated enough that the "low" in politics is *not* synonymous with poor people or lower social strata. In the US, Ross Perot was immensely richer than Al Gore, but Gore was clearly more "high." Similarly, few politicians have been more "blue blood" and from a richer family background than George W. Bush, but he was clearly to the low (and right) of John Kerry in 2004. The same applied in Italy between Monti (and even more so, Veltroni), on the high, and Berlusconi, on the millionaire low. Even at the level of electorates, levels of wealth and high-low positioning can in no way be made synonymous.

This first, social-cultural, component is in fact a politicization of the social markers emphasized in the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu in his classic work of social theory on taste and aesthetics (1979). From a different theoretical perspective, it is a politicization of the—empirically quite similar—differences in concrete manners at the core of Norbert Elias's seminal work (1982). Bourdieu emphasizes cultural capital as a "legitimate" form of distinction or credential and marker of respectability. Elias's historical sociology was more concerned about a gradual, irregular, and long-term process of "civilization" in manners. In both sociologists' works, however, one pole of the spectrum—whether long-term historical or status related—is a kind of propriety (and even distinction or refinement) that is legitimate by prevailing international standards, especially in the more developed countries. From that standpoint, the popular classes' *and* certain "third-world" practices often appear more "coarse" or less "slick."[8]

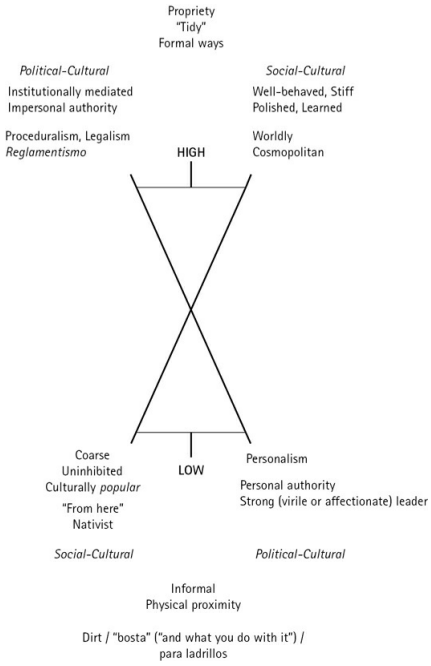

FIG. 4.1 Constitutive dimensions of high-low appeals in politics.

Although socio-cultural differences or gaps are present in all societies, and are even at times very sharp and meaningful, these differences are usually not *constitutive* of given political identities and often remain largely outside the political arena. For instance, while heavy drinking and loud singing at the pub is part of a stereotyped British working-class identity, it is not specifically associated with the Labour Party or its leaders. In some cases, socio-cultural differences *do* become politicized. That is, manners, publicized tastes, language, and modes of public behavior do become associated with, and even defining of, political identities. In such cases, *social* identities with their many cultural attributes interact with *political* identities. These interactions occur through politicians' different ways of appealing (or "relating") to supporters, and supporters' different criteria for finding them more likeable or trustworthy.[9] These appeals are not only differences in style, although they certainly are that. They are public manifestations of recognizably social aspects of the self in society (as well as of its desires) that contribute to creating a social sense of trust based on an assumption of sameness, or coded understanding. Politicians, as well as parties (that share certain practices), can be ranked ordinally on the high-low axis, within a society.

Within the social-cultural dimension, one must *also* clearly include not only the proper/refined versus coarser/folksier, but the more "native" or "from here" versus cosmopolitanism, as shown in Figure 4.1 and, especially, 4.2. Certainly,

on the more "raw," culturally-popular pole, the *specific* expressions, practices, and repertoires characterizing the socio-cultural component can only be taken from a very particular, culturally bounded and locally developed, repertoire (even though the general themes may be quite common). On the other hand, and especially in a world-context of certain "refined" elites who are largely formed and trained in Western institutions of high standing or others emulating them, the appearance, deportment, and mode of discourse of various political elites often share commonalities. There is furthermore something in cosmopolitanism which, by definition, must allow its bearer to "travel" and have an "acceptable" behavior or discourse world-wide. We thus bring in a second element of the social-cultural dimension, included in Figure 4.1 and shown in detail in Figure 4.2: the axis or scale between cosmopolitanism and nativism.[10] This element figures prominently in populist movements, cross-continentally. Identification with "the heartland," as stated forcefully by Taggart (2000) and in contrast to more impersonal international cultural ways, is indeed a key element of populism.

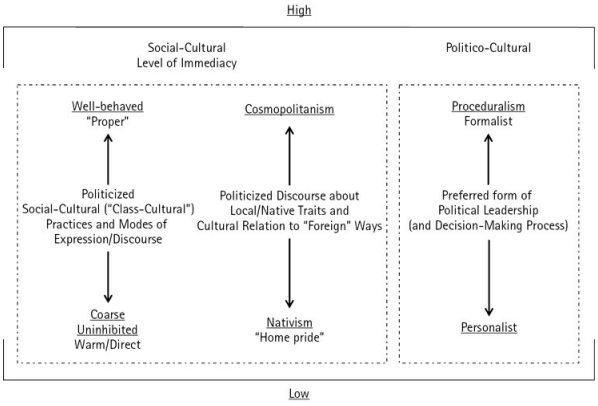

FIG. 4.2 Characteristics and components of the high and the low in politics.

In fact, as Canovan (1999: 3–5) has highlighted, "the people" as a collective has many meanings: it can refer to the popular sectors, the plebs, the politically subaltern, or it can be the *specific* national community, best embodied by the heartland. The *llaneros* in Venezuela, the hardworking farmers and ranchers of the US heartland, that is, the "typical" and culturally-recognizable working people of the nation's "heartland", are *always* at the core of the "true people" of the populists. Both aspects belong to the socio-cultural dimension.

What all poles of our low dimension (Figure 4.2) share in common is greater emphasis on immediacy (in both discourse and practices), in a more concrete, earthy, and culturally localist ("from here") way, while the reverse is true of

abstracting mediation. The high tends to justify its concerns in more abstract terms and to convey them through more "universalizing," less culturally localized language. In a certain way, localist or cosmopolitan cultural emphases and traits are in fact connotated praxes and ways of expressing oneself that *demonstrate* or reveal one's localist *belonging* (in the case of nativism) or one's aptitude as a respectable statesman in the world of today (in the case of cosmopolitanism). One should be clear: "cultural nativism" (and its reverse "cosmopolitanism") is about localist traits[11] and cultural practices; it does not necessarily and inherently entail *specific policies*, such as anti-immigration policies, nationalization of foreign-owned industries, or anti-imperialist measures. Similarly, a cruder or even vulgar mode of public expression and deportment does not policy-wise imply an intention to "carry on the class struggle" or to redistribute income: to be seen comfortably eating hotdogs (or *choripán*) with "the boys," confidently mounting a horse wearing a poncho, or being a President playing the saxophone and eating fast food are *not* signs of being on the left, but an ability to relate in certain settings.

The Political-Cultural Component

The second component of the high-low axis of appeals in politics is *political-cultural*. This component is about forms of political leadership and preferred (or advocated) modes of decision-making in the polity. On the high, political appeals consist of claims[12] to favor formal, impersonal, legalistic, institutionally mediated models of authority. On the low, political appeals emphasize very personalistic, strong (often male) leadership.[13] Personalistic (and at the Weberian extreme, charismatic) versus procedural authority (close to Weber´s legal-rationalism) is a good synthesis of this polarity. The high generally claims to represent procedural "normalcy" (at least as a goal to be achieved) in the conduct of public life, along with formal and generalizable procedures in public administration. The personalist pole generally claims to be much closer to "the people" and to represent them better than those advocating a more impersonal, procedural, proper model of authority.

Political science has devoted much attention to this component. It is also, not coincidentally, a central element of the definition of populism proposed by Weyland (1996; 2001). The relevance of this component or element is not surprising since there is a well-known strong tension, not to say a philosophical opposition, between what populism and liberal democracy stand for, particularly in terms of Dahl's two features of participation and opposition.

While there is a strong "participatory" or rather mobilizational component in the practices of populism, its respect for rules, division of powers, and the autonomy of state bodies leaves much to be desired. These classic institutional limitations are explicitly perceived by populist leaders as undesirably limiting popular sovereignty and the people's will.

There is indeed a well-known theoretical contradiction between liberalism and populism. The former, moreover, generally tends to be on the high; while populism, in our definition, is on the low. The liberal institutional architecture often figures as (and often is) an *obstacle* to popular will and to the redemptive expectations associated with the transformative populist projects. But hostility or indifference to a liberal institutional architecture is not unique to populism; it also exists in (redemptive) revolutionary socialism. What is unique to populism in that regard is "an appeal … proclaiming the *vox populi* … [through] vivid [leaders] who can make politics personal and immediate, instead of being remote and bureaucratic" (Canovan, 1999: 14). In its strongest form, as Hugo Chávez stated succinctly in his last electoral campaign: "I am not myself anymore, I am *not* an individual: I am a people!"

Turning from political theory to the discourse of the actors, a central element on the populist low is, as often stated in Latin America, the valuation of (strong, personalistic) leaders "with balls." "Ballsyness," however exactly defined, is a central attribute of the low in this political-cultural dimension.[14] And while the language of populism is at times definitely steeped in a certain form of popular masculinity, "ballsyness" is clearly not restricted to men, including in Latin America.[15] That "ballsyness" corresponds to that of daring "people's fighting heroes." On the populist side, we hear in Latin America that "Doubt is the boast of intellectuals," "Better than to talk is to do", and bragging that "He steals but gets things done!" In brief, on the political-cultural dimension, the low entails a preference for decisive action often at the expense of some "formalities"; while the high values the "niceties" that accompany the rule of law. Despite the high's claim to greater propriety, however, it is *not* clear which pole most respects *voting scores*, as the legitimate mode of determining political power.[16]

The key here is that populist personalized leadership, as a form of rapport, of representation, and of problem solving, is a *way to shorten the distance between the legitimate authority and the people*. The polar conceptual opposite of personalized populist linkage is Weberian bureaucracy: impersonal, "fair" in the sense of universal and "the same for everyone," procedural, and overall cold and distant. While one does not expect a bureaucrat to "understand you,"

one expects "fairness," absence of discrimination and other liberal-rational virtues.

Consequently, the most extreme form of populist representation and linkage is *fusion*, that is, a "fusion" between the leader and the masses. The understudied, positive flip side of the populist fusional discourse, when in power, is that it is often explicitly a discourse of love.[17] The extreme of "fusion"—not particularly liberal or deliberative—bears the question of the relationship of populism to fascism, as at times feared in Western and Eastern Europe. Fascism certainly claimed the same, with the "Führer principle" (and its mass rallies). There are, however, important and highly significant differences. First, populism displays its legitimacy through the repeated counting of votes, empirically "proving" that the populist leader is "what the people want." Fascism (a regime type) ends elections once it wins them; populism appears to *multiply them* and often supplement them with referendums.[18] Second, fascism tended to govern in a disciplined manner, from the state down. Populism is much more ambivalent: though it often uses the state apparatus with little *délicatesse*, it also fosters a myriad of not overly coordinated movements, organizations, circles, with a grassroots component. The "political-cultural" component of the low thus fully incorporates the *lack of formal institutionalization* central to many political scientists' definitions of populism (e.g. Weyland, 2001). But at the very same time, what have just been described are very much political styles, an approach convincingly used to define populism (e.g. de la Torre, 1992; 2000; Knight, 1998) and anti-populism.

The Underlying Commonality and Summary

What do these three components of the high-low axis have in common? As unusual as it may sound, concretely, it is the *level of sublimation* and of suppression judged ideal in the exercise of leadership and authority. The high is definitely more *abstract* and *restrained*, claiming to be more proper, whether in *manners* or in *procedures*. It is also colder, including (comparatively) in the positive reaction it triggers among supporters. The low, in contrast, is more concrete and into immediacy. Perceptions of *immediacy* have important implications with respect to establishing relations with (the) people. Personalism can also be seen as warmer and easier to relate to. The low generally does not worry much about appearing improper in the eyes of the international community, at times even enjoying it.

From an institutionalist standpoint, that is to say that political authority on the low is institutionally less *mediated*,[19] as mediation involves a more sublimated type of practice, whereas behavior on the low (both political-culturally and socio-culturally) is certainly more "crass" and direct. A powerfully accurate typological metaphor, overall, is that of Lévi-Strauss's (1983) famous structural anthropological contrast between "the raw" and "the cooked."

If the level of sublimation and/or suppression matters, it follows that one needs to pay attention to concrete bodies. On the public stage, they will appeal, repel, or leave indifferent. The low is more warm, hot—in the sense of hot-tempered, of openly manifested drives—or physical in its displays.

Undoubtedly, most intellectuals have preferred—and have been located on—the high. On the other hand, poorer and less educated people have often enjoyed and preferred the *less sublimated* cultural expressions and discourse of politicians on the low, as well as the *personalization* of power and social services that have often gone with it. These characteristics are important not only as cultural markers of social differences, but as ways of being that play a role in the economy of affection and dislikes. It comes up in utterances like: "I don't want to associate with *that kind* of people," or "I don't want people *like that* in government," or simpler: "Yes, I can relate to [X]."

A last point, related to social psychology, must be made here regarding identification and desires, in politics. A notable trait of politics on the "low" is its more performative, frequent "soap-opera" aspect.. Laclau goes too far in casting the leader as an *empty* signifier, condensing our desire for plenitude. The concrete Carlos Menem publicly fulfilled, crassly but with gusto, many (traditional popular-sector masculine) manly myths. Evita, the radio soap-opera actress, made it *real*, through meeting Perón. Something similar was perhaps at play with Donald Trump's rise to power. That is, importantly, the leader is both *like me* (a "me" with no cultural titles) *and* an ego *ideal*—but one that is accessible and understandable. In populism, those fantasies are coarser and display an antagonistic dimension—a flaunting. Populism is thus a kind of personal (on the part of the leader) and collective (on the part of the movement) narcissistic *affirmation*, with "the middle finger" defiantly raised to the well brought up, the proper, the accepted truths and ways associated with diverse world elites. It is a flaunting of "our" low, in politics.

In summary and overall, populism is defined as the antagonistic, mobilizational flaunting in politics of the culturally popular[20] and native, and of personalism as a mode of decision-making. The culturally popular and the

native act as emblematic of what has been "disregarded"[21] in the polity, while personalism is both a mode of identification and of fixing the former. Stated in the most synthetic way, populism is the antagonistic, mobilizational flaunting of the "low."

The "Universal" Left-Right Axis in Politics

The left-right axis is the political axis that orders most party systems and party competitions in democracies around the world (e.g. Huber and Inglehart, 1995; Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976; Huber, 1989; Budge, Robertson, and Hearl, 1987; Laver and Budge, 1992; Gabel and Huber, 2000; and for Latin America, Zechmeister, 2010 or Wiesehomeier, 2010). Left and right are well accepted, much discussed theoretically (Laponce, 1981; Fuchs and Klingemann, 1989; Bobbio, 1996; Mair, 2009) and also the object of innumerable empirical studies on the structure of values and public opinion. Conceptually, it appears there are also *two* constitutive dimensions of the left-right axis or scale (see Figure 4.3), a finding empirically supported by both survey analysis about that scale and political history. These two constitutive dimensions are, however, at an angle in relation to one another, as illustrated in Figure 4.3. This angle can even be measured statistically through factor analysis or principal component analysis. These two dimensions interact quite distinctively with the high-low dimension.

The first and most well-known dimension is the *socio-economic policy* dimension between, on one pole, appeals for more equal economic distribution and, on the other, appeals that favor established property rights and entitlements. The left pole of this dimension favors a greater role for *politics* in producing *more equal* economic distribution, whether through state intervention, self-management, regulations, or other devices. Over decades and centuries, the specific policies advocated did change, as did some arenas of conflict, but not the conceptualization or idea.

The second dimension of left and right is about the necessary strength of (hierarchical) authority that is indispensable to make life in common functional. It is a more political dimension about *attitudes toward order and authority* or, more precisely, toward the amount of necessary exertion of hierarchical authority that is required for social life. As important politically and theoretically as the first one, it is about attitudes toward hierarchical power relations and public and social order. The right believes that without such

exertion, society (and morality) "will go to hell," decay, and face many unwanted problems. The liberal left thinks one should "chill out" and allow for "interesting life-style experiments"; while the radical left is militantly anti-God, anti-patriarchy, and anti-bosses.

With regard to its political sociology, the left-right "materialist" *ideological* cleavage should not be equated with the class or social status *structural* cleavage, as the two have empirically become increasingly *independent* (Knutsen, 1988). And while the latter has become less significant, the former continues to be highly relevant (ibid.). Inversely, there has been more "sociological anchoring" along the second, politico-cultural dimension than is often assumed, as the right pole is generally stronger amongst rural, family-business owning people (US), small shop-keepers (Europe), and segments of the armed forces in Latin America, while the left pole is always strong amongst students (especially in the social sciences and humanities) and artists.

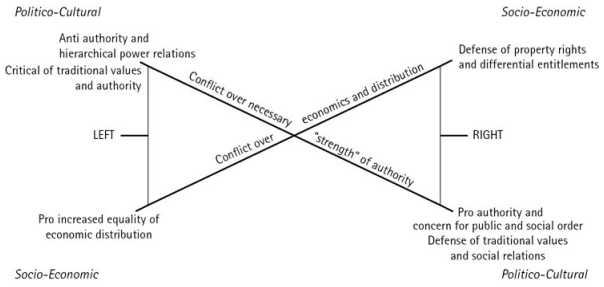

FIG. 4.3 Constitutive dimensions of left-right appeals in politics.

These two (sub)dimensions of left and right are not theoretically reducible to one another. It is even possible to combine the poles *across* the obtuse angles of Figure 4.3: the influential *New York Times* combined value liberal and pro-free-market economics in the 1990s; similarly, it is often argued that the "neglected" non-unionized white working-class American majority is receptive to both poles shown at the *bottom* of Figure 4.3.[22] That is, it would in fact appear that a class-educational difference is more noticeable *across* a divide "*vertically*" visualized, spatially, in Figure 4.3, rather than horizontally in the customary way across the usual left-right, liberal-conservative axis.

We certainly fully share the conclusions separately reached by Laponce (1981), Bobbio, and Inglehart that "the core meaning of the Left-Right dimension … is whether one supports or opposes social change in an *egalitarian* direction" (Inglehart, 1990: 293) and that it is about "the attitude of real people in society to the ideal of equality" (Bobbio, 1996: 60). However,

we believe that this definition is also quite *left-anchored*. A less skewed perspective about the right is to conceptualize it as political projects and actors aiming to protect a collectively "necessary" societal (i.e. socio-economic *or* other) structure of power that provides order against threats that erode or destroy it. A structuring order is always clothed as a moral order (in what is often *doxa*), and the right usually takes the public defense of this given moral order quite to heart. "Left" are political projects and actors aiming to transform the *structure* of social power, socio-economic or otherwise, in a more egalitarian direction.

A Two-Dimensional Political Space and a "Wheel" of Axes

The orthogonal left-right and high-low axes, *together*, form a two-dimensional political space of appeals, in which we can locate actors, parties, and politicians. This basic political space is illustrated in Figure 4.4. Location along each of those two orthogonal axes making up that space furthermore has significant consequences in the societal or, rather, sociologically differentiated reception of political appeals. It should also be noted that having *two* orthogonal dimensions allows for a much greater variety of possible political or social-political alliances, as well as for quite dissimilar political strategies for appealing to somewhat similar social sectors in the electorate, than a unidimensional space. For example, it is quite possible as a right-wing politician to appeal to broad popular-sectors elements by being on the low and flaunting it, while the task of left-wing politicians seeking to maintain support among those same popular sectors may become more difficult if they are on the high-left, as is often the case. *Each* of the two constitutive axes, indeed, results in a certain sense from a different way of politically *translating* differential endowments: while a part of the left-right dimension translates social differences in material interests, the high-low axis also translates inequalities in their more cultural-propriety dimension. This space also identifies, and names in the process, the political opposite of populism in politics: the high (and its valuation).

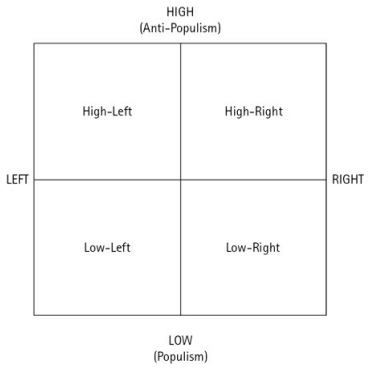

FIG. 4.4 A two-dimensional political space of positions and appeals.

A clear analytical advantage of the political space delineated in Figure 4.4 is that the left-right axis (scale, dimension) and the high-low axis are fully *neutral*, or orthogonal, theoretically, in relation to one another. That is, *any* combination is not only possible, as is commonly the case in spaces configured by non-orthogonal axes, but equally possible. Making this formal neutrality explicit is vital: political scientists of Latin America have regarded populism as *implicitly* left-of-center, since it is said to redistribute income in favor of the popular sectors, oppose orthodox economic policies, and to ally historically with labor unions; while analysts in Northern Europe have understood populism as "obviously" on the right, and even at times as synonymous with "radical right."

There is a delicate conceptual issue in several regions—Europe, Oceania, and arguably the US—as to whether populist parties are "radical right" parties, and also vice versa. To the extent that parties strongly (or even, "radically") promote the "authority pole" (public and social order), on the right of the left-right politico-cultural subdimension (Figure 4.3), it would appear they are not, per se, populist parties but, indeed, "radical right" parties. But in terms of the high-low dimension, such parties are often, and not coincidentally, characterized in the *politico-cultural* subdimension as well (see Figure 4.1) by a strong, personalistic, "one-man"[23] leadership—in contrast to much more bureaucratic or parliamentary European parties. And then, several of these leaders *also* "happen" to be much more *socio-culturally* "low" in their demeanors and praxis: Jean-Marie Le Pen, Umberto Bossi, Vladimir Zhirinovski, Nigel Farage (but not so much Pim Fortuyn). There is in practice a *family resemblance* (or relative proximity) between those three poles.

This empirical pattern is theorized in Figure 4.5, through the superposition of Figure 4.1 and of Figure 4.3—theoretically justified in Ostiguy (2017). This

superposition gives rise to a "wheel" of axes of political polarization, made up of the poles of a series of logically *ordered* alternate axes. In this conceptually more sophisticated framework, politicians and parties are located *along the circumference* of the circle (created by such poles). And they empirically cover a given (and continuous) *portion* of such circumference. Regionally, the common populisms of comparatively developed countries combine, as illustrated in Figure 4.5, the politico-cultural right, the politico-cultural low, and the socio-cultural low.[24] In contrast, both the classical and contemporary populisms of Latin America combine the same two components of the low (by definition) with socio-economic redistributionism (the pole at the bottom left of Figure 4.3), in what is only (politically and conceptually) a relatively small clockwise rotation (of one node or rather of one "dot") leftward, along the wheel.

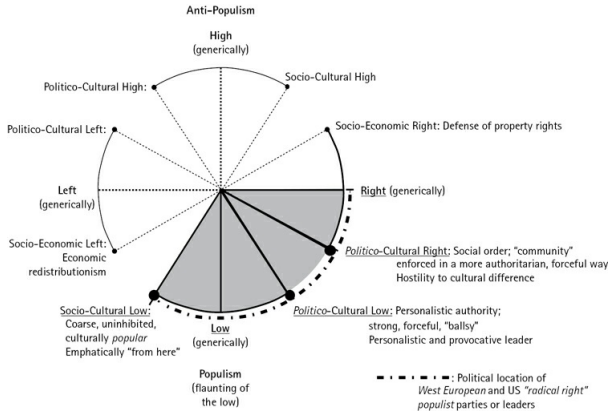

FIG. 4.5 The "wheel" of axes of political polarization: populism and "the right" (Europe and US).

Note that since the horizontal axis is about left and right generically (and thus potentially created by any of the two sub-dimensions of left and right), a movement of one node clockwise has the effect of eliminating two shaded areas (on the left) and of adding two shaded areas, clock-wise, on the left.

POPULISM AS AN ORDINAL CATEGORY?

Most publications defining populism have hitherto simply taken for granted that populism is a nominal category. That is, a "referent" (a politician, a party, a regime) is either populist or it is not. The conceptual Sartorian challenge then becomes to create the "net" in category building that catches the precise quantity of fish (the "correct" extension): all populist objects within the net—

assuming we *already* know beforehand what a "populist" object is; and all non-populist ones outside the net. But both reality and category construction are more complex than this.

Even if we could *all* agree on a common definition of populism, something unlikely for most contested concepts (Gallie, 1956), it still remains unclear why a nominal category would be the most useful kind. An advantage of understanding populism as a function of the use of the "low" in politics is that it allows clear, *ordinal* categories. To put it differently, it permits us to locate our objects spatially, on a scale. The same certainly routinely happens with left and right.

Understanding populism as an ordinal category is by no mean an option exclusive to this approach. The discursive approach to populism presented in the work of Mudde, laid out for Belgium by Jagers and Walgrave (2007), for Venezuela by Hawkins (2010), or for Latin America in general by Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013), is as compatible with an ordinal as with a nominal category, if not even more with the former. Any quantitative textual coding, of the sort pioneered by Hawkins (2010) or of the standard content analysis, is bound to provide an ordinal, and even interval, measure of "populist-ness." The situation is less clear with the approach promoted by Weyland (2001: table 1), as his category is originally derived from a typology, crossed with the categorical notion of "power capability based on numbers" (2001: 13). Nonetheless, his typology about "Type of Ruler" seems ordinal (individual person; informal grouping; formal organization). And in his "ruler's relationship to support base," one can always ask *how* un-institutionalized and *how* unorganized—which would then lead to a more standard ordinal scale. However, difference in degrees in Weyland (2001) becomes—the way Sartori (1970) wants it—a qualitative, and therefore categorical, difference.

Ordinality is particularly useful in politics and political analyses. Whether for high and low or for left and right, it is often indispensable or extremely useful to be able to refer to a "left-of-center" *or* an "extreme left"; or to write about the "extreme right" or the role of the "center." There exist "outflanking on the low," high-low polarizations, or party convergences in the choices of a candidate. The panorama becomes exceedingly rich if the two, orthogonal, ordinalities are combined, when pertinent analytically. Only a portion of politics, to be sure, and only in certain countries and at certain times, is productively analyzed through such a bi-dimensional space. But is Umberto Bossi more right or more low? Is the French Socialist Party more high or more

left? Answers to those questions have sociological entailments, as seen when observing the social composition of the vote.

Comparing the Approaches

Competing dogmatisms notwithstanding, there is a family resemblance among the many conceptualizations of populism circulating. While distinct, the three specific approaches presented in this volume share significant similarities. Nonetheless, Weyland's and Mudde's stand the furthest apart on the importance of personalism and leadership, and on the "sincerity" of the manifested world views. The personalism so central in Weyland's approach is, to us, the very definition of the low pole of the politico-cultural dimension. The leader's *appeals*, which act as "weapon" in the populist *strategy* of Weyland, are for both of our approaches a constitutive feature of populism.

Weyland, however, is quite uneasy epistemologically with style, although he does notice the "similarities in political style and strategy" between different types of populists (2001: 9), even far apart on the left-right axis. Because he is not familiar with, and has little interest in, the empirical study of political style(s), he errs in discarding it, without much justification. Weyland's definition is, fundamentally, "by the negative" (a series of "lack of" and "un-"); but little headway is made regarding what makes even *positively possible* the—somewhat amazing—"direct, unmediated", uninstitutionalized support from "unorganized" followers—besides his own mention of political style and charisma. The focus on political style and performance is in fact a necessary and *essential* corollary to Weyland's approach, thickening it (Coppedge, 1999) and *causally explaining* it. The process of political mobilization that bypasses institutionalized forms of mediation is *embedded* within the very political style of populism. It is ironic that after summarily dismissing political style as "too broad" and "hindering the clear delimitation of cases," Weyland (2001) specifies and causally explains how "populists constantly demonstrate their closeness to common people and stimulate popular identification with their leadership, … [and] *act in ways* that embody and live out the dreams of the common man … creat[ing] a particularly intense connection to their followers" (12–14). We really could not have said it better! Without a focus on the actual *content* of the populist appeals, defining populism as a power capability based on numbers and little organization for an individual ruler would simply appear to be a complex way of just referring to

demagoguery.

Organizations, Institutionalization, and Numbers

Weyland's definition was inspired by the Latin American populisms of the 1990s. But if there is *one* feature that defined the "classic" (1930–1950s) populisms of that region (the paradigms of populism), it was the remarkably *high* level of *organization* of the populist mode of popular incorporation (as defined in Collier and Collier, 1991). Populist incorporation also meant the creation of, by far, the largest mass political parties—both organizations and institutions—of the entire continent. So either Weyland or Collier and Collier are wrong, definitionally.[25] The definition of populism should *not* center on an organizational criteria. In populism, there usually *is* organization; but formal institutionalization, often not (Levitsky, 1998). One can certainly have personalized rule based on an individual leader (Weyland, 2001: 13) *and* numbers with highly effective mass *organization*. This is what fascism was, after all.

There is no reason finally why the power capability based on numbers must be fickle and, thus, why populism necessarily "either fails or, if successful, transcends itself" into a formally institutionalized form of rule (2001: 14). Hugo Chávez was in power *fourteen* consecutive years as a highly personalistic president with large numbers, and would have remained so for more years still had he not died.

Like Mudde, we find in discourse a central source of data: from field research and participant observation to audio-visual material and newspaper accounts. We furthermore examine behavior, body language, expressions, even dress codes, to understand *appeals*. The question of "sincerity," at times a problem in Mudde's approach, is irrelevant for us: what is essential is that a *connection* is established. Because the ideology of populism is indeed quite "thin," and the minimal definition perhaps even thinner, Muddés much repeated sentence definition is prone to have too broad of an extension. Its acute minimalism and thinness inevitably leads to the inclusion of "misleading positives." His Manichean definition in particular comes ambiguously close to including militant Marxism and (discursively) the revolutionary rhetoric in Latin America, which considers "society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups," the working people versus the parasitic owners, and "which argues that [decision making] should be the expression of the volonté générale of the [working] people."

Purity and Corruptness

The emphasized notion of "purity" (Mudde's "pure people") may work well for European populisms, but does not travel well to other regions. By "pure," we either mean that the people are "pure" in an ethnic or at least physiologically recognizable way (black Frenchmen would not be part of the "pure" French people) *or* that the "regular people" are morally virtuous, have a "pure heart," in contrast to the corrupt elite. If it is the first, there is certainly no ethnicity or "type" of the "pure" people of Venezuela, for example; "motley" Venezuelans are zambos, mulatos, mestizos, whites, blacks, etc. If it is the second, as we think, the subordinate strata, the plebs, while certainly "deserving," "suffering," and "being treated unfairly," are most certainly *not* viewed as morally pure and virtuous (at least in Latin America), whether by themselves or by populists! The world of the plebs, the *chusma*, the "rabble" in Latin America is the world of petty thieves, of street smarts, *lazzaroni*, *patoteros*, *arrabeleros*. The followers of Abdala Bucaram in Ecuador may have been many things, but "pure and virtuous" they were not (as the leader himself also emphasized)! And "angry" populist supporters in the US are not particularly "pure" either. The word "pure" does not appear in *any* of Chávez's innumerable speeches, nor in those of Huey Long. Even the fact that the leaders of our "political elite" may be quite *corrupt* is not necessarily a problem, provided that, as stated in Brazil's famous populist slogan, "he [may] steals, but gets things done." Because of the features of personalism, closeness, *and* disregard for formal rules, the willingness to "get dirty" for the people is a central discursive feature of many populisms—certainly in the Americas, both North and South. And dirt is on the "low"!

Mudde's definition would be closer to reality were he to state that populism involves a discursive antagonism between an "*authentic*" people and a *nefarious elite*. This modification, however, shifts the focus away from the morality of the pure people to *representation*—far more crucial in the understanding of populism (see also Taggart, 2004). The key issue here is about connection with, and representation of, the "authentic," "deserving," and "neglected" people of "this place". The moral indignation—and such there is—is that "the people" have been hurt, damaged, ignored, "unrepresented"—not that their "purity" is not sovereign.

Oddly, *just as* Weyland refuses to incorporate theoretically the style that permeates his understanding of populism, Mudde does the same with personalistic leadership. But in his main article on populism (2004), he states that "the current heartland of the populists … wants *leadership* [Mudde's

emphasis]. They want politicians who *know* (rather than listen to) the people, and who make their wishes come true" (558). What is needed, Mudde writes, is "a *remarkable* leader … Just look at the flamboyant individuals that lead most of these movements" (559–60). We could not say it better.

Conclusion

The chapter has presented a dynamic cultural-relational approach to populism in politics. This approach takes the notion of appeals seriously, not limiting them exclusively to "ideas" or programs. Through the two-dimensional space, central in this approach, our view of populism can be used in combination with an ideological approach anchored in the notions of left and right, cross-regionally. Like left and right, it views populism as an ordinal category. This approach also highlights strategy, including from a spatial standpoint, without disregarding the political and socio-cultural subjectivities of populists' followers, as Weyland's "strategic" approach arguably does. And it deals with (social, cultural, historical) identities, central in populism, something with which Mudde's approach has theoretical difficulties grappling.

In its rhetoric and praxis, populism carries an emotional charge, which covers the spectrum from the negative *ressentiment* of the *laissés pour compte* to the positive extreme of the fusional love with the leader—an emotional charge akin to the redemptive impulse rightly highlighted by Canovan (1999). At the same time, populism is in many ways a spectacle, a show, a performance; it is a world away from dull bureaucracies and self-enclosed administrations. This approach is thus also a performative one, in which physical and more coded gestures of transgression and closeness figure centrally in generating and perpetuating populism's distinctive bonds and antagonisms.

Populism is always anti-elitist, though it can be quite top-down in its organization and the nature of the elite antagonized can vary widely. If populism is the expression of a plebeian-native "grammar," then not only will it be at ease with the "low" but, in an antagonistic way, it will flaunt it—though it may not be "proper" or "politically correct." In claiming to represent, and at times to embody, a—neglected—true "us-ness," it flaunts a politically or socially "unpresentable Other," a historical byproduct of an allegedly "civilizing process," and champions it as the authentic "Self" of the nation. It should thus come as no surprise that populists are *enfants terribles*, relishing

both their transgressions and the much sought-after connections with the "people from here" that they seek to articulate, perform, and display.