

DE GRUYTER
OLDENBOURG

NATIONALISM AND POPULISM

EXPRESSIONS OF FEAR OR POLITICAL STRATEGIES?

Edited by Carsten Schapkow and Frank Jacob



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Carsten Schapkow and Frank Jacob

1 Introduction

To say that we are living in times of populism would be an understatement. Populism, in its various guises, seems to have replaced any objective and well-balanced approach to the realities in which we are living.¹ Populism is en vogue again, and not only among right-wing parties across Europe, e.g. Hungary, where Victor Orbán was just re-elected, but also among state leaders in many national contexts, e.g. Brazil,² China,³ Russia,⁴ and even the United States.⁵ The rules of politics and international diplomacy seem to have changed again, and particularly masculine and nationalist tones that reinvigorate memories of the Cold War period can be observed.⁶ It has been more than obvious since the turn of the 20th to the 21st century that the rise of nationalism⁷ has been accompanied by stronger populism in many national contexts.⁸ Furthermore, it was not only the rhetoric but also the nationalist actions that often

1 Jan-Werner Müller, *Was ist Populismus? Ein Essay* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2016) is a recommended theoretical introduction to populism.

2 Carina Barbosa Gouvêa and Pedro H. Villas Bôas Castelo Branco, *Populist Governance in Brazil: Bolsonaro in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective* (Cham: Springer, 2022); Roberto Malte, "Brazil, Bolsonaro, and Barreto: Populism, People, and Public," *Illiberalism Studies Program Working Papers* 2 (October 2021).

3 Salvatore Barbone, "Xi Jinping: Communist China's First Populist President," *Forbes*, October 20, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/salvatorebabones/2017/10/20/populism-chinese-style-xi-jinping-cements-his-status-as-chinas-first-populist-president/?sh=84522e7152e6>; Elizabeth J. Perry, "The Populist Dream of Chinese Democracy," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 4 (2015): 903–915.

4 Philipp Casula, *Hegemonie und Populismus in Putins Russland: Eine Analyse des russischen politischen Diskurses* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012).

5 Richard S. Conley, *Donald Trump and American Populism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Michael Kazin, "Trump and American Populism: Old Whine, New Bottles," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 6 (2016): 17–24; Robert C. Rowland, *The Rhetoric of Donald Trump: Nationalist Populism and American Democracy* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2021).

6 Rolf Hugoson, "Brinkmanship: A Cold War Parody of Statesmanship," in *War and Semiotics: Signs, Communication Systems, and the Preparation, Legitimization, and Commemoration of Collective Mass Violence*, ed. Frank Jacob (London/New York: Routledge, 2021), 301–320.

7 For a broader discussion of this renewed rise, see Frank Jacob and Carsten Schapkow, "Nationalism in a Transnational Age: An Introduction," in *Nationalism in a Transnational Age: Irrational Fears and the Strategic Abuse of Nationalist Pride*, eds. Frank Jacob and Carsten Schapkow (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 1–11.

8 Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

followed that were based on populist claims that misrepresented facts – with claims of access to “alternative facts”⁹ – or were simply lies camouflaged as alternative interpretations of history – an example would be Vladimir Putin’s current falsification of Ukraine’s history to sanction Russian military actions.¹⁰

Since the middle of the 19th century, the term ‘populism’ has been used to describe (the will of) a homogenous people opposing the elites in terms of the economy, finances, culture, and the media, to name just a few areas. It has also been used by revolutionary organizations, like the Narodnaya Volya (People’s Will), whose members tried to overthrow autocratic rule in Tsarist Russia at the end of the 19th century.¹¹ Although it appealed to many people in different ways, the meaning of populism generally remained pejorative for a very long time. As Margaret Canovan has argued, “[a]lthough frequently used by historians, social scientists, and political commentators, the term [populism] is exceptionally vague and refers in different contexts to a bewildering variety of phenomena.”¹² This statement remains accurate to this day; however, populism in its connection with aggressive nationalism creates a dangerous mixture. Post-nation state nationalism in particular can be very exclusionary with regards to minorities that live within a nation state or migrants who intend to live within the borders of a foreign nation state to achieve better opportunities or important rights and freedoms for themselves and/or their children.¹³ Such groups often become victims of false populist accusations that often intend to create a scapegoat or become aggressive toward external enemies who supposedly limit the fulfillment of national dreams and

9 Vincent F. Hendricks and Mads Vestergaard, *Reality Lost: Markets of Attention, Misinformation and Manipulation* (Cham: Springer, 2019), 49–77.

10 On the way Putin interprets Russian history, see Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, “Putin and the Uses of History,” *The National Interest* 117 (2012): 21–31.

11 Derek Offord, *The Russian Revolutionary Movement in the 1880s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Astrid von Borcke, “Violence and Terror in Russian Revolutionary Populism: The Narodnaya Volya, 1879–83,” in *Social Protest, Violence and Terror in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe*, eds. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Wolfgang J. Mommsen (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), 48–62; Tim-Lorenz Wurr, *Terrorismus und Autokratie: Staatliche Reaktionen auf den Russischen Terrorismus 1870–1890* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2017).

12 Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 2.

13 While immigrants are often depicted as a threat to the existence of the nation state, scientific research has shown that such narratives should be considered populist in nature. Frank Jacob and Adam Luedtke, eds., *Migration and the Crisis of the Modern Nation State?* (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2017); Frank Jacob, “The ‘Decline of the West’ as a Semiotic Strategy Against a European Union,” in *Images of Europe: The Union between Federation and Separation*, eds. Francesco Manganapan and Tiziana Migliore (Cham: Springer, 2021), 91–102.

ambitions.¹⁴ In both ways, nationalism seems to be a trigger for as well as a consequence of populist strategies to fuel “anti-opinions” in several directions.

Nationalism and populism seem to offer both “expressions of fear or political strategies,” as the subtitle of the present book suggests, and, at the same time, they obviously have the potential not only to stimulate but also to increase each other. In that sense, they are, therefore, not competitive but rather complement each other and force the course of history toward a violent eruption once they have unleashed a climatic spiral of aggression and accusations. In recent years this has seemed to be an ongoing trend, which in a way reached its climax with Donald Trump’s presidency in the United States when populism, because of its usage in new media through the help of digital technologies and social media, reached broader audiences and acknowledgment. However, Trumpism, as the specific US populism in relation to the years 2017–2021 is called, did not end with Joe Biden’s inauguration but will continue to play an important role there,¹⁵ as will populist nationalism in the future history of other countries when political gains can be achieved through the exploitation of fear. Such moments are like windows of opportunity for populist politicians, who sophisticatedly exploit the situation and its changes to use and stimulate waves of nationalist emotions and responses.

These responses often express an imagined contrast between an “us” and a “them” (the obvious Other), which is a critical aspect of the combination of nationalism and populism, but in many cases, conspiracy theories are linked with nationalist emotions and are used by populists who attack the “elites,” who remain unidentified but are supposedly ruling over the people and their common sense through all kinds of control measures, including the so-called “mainstream” or “lying” media.¹⁶ Since the interrelationship between nationalism

14 Examples of publications that exploit fears and fuel such “anti-opinions” against immigrants or minorities are numerous, including Ann Coulter, *¡Adios, America!: The Left’s Plan to Turn Our Country into a Third World Hellhole* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015); Michel Houellebecq, *Soumission* (Paris: J’ai lu, 2019); and Thilo Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen* (Munich: DVA, 2010).

15 Christian Fuchs, *Digital Demagogue: Authoritarian Capitalism in the Age of Trump and Twitter* (London: Pluto, 2018), 81–164; Gwynn Guilford and Nikhil Sonnad, “Der Geist des Trumpismus oder: Was Steve Bannon wirklich will,” *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 3 (2017): 55–67; Carter A. Wilson, *Trumpism: Race, Class, Populism, and Public Policy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

16 In Germany in particular, the narrative of the “lying” media (*Lügenpresse*) has gained ground in recent years, while Donald Trump also attacked the “mainstream media” in the US. Britta Schellenberg, “‘Lügenpresse’? ‘Rechtsextremismus’ und ‘Rassismus’ in den Medien,” in *Rechtsextremismus und “Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund”: Interdisziplinäre Debatten, Befunde und Bilanzen*, eds. Wolfgang Frindte, Daniel Geschke, Nicole Haußecker and Franziska

and populism has become not only more intense but also more obvious in the first two decades of the 21st century, it is hardly surprising that demands for a concept of national populism have been expressed by researchers dealing with both phenomena in their research.¹⁷

While nationalism – and theoretical reflections about the concept have emphasized this – has some positive sides, especially when one considers pre-nation state nationalism that drove independence movements in anti-colonial contexts,¹⁸ populism must rather be seen as a negative historical force, as it declares the “elites” as “enemies of the people” or creates dichotomic antagonisms and thereby bases its success on the division of people in accordance with racism, classism or chauvinism.¹⁹ In the theoretical reflections of Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm,²⁰ the elites were instrumental in bringing nationalism into the world as they helped to form and formulate the idea of the nation. This idea of the nation, however, as Ernest Renan emphasized in his famous lecture,²¹ is based on the consensus of the people. It is therefore almost oxymoronic to speak of nationalist populism, as the latter is a dividing rather than a unifying force, and it usually uses extreme rhetoric related to a nationalism that is 1) rather secessionist and intends to create a new and independent nation state based on the demand for a cleaved nation, or 2) antagonistic to the existence of a multilayered and diverse idea of the nation. It therefore demands the homogenization of the people who share a nation and, as a result, is exclusive in the sense that it can only be home to those who are accepted as members of this specifically determined nation. In short, populists base their arguments on the idea of a segregationist nation that is even more

Schmidtke (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016), 309–339; Mollie Ziegler Hemingway, *Trump vs the Media* (New York: Encounter Books, 2017).

17 Irakli Chkhaidze, “Georgia’s Two Others: Nationalism and the Identity Struggle of a Post-Soviet Nation State,” in *Nationalism in a Transnational Age: Irrational Fears and the Strategic Abuse of Nationalist Pride*, eds. Frank Jacob and Carsten Schapkow (Berlin: De Gruyter 2021), 144.

18 Frank Furedi, *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third World Nationalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994).

19 Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2015).

20 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London/New York: Verso, 2006); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

21 Ernest Renan, “A Lecture Delivered at the Sorbonne, 11 March 1882: ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation’,” in Ernest Renan, *Oeuvres Completes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947), 887–907.

elitist than the “elitist establishment” of populist narratives that would prevent such a nation state’s future existence.

The imagination of the past and the wishful creation of the future are consequently two components of populism and its demands, which is why the contributions in this volume consider these aspects in different contexts. The eminent theorists of nationalism, including the already mentioned Gellner, Anderson, and Hobsbawm, as well as Karl Deutsch,²² Otto Dann,²³ and Miroslav Hroch,²⁴ among others, introduced a very rigorous theoretical framework for nationalism.²⁵ It now seems especially important to analyze which nationalist elements can be identified with regard to populism as well; the overlaps between these two historical and contemporary forces are consequently the main focus of the present volume, although the contributions offer only some initial insights into this relationship, offering some theoretical reflections and specific case studies as well. That interdisciplinary studies of populism are important was recently emphasized in *The Palgrave Handbook of Populism*, which offers a focus on the phenomenon from the perspective of political science, but it does manage to assess it as one of the greatest challenges for liberal democracies of our time and also provides some more detailed analyses and reflections on populism’s causes and the fears and frustrations that are faced by people who increasingly have to encounter populism on an everyday basis.²⁶ Recent scholarship has furthermore identified multiple reasons for the emergence and everlasting presence of populism. There seems to be a crisis of capitalism as well as of its representation, and this and the fragility of democracies in general seem to have stimulated the rise of populism.²⁷ In addition, there are new attempts and scientific approaches to better contextualize theoretical considerations regarding populism.²⁸ Questions related to our past and future, similar to those we have to answer with regard to the impact of nationalism, will be on the radar of researchers in the years to come, and the editors hope that the present volume will stimulate further research that will help us to

22 Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1953).

23 Otto Dann, *Nationalismus und sozialer Wandel* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1978).

24 Miroslav Hroch, *European Nations: Explaining their Formation* (London/New York: Verso, 2015).

25 For a very good introduction to nationalist theories, see Rolf-Ulrich Kunze, *Nation und Nationalismus* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2007).

26 Michael Oswald, ed., *The Palgrave Handbook of Populism* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

27 Eric Fassin, *Revolte oder Ressentiment: Über den Populismus* (Berlin: August Verlag, 2019).

28 Seongcheol Kim and Veith Selk, eds., *Wie weiter mit der Populismusforschung?* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2021).

better understand the connections between nationalism and populism, as well as between both of these phenomena and nationalist populism.

The Contributions

The volume opens with a reflective essay by Jan-Werner Müller that takes a closer look at the politics of fear to investigate the emotional category of fear and its connection(s) with populism and nationalism in some detail. Following this opening essay, the volume is organized into three sections.

The first section, “Consequences of Nationalism and Populism,” consists of three chapters by Frank Jacob, Katerina Tsetsura and Oleg Kashirskikh, and Mitterand M. Okorie. Jacob focuses on the decline of the occident as a traditional narrative of nationalist populism and thereby spans time periods to connect developments and narratives that were formulated in relation to the period of the Enlightenment with more recent events such as the so-called migration crisis in Europe since 2015. Tsetsura and Kashirskikh analyze populism in Russia and thereby provide an important – particularly so today – case study that shows the impact of exploiting empty signifiers in the struggle against Western ideological penetration as a means of populist politics. Okorie then shows how populist narratives are used by senior political officials in South Africa and what this means for the country’s bilateral relations with its allies.

The second section, “Strategies of Nationalism and Populism,” brings together three papers by Maximilian Kreter, Vladimir Naxera, and Armin Langer that take a closer look at different angles on how nationalism and populism work in combination. Kreter provides an analysis of four decades of white power music in Germany and shows how this music became a crucial part of right-wing extremists’ activities. Naxera looks at Czech President Milos Zeman and how he uses history and the othering of Germans in his speeches to stir up populist sentiment and thereby use nationalist emotions. Finally, Langer’s article describes how conspirational narratives about George Soros or the Rothschilds, as well as other conspiracy theories, have built the determining strategy of American nationalists and populists and are abused for political purposes.

Section three, “Identity Questions in the 21st Century,” goes beyond the typical examples of contemporary populism-nationalism in relation to the populism-nationalism connection and offers critical insights for less well-known countries that have to deal with the connection or link between nationalism and populism. Steinar Aas focuses on nationalism, populism, and Norwegian historiography, showing that the interrelationship between the two historical

and contemporary forces can be felt in the Scandinavian context as well. Murat Iplikci's paper analyzes the role of the media in populist waves when he takes a closer look at Henry Luce's nationalist-populist crusade and its impact until today, followed by Jonah Roberson's analysis of the perception of Poland's history by the country's elites. Björn P. Müller-Bohn's chapter "Populist Politics and the Rise of the AfD in Germany" and Britt Leake's "Muslims and Islam in Nehru's Secular Indian Nationalism" round up this final section by offering insights into two national cases in which populist politics seem to have gained ground in the last decade, especially in places where populist narratives have been directed toward nationalist fears, or more accurately, fears on a nationalist emotional level, of the people.

What was initially planned as a workshop at the University of Oklahoma in the spring of 2020 was made impossible by COVID-19. Still, we felt committed to bringing the contributors of the planned workshop together in this edited volume and therefore offer what would have been an important event for all of us in a written form to document the global perspectives that are relevant to the study of populism and nationalism as historical issues or as an intertwined phenomenon. We thank the authors for their contributions in these daunting times and hope that this volume will pose many questions that researchers will answer in more detailed studies soon.

When we wrote this introduction, Russia had just begun to invade Ukraine. Nothing, we all know, will remain the same after this dreadful and unjust event, which was partly made possible and was very intensively accompanied by nationalist populism and populist nationalism alike.

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Jan-Werner Müller

2 The Politics of Fear Revisited

The seventeenth century was the century of mathematics.
The eighteenth century was the century of physical science,
and the nineteenth century of biology.
Our twentieth century is the century of fear.
Fear isn't a science, you may be thinking . . .
even if fear can't be considered a science in itself,
there is no question that it is a method.¹

Albert Camus, 1946

“The politics of fear” – the phrase comes to mind easily, perhaps all too easily, when reflecting on the rise of what is variously referred to as right-wing populism, a new authoritarianism, or even novel forms of fascism in our era.² It is assumed that the propagators of these -isms purposefully make people afraid or even panic in order to then present themselves as benevolent protectors or even saviors. That leads to the further thought that fear as such might be perilous in politics. But is it? Can fear not also play a positive role – as a force motivating citizens to defend freedoms (for instance, against right-wing populists, new authoritarians, and novel fascists)? After all – and very much in contrast to the presumed affinity between fear and autocracy – one would have thought that our anti-authoritarian (and anti-fascist) intellectual repertoire also contains a “liberalism of fear,” a “reformism of fear,” and even a “social democracy of fear.”³ And, during the pandemic, some politicians and civil servants could

1 See Albert Camus, *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947*, ed. Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 257.

2 See for instance the excellent book by Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

3 Judith Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21–38. Of course, Shklar’s contribution to political thought is not exhausted by the liberalism of fear, even if it seems likely that she will be remembered, above all, for this particular theory (or sketch of a theory). See Katrina Forrester, “Hope and Memory in the Thought of Judith Shklar,” *Modern Intellectual History* 8 (2011): 591–620. For the “social democracy of fear,” see Tony Just, *Ill Fares the Land* (New York: Penguin, 2010). For the “reformism of fear,” see Pierre Rosanvallon, *The Society of Equals*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013) and Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

Note: This essay draws in parts on Jan-Werner Müller, *Democracy Rules* (London: Allen Lane, 2021). Thanks to Sam Moyn for comments.

have been entirely justified in wanting to make people who might have been underestimating the dangers of the virus more fearful.⁴

So how should we think about fear in politics? Is it a “method,” as Camus held, that can be used for good or ill; is all relative, which is to say, does all depend on the object of fear, with some objects being a rational focus of fear and others not? Or is fear as such, in the end, bound to have harmful effects, even if it is invoked (or purposefully evoked) for liberalism and social democracy?

My aim in this small contribution is, first of all, to show how fear is not a “vehement passion” – something somehow beyond individuals’ or a collective’s control (though sheer terror might be); it is not, pace Raymond Aron, somehow “subpolitical” or “prepolitical.”⁵ Its temporality is different than is often suggested (it extends over time, but it is not the same as constant dread). Fear shares that feature with anxiety, or *Angst* (one of the German words for which there is allegedly no equivalent in the English language), but while anxiety is rather diffuse, fear tends to be focused.⁶ It also, rather obviously, entails some conception of loss (which has not occurred yet; it is not the same as nostalgia); as long as there is fear, it is often said, there actually remains hope.⁷

What is crucial is that fear – just like anger, an emotion also frequently associated with right-wing populism – has cognitive antecedents.⁸ Or, to put it differently, there are reasons here that can be made subject to political argument, and there are situations in which fear is entirely apt – hence it is not inappropriate even to try to formulate an “ethics of fear.”⁹ The uses of fear, then, are very specific in some of the most problematic phenomena of our time; one can argue against them without having to accept the notion that, ideally, fear

⁴ An internal memo from spring 2020 of the German Interior Ministry entitled “Wie wir COVID-19 unter Kontrolle bekommen” read as follows: “Um die gewünschte Schockwirkung zu erzielen, müssen die die konkreten Auswirkungen einer Durchseuchung auf die menschliche Gesellschaft verdeutlicht werden . . . Viele Schwerkranke werden von ihren Angehörigen ins Krankenhaus gebracht, aber abgewiesen, und sterben qualvoll um Luft ringend zu Hause. Das Ertricken oder nicht genug Luft kriegen, ist fuer jeden Menschen eine Uranngst” [underlining in the original]. Robin Alexander, *Machtverfall: Merkels Ende und das Drama der deutschen Politik – Ein Report* (Berlin: Siedler, 2021), 243–244.

⁵ Philip Fisher, *The Vehement Passions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993), 140–142 and 184–191.

⁷ John Hollander, “Fear Itself,” *Social Research* 71 (2004): 865–886.

⁸ Jon Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁹ Amia Srinivasan, “The Aptness of Anger,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26 (2018): 123–144; Sabine A. Döring, “How Safe Should We Feel? On the Ethics of Fear in the Public Sphere,” in *The Ethics of Belief and Beyond: Understanding Mental Normativity*, eds. Sebastian Schmidt and Gerhard Ernst (New York: Routledge, 2020), 215–233.

and feelings of possible loss ought to be banished from democratic politics altogether.

What Kind of Fear to Fear

I want to start out by explaining how fear works in right-wing populist rhetoric. It is frequently asserted that scholars and journalists (not to mention politicians and “ordinary citizens”) simply cannot agree on what populism is. I would respectfully disagree. Many social scientists and political theorists have in fact converged on what can broadly be called an ideational approach.¹⁰ They might differ on the extent to which populism should be classified as an ideology, but they do reject notions according to which populism is a matter of particular electoral support (as in, “only frightened lower-middle-class people vote for populists”); they also refuse the idea that populism is a question of quality – or, rather, a lack thereof – when it comes to policy (that is, the still widespread view, especially among economists, that populists are characterized by having very simplistic understandings of the world or necessarily make irresponsible or outright demagogic election promises).

It is misleading, then, to equate populism with the “criticism of elites” or “anti-establishment attitudes.” While such an equation has become conventional wisdom, it is actually based on a rather peculiar thought. After all, any old civics textbook would instruct us that keeping an eye on the powerful is a sign of good democratic citizenship; yet nowadays, we are told incessantly that precisely such a stance is populist (and, by implication, according to many observers, dangerous for democracy and the rule of law). Now, it is true that populists, when in opposition, criticize sitting governments (and, usually, also other parties). But, above all, they also do something else (and this is crucial): in one way or another, they claim that they, *and only they*, represent what they often refer to as the “real people” or the “silent majority.”

At first sight, this might not sound particularly nefarious; it does not immediately amount to, let’s say, racism or a fanatical hatred of the European Union, or, for that matter, a principled opposition to the notion of the rule of law. And yet this claim to a monopoly of representation has two detrimental consequences for liberal democracy (and particularly the ideal of equal political inclusion).

¹⁰ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda,” *Comparative Political Studies* 51 (2018): 1667–1693.

Firstly, and rather obviously, populists then also assert that all other contenders for office are fundamentally illegitimate. This is never just a matter of disputes about policy or even about values, which, after all, are completely normal and, ideally, even productive in a democratic polity. Rather, populists assert that their rivals are simply corrupt, fail to serve the interests of the people on account of their bad or, one might say, “crooked” character, etc. Secondly, and more insidiously, populists claim that those who do not agree with their ultimately symbolic construction of the people (and hence usually do not support the populists politically) might not properly belong to the people in the first place. After all, the suggestion that there is a “real people” implies that there are some who are not quite real – folks who just pretend to belong, who might actually undermine the polity in some form, or who, at best, are second-rate citizens.¹¹

Such a message that only some truly belong to the people systematically undermines the standing of certain citizens. Obvious examples are minorities (whose standing might already be vulnerable for one reason or another) and recent immigrants who are suspected of not being truly loyal to the polity. Think of Narendra Modi’s policy of creating a register of genuine citizens; ostensibly, this is about identifying illegal immigrants, but especially in combination with new refugee policies that effectively discriminate against Muslims, its actual message is abundantly clear to Hindu nationalists. The latter understand perfectly well that the package is meant to affirm the real, that is to say, Hindu people and put fear into one particular minority, namely Muslims.

In short, where populists come to power, one consequence of this exclusionary stance can also be that such citizens no longer enjoy full equality before the law (or even the protection of the law at all¹²): they are treated differently in conspicuous ways, perhaps not necessarily by judges in court, but in many ordinary encounters with bureaucrats who understand perfectly well what is expected from the very top,¹³ not to mention the unleashing of hate on streets and

11 This symbolic message (which, however, has very real consequences) can usefully be compared to Sandra Day O’Connor’s endorsement test developed in *Lynch v. Donnelly*: “Endorsement sends a message to nonadherents that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.” As so often happens, treating people as inferior and excluding them can then produce the very evidence which appears to prove that their unequal treatment is justified.

12 Think of the violent Hindu nationalists tolerated (and sometimes clearly incited) by the Modi government in India.

13 For some examples of what Trump’s populism has meant on the ground, see Dylan Matthews, “Donald Trump, the Family Separation Crisis, and the Triumph of Cruelty,” *Vox*, June 19, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2017/1/28/14425354/donald-trump-cruelty>; Seth Harp,

squares. There is significant evidence, for instance, that Trump rallies are associated with a local increase in assaults.¹⁴ The concept of “trickle-down aggression” – coined by the philosopher Kate Manne – captures this dynamic.

Note how this exclusionary stance is not exactly the same as nationalism, if we understand the latter to mean that every cultural nation is entitled to its own state and that the imperative of preserving the nation has independent moral weight.¹⁵ To be sure, all populists need to provide some content for their notion of “the people,” and it is hardly an accident that right-wing populists have so often reached for an ethnically defined understanding of the nation to do so (or opted for outright nativism). But, in principle, one can be a populist for whom the definition of the people is primarily political or ideological (think of Hugo Chávez’s notion of Bolivarian socialism for the twenty-first century); what matters in this case is that those who disagree with the supposedly uniquely authentic representative of the people are declared illegitimate and quite possibly put *hors la loi*.

Populism, then, as I understand it, is always about exclusion in the name of a people that is imagined as homogeneous. Those excluded are not treated neutrally (in the way that non-citizens in general might be); rather, their symbolic (and moralistic) exclusion is based on a particular kind of fear – specifically that of those who might pass as insiders. The particularly dangerous enemy, in other words, is within and cannot always be so easily identified. As Thomas Meaney has argued, Trump complemented the construction of the Muslim-as-enemy, which obviously preceded his political rise in 2015–2016, with a suspicion of “fake Americans” and “wannabe Americans” – primarily Hispanics – who seek to pass as Americans but actually pose a threat to the real America from within.¹⁶

Populists – even though they frequently invoke “unity” – de facto seek to divide societies. They consciously polarize societies, invoking an existential threat of some sort or another. That can help keep them in power – and, less

“I’m a Journalist but I Didn’t Fully Realize the Terrible Power of U.S. Border Officials Until They Violated My Rights and Privacy,” *The Intercept*, June 22, 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2019/06/22/cbp-border-searches-journalists/>; A. C. Thompson, “Inside the Secret Border Patrol Facebook Group Where Agents Joke About Migrant Deaths and Post Sexist Memes,” *Pro Publica*, July 1, 2019, <https://www.propublica.org/article/secret-border-patrol-facebook-group-agents-joke-about-migrant-deaths-post-sexist-memes>.

¹⁴ Larry Diamond, *Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency* (New York: Penguin, 2019), 106.

¹⁵ David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁶ Thomas Meaney, “The Dark European Stain: How the Far Right Rose Again,” *New Statesman*, September 12, 2018, <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/europe/2018/09/dark-european-stain-how-far-right-rose-again>.

obviously, it also explains why citizens who in fact recognize anti-democratic behavior might be willing to keep supporting them. After all, it is us against them, and the stakes are very high indeed.¹⁷

However, it is also important to note the difference between populism on the one hand and certain forms of authoritarianism as well as fascism on the other. Right-wing populists surely mobilize voters on the basis of fear; as a leader of the far-right populist party in Germany put it, “we need the fearful to move majorities.”¹⁸ But populists in power are not interested in keeping entire societies in a state of dread of that knock on the door late at night, in the way despotic governments do, for that would all too obviously betray their promises of being the better democrats; spectacles of violence that might remind especially international audiences of twentieth-century dictatorships and mass human right violations are also, for the most part, not opportune.

What is more, right-wing populists only share a very limited number of characteristics with fascists: clearly, fascist leaders also claimed that they, and only they, represented, let us say, the German and Italian people. But they also systematically glorified violence – suggesting that a life of struggle and mortal combat is what gives human life meaning – and they consistently re-created their states, and empires, along racist lines. Fear mattered for them, but so did the ideals of heroism and self-sacrifice, which play virtually no role for right-wing populists today: if anything, the latter generate solidarity on the basis of shared victimhood (remember Trump telling his supporters, “You are all victims”). Of course, that sense of victimhood is then invoked to justify aggression or even outright violence; the logic is not that different from terrorists who announce that they never started any atrocities but that they are merely defending themselves. By the same logic, right-wing populists re-fashion anti-colonial discourses or claims that white men are now the new oppressed minority. These reversals are all too transparent; what has not been understood enough, though, is that they mark an important difference from fascism as well as forms of authoritarianism that primarily invoke technocratic or militaristic, or, for that matter, anti-communist justifications. Hence, the

17 Milan W. Svobik, “Polarization versus Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 30 (2019): 20–32. As Svobik puts it, “the political acumen of Chávez, Orbán, or Erdoğan lay in their ability to draw political battle lines along societal cleavages that were only simmering when these leaders were first elected. Once they succeeded, elections confronted their supporters with the choice between their partisan interests on the one hand and democratic principles on the other.”

18 Lenz Jacobsen, “Im Bund mit den Ängstlichen,” *Die Zeit Online*, November 28, 2015, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2015-11/alternative-fuer-deutschland-parteitag-frauke-petry-hannover>.

idea that fear could re-invigorate societies that somehow have become decadent or, generally, fail to exercise collective will, belongs to fascists rather than populists, who in fact are quite content for the people to play a passive role.¹⁹

A Good Fear (or Equivalent of Fear)?

Fear is pernicious when its reasons are demonstrably wrong – whatever right-wing populists say, there is no one who is trying to “take the country away from us,” or launching conspiracies to replace the population, or making the government into a form of tyranny via vaccinations. But fear might be salutary when it motivates behavior based on rational insight: taking measures against COVID or global warming. Except: can it really be as simple as that?

The claims of populists are, of course, not all conjured out of thin air. There really are minorities who are demanding something, there really are claims being made on us that might feel uncomfortable, and there are real potential losses of power faced by, very broadly speaking, white men.²⁰ The problem is that right-wing populists reframe what can be a real conflict over interests, identities, and ideas such that one side of the conflict is simply delegitimated entirely because those participants are said not to belong to the polity at all, and hence they cannot truly be part of the conflict. The fear of losing something could, ideally, become subject to proper political argument or some form of negotiation – but it cannot be so, because those making claims are effectively treated as something like thieves (they are “stealing our country,” and the theft must be stopped).

It is not true that claims by minorities automatically lead to pernicious polarization and irresolvable conflicts. Conventional wisdom has it that one can negotiate over interests more easily than over identity; for many, there is also the seemingly self-evident lesson from recent years that if one does not want populist-authoritarian white identity politics, one should not be talking so loudly about the identity of black and brown people.

Yet identity and interests cannot be so neatly separated. That is true today, and if we did not suffer so badly from historical amnesia, we would also not think that things were all that different in a golden age of social democracy. Socialist parties never fought just for wage increases and better working conditions;

¹⁹ Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁰ Jedediah Purdy, *This Land is Our Land: The Struggle for a New Commonwealth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 15.

they also struggled for dignity and collective respect. Think, for instance, of Red Vienna, made by socialists into a showcase for working-class culture and uplift during the interwar period. On the other hand, many of today's demands are not about identity (or values) in the abstract; they are about the distribution, or rather re-distribution, of basic rights (for instance, the right not to be shot by police and the right not to be harassed by powerful men).

Identity is not immune to compromise and negotiation. We do not all automatically think that there is an inner, true, more or less unchanging self, as a romantic conception of identity would suggest. People are able to rethink their political commitments and what really matters in both private and collective life; what is regularly ridiculed by the right as 'woke' today is only one example. Conversely, it is far from obvious that conflicts over material interests can always be resolved. We have simply forgotten to what lengths the owners of concentrated wealth might go to defend themselves from claims to redistribution.

Still, a skeptic might object it is surely naïve to think that, if only one explained the justice of some of the claims made by those previously unheard, conflicts in a democracy would be resolved smoothly, as those with inherited privileges would simply relinquish them. Not only does power concede nothing without a demand, it also concedes nothing without a struggle. Or perhaps without fear? That brings us to the fraught question of whether there can be fear in the service of just, democratic politics. Three scenarios might be distinguished.

First, the oppressed, or, at least, historically disadvantaged, can make the traditionally powerful experience fear – be it a fear of protest or even of an overthrow of a political-economic system altogether. One might call this the Bismarck scenario; proponents of a “reformism of fear” might argue that elites can be frightened into compromises (but there might be limits as to what kinds of frights one might cause in a democracy). There is also the intriguing suggestion that one might need an “equivalent of fear,” but it is not clear what that might be.²¹

Second, one can think of an *outside* threat that forces elites into some kind of pre-emptive reform. The fear here is of a rivalrous political-economic system that might directly attack or, perhaps more plausibly, prove so attractive that protest from within combined with pressure from without proves strong enough to force change. This is, of course, a common narrative about the twentieth century: had there been no communist threat – externally and internally – there would have been no welfare state.²² The flipside of this argument is not so often

21 Samuel Moyn calls for a “functional replacement for the sense of fear that led to both protection and redistribution for those left alive by the horrors of the twentieth century.” See Moyn, *Not Enough*, 219.

22 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (London: Abacus, 1993).

mentioned: the price for the welfare state was the national security state (and while the former could be dismantled, the latter has only grown).²³

Finally, there is the – perhaps naïve – idea that a genuine collective experience of vulnerability, be it to an external enemy or, let’s say, a virus, can generate forms of solidarity. Here, fear would be rational; it would not be apolitical (virologists cannot instruct a democracy in what has to be done; that remains a decision informed by value choices, levels of risk tolerance, etc.), and it would involve public argument (how to reduce pervasive insecurity to something like manageable risk).²⁴ Yet it could also not be turned against an internal enemy in the way that fear was able to be instrumentalized during McCarthyism, for instance. Or so one might hope.

True, no crisis automatically delivers its own lessons – in fact, that lesson about lessons could have been learned from the aftermath of the financial crisis when social democrats took it for granted that they would get an electoral boost (without really having to make their case or offering anything particularly inspiring beyond “greed is bad”). In the past, it turned out to be the Tea Party that succeeded in imposing its framing of the crisis on a surprisingly large number of people: undeserving folks had taken on too much debt, and the state was now rewarding them with more cash.

No two lives of citizens in a democracy are ever exactly the same, and yet we expect political parties to construct platforms that appeal to people with very different forms of lived experience. In the 1940s, a British aristocrat who could retreat to his country home had a very different war from a worker fighting at the front. But the Labour Party managed to appeal to a collective sense of sacrifice and solidarity (and shared vulnerability) in order to legitimize the creation of the welfare state. It is a question of political imagination, not of technocratically deducing individual policy lessons.

The idea that fear could somehow be made foundational for a genuinely democratic politics – as Corey Robin pointed out almost two decades ago – is profoundly flawed. Yet that should not lead us to think that the only alternative is to exude optimism and confidence (as some self-declared saviors of liberalism sometimes do) or that one has to deny loss, lest one encourages unsavory forms of politics.

²³ Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2013).

²⁴ This distinction between immeasurable uncertainty and risk goes back to F. H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921).

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Section 1: Consequences of Nationalism and Populism

Frank Jacob

3 The Decline of the Occident: A Traditional Narrative of Nationalist Populism

Migration often causes a disturbance in the imagined national homogeneity of modern states, and populist nationalists use this development to gain influence. They center their own appeal to possible voters on the fear of the “foreignness” that is represented by immigrants and refugees alike, claiming that their arrival represents a threat to the existence of the Occident and the Western values it represents.¹ Since 2015, when the so-called “refugee crisis” caused turmoil in the international system and threatened the clear separation between the peripheries and the center of the Wallersteinian world system,² Europe has been turned into a “fortress,”³ and the human rights that are often stressed in EU declarations were in a way led ad absurdum.⁴ Populist nationalists argued that the welcoming of people who represented a different culture would lead to the decline and fall of the Western world. The “clash of civilizations” that the American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington (1927–2008) warned of⁵ seemed to have become inevitable. However, such narratives were neither new nor original but rather resembled a continuation of considerations that can be traced back to the late 18th century.⁶ The idea that a modern and advanced West would suffer a decline and fall due to the immigration of inferior elements

1 With regard to the depiction of immigration-related crimes in the media, see Mathieu Coutenier, Sophie Hatte, Mathias Thoenig and Stephanos Vlachos, “The Logic of Fear: Populism and Media Coverage of Immigrant Crimes,” *HAL Open Science* (April 2019), <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-02095658/document>.

2 Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

3 Annette Jünemann, Nicolas Fromm and Nikolas Scherer, eds., *Fortress Europe? Challenges and Failures of Migration and Asylum Policies* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2017).

4 Marianna Fotaki, “A Crisis of Humanitarianism: Refugees at the Gates of Europe,” *International Journal of Health Policy and Management* 8, no. 6 (2019): 321–324.

5 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

6 Hans Erich Bödeker, Clorinda Donato, and Peter Hanns Reill, eds., *Discourses of Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Enlightenment* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009).

can be traced through modernity in different national and cultural contexts.⁷ That it is used by nationalist populists – from right-wing parties in Europe that claim to defend the Western world to the former US president who argued he was defending the US and its people’s wealth against immigration from “shit-hole countries,”⁸ to name just two examples – is related to the appeal of such stories. The image of the “immigrational wave” is used to stimulate fears that are often simply based on stereotypes and prejudices,⁹ based on the idea that the nation is something homogenous that needs to be defended against any kind of “diversity,” be it cultural, ethnic, religious or gender-related.¹⁰ The present chapter, after a short theoretical reflection on the nature and possible diversity of the nation, intends to provide a survey of such narratives to emphasize their historical longevity. It will, due to the framework of solely being a chapter in an edited collection, just cover a few examples, but these highlights will show that the idea of a foreign invasion of the nation is one that can be traced throughout modern history and that it has obviously not lost any of its appeal for some forces within modern society, especially those who reject the consequences of globalization while simultaneously wanting to enjoy the gains it provided for their own status.

The Nation as a Dialectic Process

When the French historian Ernest Renan (1823–1892) explained what a nation actually is in a lecture at the Sorbonne in March 1882, he argued that it “is a soul, a spiritual principle,” based on a shared past and the consensus of the people in the present. He continued by emphasizing that “[t]he nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand

7 Angelos Mouzakitis, “Modernity and the Idea of Progress,” *Frontiers in Sociology* 2, no. 3 (2017), doi:10.3389/fsoc.2017.00003.

8 Josh Dawsey, “Trump Derides Protections for Immigrants from ‘Shithole’ Countries,” *The Washington Post*, January 12, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-attacks-protections-for-immigrants-from-shithole-countries-in-oval-office-meeting/2018/01/11/bfc0725c-f711-11e7-91af-31ac729add94_story.html.

9 Dorota Dormalewska, “Immigration, Stereotypes, and Social Security: The Portrayal of Migrant Groups in Public Discourse,” *Security and Defence Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (2016): 15–31.

10 Joanna Kruczkowska and Paulina Mirowska, eds., *Diversity and Homogeneity: The Politics of Nation, Ethnicity and Gender* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea.” Yet even more important than this past is the “common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people.”¹¹ Following Renan’s thoughts, it is important to understand that it is the will of the people to share a future together that decides the fate of the nation. This also means that the past on which the nation is based is relative. The people themselves, as a society, have to decide what historical events and which achievements are of importance and which the present consensus should be based upon. The current debates about the forms of remembrance and commemoration of the past are consequently only expressions of the reconfiguration of the way current societies interpret, understand, and value historical events and the people that lived in relation to these events.¹²

Such processes are not unique but happen according to the progress societies are making or are in danger of being reverted if reactionary forces should determine such developments. Nevertheless, there is one important aspect that needs to be emphasized here: the nation is not static but is, in contrast, redefined by every new generation of people who agree to find a consensus about their own coexistence as members of a shared nation. The awareness of being part of a nation, which Benedict Anderson referred to as an “imagined community,”¹³ is usually related to a set of values that are supposedly shared by the majority of people that belong to this community. In the case of the US nation, one can argue that the American Revolution, which is therefore less important from a global perspective than the French or the Haitian one, was the expression of a limited nation. It was a nation that was exclusively white, Christian, and male. It took two centuries to change this nation through struggles that not only resemble a renegotiation of national values, civil rights, and gender roles but also show that Hegelian dialectic struggles were necessary to reach a new nation that would eventually be multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and diverse regarding gender and its respective roles within a modern society (Fig. 1).

A diversification of the nation is therefore possible but is often just the result of a long process based on the demand for more rights and democratic

11 Ernest Renan, “A Lecture Delivered at the Sorbonne, 11 March 1882: ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation’,” in Ernest Renan, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947), 887–907.

12 For a theoretical reflection with a special focus on war memorials, see Frank Jacob and Kenneth Pearl, “Introduction: War Memorials and Critical Insights into the Human Past,” in *War and Memorials: The Age of Nationalism and the Great War*, eds. Frank Jacob and Kenneth Pearl (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2019), 1–21.

13 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

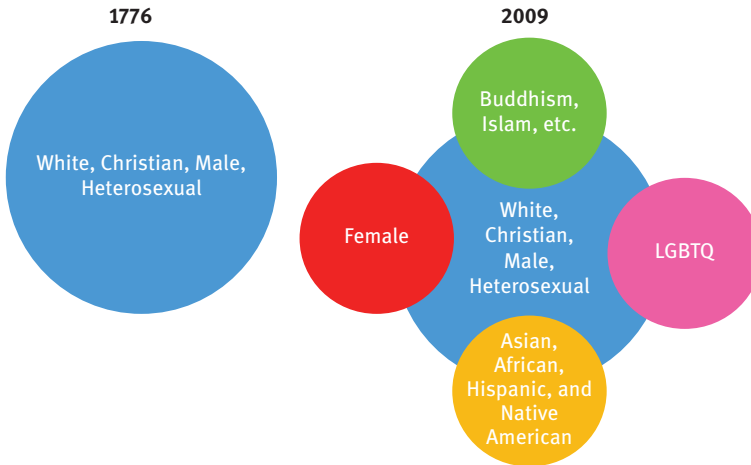


Fig. 1: The American nation in 1776 and in 2009.

participation for those who had not been taken into full consideration as equal members of the nation when it was originally formed.¹⁴ Over time, however, the basic setting of the nation was reframed, and more diversity was eventually achieved and represented many historical changes.

These changes, in addition to the ones stimulated by globalization with regard to social, economic, and political structures, at the same time increased the fears of those in the US, as in other national contexts, who are unwilling to accept these changes but rather intend to keep the old nation in existence, as it strengthens the privileges the reactionary forces hold in a society because the latter is based on inequality.¹⁵ Nationalist populists, like Trump in the US context, appeal to these women and men as they declare that they are defending the traditional nation against all “evil” elements, i.e. progressives, socialists, feminists, climate activists, etc., who threaten the further existence of what conservative and reactionary elements consider the best possible nation.¹⁶ It is interesting that Hegel himself considered history to have achieved its final target in the 1830s and assumed that the political order

¹⁴ Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁵ John Halpin, “Why We Need Inclusive Nationalism,” *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, July 29, 2020, <https://democracyjournal.org/arguments/why-we-need-inclusive-nationalism/>.

¹⁶ As an example of such populist arguments, see Ann Coulter, *¡Adios, America!: The Left’s Plan to Turn Our Country into a Third World Hellhole* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015).

could not change any further for the better, an assumption echoed by Francis Fukuyama, who succeeded in translating the later Hegel for an American public that considered itself the winner of the Cold War and thereby the legitimate heir of the future of mankind.¹⁷ However, as the rise of nationalism since the early 1990s proves, there is no guarantee that history and the world always move forward.

The increasing appeal of nationalist populists is related to the fear of a nation that allows too much development and thereby contests the traditional social order and the privileges, especially those of white men, that have been gained from it.¹⁸ The current struggle between progressive and conservative forces about the nation and its “design” therefore represents a heated dialectical conflict about the nature of the nation that will be accepted by a majority of the people in the future. One can consequently argue that populist arguments are a reactionary attempt to prevent the nation from changing or to recreate a past nation and instead to reassert the existence and advantages of a national homogeneity in which the social ranks and roles of the past remain uncontested.

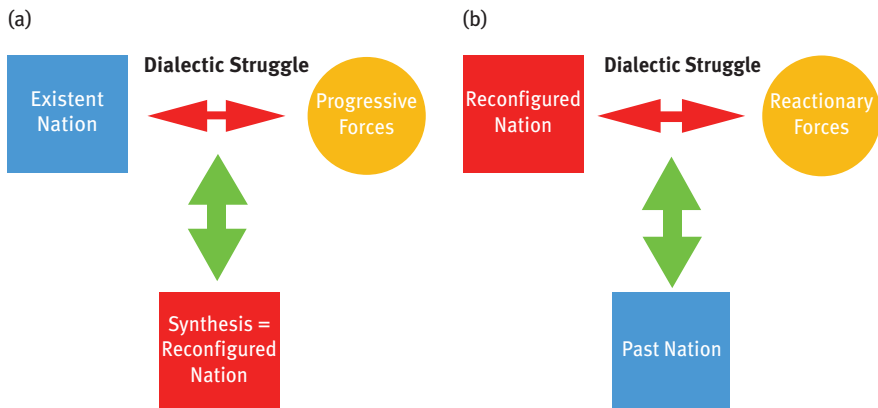


Fig. 2: The two possible dialectic struggles about the nature of the nation. (a) Progressive national reconfiguration, (b) Reactionary national reconfiguration.

¹⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 2012 [1992]). On Hegel’s views, see Moses Rubinstein, *Die logischen Grundlagen des Hegelschen Systems und das Ende der Geschichte* (Halle: Kaemmerer, 1906); Otto Pöggeler, *Ein Ende der Geschichte? Von Hegel zu Fukuyama* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1995); Henk de Berg, *Das Ende der Geschichte und der bürgerliche Rechtsstaat: Hegel – Kojève – Fukuyama* (Tübingen: Francke, 2007).

¹⁸ Jeff Maskovsky, “Toward the Anthropology of White Nationalist Postracialism,” *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 1 (2017): 433–440.

It is important, now that Trump's negative influence, at least on the level of political decisions, has ended, to prevent this dialectic struggle of opinions from reaching a status where the reactionary and populist nationalists achieve a secession of their own nation from the ideal the US nation represents. As long as their basic values are accepted, these will suffice to keep the American people together, although a nation also represents a consensus of the people who share it, which means not all wishes will be fully addressed in the end.

Considering the dialectic struggle that prevents the reconfiguration of nations, it is important to highlight that nationalist populists, who argue for an unchallenged continuation of an, in a way, outdated nation, will use a narrative based on a sense of decline or a menace of social degradation and cultural destruction. Nationalist populists are therefore an expression of an ongoing dialectic conflict between progressive forces that intend to reshape the nation and those who want to prevent it. Depending on the national achievements (Fig. 2b), one could also argue that they represent reactionary forces that intend to undo previous dialectic developments to return to a status quo ante of the nation. No matter which is the case, the populist-nationalist narrative will argue that those who are in favor of traditional values and their expression in and through the nation are defending what the essence of the nation is, namely its national and homogenous character against all evils that threaten its existence, i.e. foreign elements and values. Taking these theoretical reflections into account, I will now highlight some of the historical discourses about such menaces and threats to show that the arguments and narratives that are often used by populist forces these days are neither new nor really original.

The “Decline of the West” from Gibbon to Spengler

In his *The History of the Decline and the Fall of the Roman Empire* (6 vols., 1776–1788), Edward Gibbon¹⁹ (1737–1794) broadly discussed the end of the Roman Empire. The British historian might not always have been critical with his use of sources and many of his arguments have been disproven since the publication of his work, which is still considered one of the classics about the

¹⁹ Still a recommended biography of Gibbon is Joseph Ward Swain, *Edward Gibbon the Historian* (London: Macmillan, 1966). For an exemplary work on his influence within the field of ancient history, see Johannes Irmscher, *Edward Gibbon und das deutsche Byzanzbild* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1965).

end of the Roman Empire, but Gibbon nonetheless names two main reasons for the latter's decline: first, the Germanic tribes that eventually threatened the existence of the empire not only from without but also from within, and second, the rise of Christianity. For Gibbon, the "decline and fall of the Roman Empire" was "the greatest, perhaps, and most awful scene, in the history of mankind." According to his evaluation, it was the foreign menace that played the most important role:

The various causes and progressive effects are connected with many of the events most interesting in human annals: the artful policy of the Caesars, who long maintained the name and image of a free republic; the disorders of military despotism; *the rise, establishment, and sects of Christianity*; the foundation of Constantinople; the division of the monarchy; *the invasion and settlements of the Barbarians of Germany and Scythia . . .*²⁰

Gibbon's ideas about the end of the Roman Empire would have an important impact on many intellectuals from the late 18th century on,²¹ yet, more importantly, the British historian established the idea that large empires mainly fail due to the increasing influence of foreign elements within them. This idea of a menace to the nation from the outside has been preserved ever since as an important motif or narrative within Western culture and used to make a point against immigration and the inclusion of supposedly "foreign elements" within the nation. Gibbon emphasized the important role of the two aforementioned elements, whose supposedly destructive image was preserved over the course of the centuries and which are still considered dangerous in the current discourse about national security in Europe and North America, as well as in other parts of the world, as 1) the introduction and impact of a new religion, i.e. Islam, although the latter has been a part of Europe and its history for a long time,²² and 2) the arrival, settlement, and growing influence of foreigners, i.e. immigrants and refugees, in Europe and the US.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), whose dialectic has already been mentioned and applied above, was also influenced by Gibbon's work. In

20 Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and the Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 12 (London: Plummer & Brewis, 1820), 431–432. My emphasis.

21 For the impact Gibbon had on Hegel, see Philippe Muller, "Hegel und Gibbon: Oder wie der Philosoph dank der Lektüre des Historikers zu sich selbst findet," in *Hegel in der Schweiz (1793–1796)*, eds. Helmut Schneider and Norbert Waszek (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 145–171.

22 The Italian historian Franco Cardini has highlighted that the relationship between Europe and Islam was and still is a "history of misunderstanding." Franco Cardini, *Europa und der Islam: Geschichte eines Mißverständnisses* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000).

his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1830–1831),²³ the German philosopher tried to reflect upon the universal understanding of the historical developments of the past: “The subject of this course of Lectures is the Philosophical History of the World. And by this must be understood, not a collection of general observations respecting it, suggested by the study of its records, and proposed to be illustrated by its facts, but Universal History itself.”²⁴ For Hegel, history as such only seemed to describe several processes of vanishment, which were used to replace something old and outdated with something new: “history tells us of that which has at one time existed, at another time has vanished, having been expelled by something else. Truth is eternal: it . . . has no history. But if it has a history, and as this history is only the representation of past forms of knowledge, the truth is not to be found in it, for the truth cannot be what has passed away.”²⁵ Regardless of this consideration, Hegel also divided the history of the world into four different eras – the Oriental, the Greek, the Roman, and the German. According to Hegel, the first three had all vanished, and history had reached an ideal that would end the dialectic course of history as such. The political orders that were present in the different time periods – despotism (Oriental world), republicanism (Greco-Roman world), and constitutional monarchy (Prussia and other German states) – as well as their respective forms of history had consequently replaced each other until Hegel’s time.²⁶ His dialectic model described the process of vanishing orders or empires, as they were described as the consequence of an antithesis to an existent political order, which, through a struggle, led to a synthesis and thereby initiated the new era.²⁷ In addition to such dialectic considerations, the European historical experience was also full of foreign invaders that had often threatened the borders and the pure existence of

23 First given as a lecture in Jena (1805/06), the manuscript followed Hegel’s own as well as students’ notes. The lectures were first published in 1833. W. H. Walsh, “Hegel on the History of Philosophy,” *History and Theory* 5, no. 5 (1965): 67.

24 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (Kitchener, ON: Batoche Books, 2001), 14.

25 Hegel, cited in Walsh, “Hegel on the History of Philosophy,” 71.

26 Joshua F. Dienstag, “Building the Temple of Memory: Hegel’s Aesthetic Narrative of History,” *The Review of Politics* 56, no. 4 (1994): 702–703.

27 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegels Dialektik: Sechs hermeneutische Studien* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1980).

the Western order, e.g. the Huns,²⁸ the Vandals, the Hungarians,²⁹ the Vikings,³⁰ the Ottomans, etc. The European continent throughout the ages was therefore supposedly facing the menace of a decline and fall, especially from the perspective of historians and philosophers who were dealing with their national pasts during the “long” 19th century³¹ and who helped to establish national narratives to explain and sanction the idea of the nation in different geographical contexts.

Another philosopher who focused on the decline of the Occident was Oswald Spengler (1880–1936). In his work *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (1918–1922),³² sometimes translated as the *Downfall of the West*), Spengler describes eight different “high cultures” (*Hochkulturen*)³³ that existed throughout history and argues that the latter’s course as such is based on their genesis and decline. Spengler, whose sources are often said to have been the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900),³⁴ clearly follows thoughts about cultural decline that had already been expressed by Gibbon or Hegel, to name just two examples that have been highlighted in this chapter. One can therefore argue that Spengler’s work was a continuation of ideas that

28 For a description of the military impact of the invasions and the formation of the Hunnic Empire, see Hyun Jin Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 43–88.

29 Maximilian Georg Kellner, *Die Ungarneinfälle im Bild der Quellen bis 1150: Von der Gens detestanda zur Gens ad fidem Christi conversa* (Munich: Verlag Ungarisches Institut, 1997); Mechthild Schulze-Dörlamm, “Die Ungarneinfälle des 10. Jahrhunderts im Spiegel archäologischer Funde,” in *Europa im 10. Jahrhundert: Archäologie einer Aufbruchzeit*, ed. Joachim Henning (Mainz: von Zabern, 2002), 109–122.

30 Pierre Bauduin, *Histoire des Vikings: Des invasions à la diaspora* (Paris: Tallandier, 2019).

31 Franz J. Bauer, *Das “lange” 19. Jahrhundert (1789–1917): Profil einer Epoche*, 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2017).

32 Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, 2 vols. (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1922–1923). Volume 1 (*Gestalt und Wirklichkeit*) was originally published in 1918 by Braumüller in Vienna.

33 For a short introduction to Spengler’s work, see Michael Thöndl, “Oswald Spengler: Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte. Erster Band: Gestalt und Wirklichkeit, K. K. Universitäts-Verlagsbuchhandlung G. m.b. H. Wilhelm Braumüller: Wien und Leipzig 1918, 639 S.; zweiter Band: Welthistorische Perspektiven, C. H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung: München 1922, 635 S.,” in *Klassiker der Sozialwissenschaften*, ed. Samuel Salzborn (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016), 79–82.

34 In the preface of the 1922 edition, Spengler himself writes: “I took the method from Goethe and the questions from Nietzsche” (“Von Goethe habe ich die Methode, von Nietzsche die Fragestellungen”). Cited in Hildegard Kornhardt, “Goethe und Spengler,” *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie* 38, no. 4 (1950): 589.

had been reflected upon by historians and philosophers alike during the “long” 19th century, and at its end, Spengler, influenced by the events of the First World War, used them to shape his own narrative about the decline of the Occident.

Regardless of the similarities to former works of other intellectuals, the intent of Spengler’s work was different. For the first time, the German philosopher assumed that someone would be able to predict the course of history through a philosophical reflection on the past.³⁵ *The Decline of the West* “attempted for the first time the venture of predetermining history, of following the still untravelled stages in the destiny of a Culture, and specifically of the only Culture of our time and on our planet which is actually in the phase of fulfillment – the West European-American.”³⁶ Spengler’s aim was to trace the “metaphysical structure of historical humanity” (*metaphysische Struktur der historischen Menschheit*) and to use it to explain the “decline of the Occident,” a phenomenon that includes “all big questions of existence.”³⁷ The downfall of the Occident, however, was inevitable for Spengler, as his comparison with the decline and fall of the “high cultures” of the past was supposed to prove.³⁸ Spengler thought he could “overview the phenomenon of the historical humanity with the eye of a god”³⁹ without himself being part of the actual events, and the philosopher’s work was widely read during the years of the Weimar Republic.⁴⁰ Regardless of this success, however, his idea of the downfall, the *Untergang*, was quite often misinterpreted, and Spengler might actually have felt misunderstood.⁴¹ The idea of the “decline of the West,” especially due to the

35 Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, vol. 1: *Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, 23rd-32nd edition (Munich: C.H.Beck, 1922), 3.

36 Ibid. Translation from Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

37 Ibid., 4.

38 Peter Strasser and Simone Miller, “100 Jahre ‘Untergang des Abendlandes’: Was wollte Oswald Spengler?,” *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, April 22, 2018, https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/100-jahre-untergang-des-abendlandes-was-wollte-oswald.2162.de.html?dram:article_id=416244.

39 Spengler, *Der Untergang*, 136.

40 Barbara Beßlich describes how intellectuals like Thomas Mann were influenced by Spengler’s work in the years during the Weimar Republic. See Barbara Beßlich, *Faszination des Verfalls: Thomas Mann und Oswald Spengler* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2002). For a broader discussion of Spengler’s impact, in particular with regard to the image of Europe during the Weimar Republic, see Irina Knyazeva, *Europavorstellungen der Konservativen Revolution* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2018).

41 Spengler was often cited by National Socialists, who were inspired by his work. To name one example, on 29 April 1925, Goebbels noted the following in his diary: “I am reading: Oswald Spengler, ‘Reconstruction of the German Empire’. This is truly a book of reconstruction.

revolutions of 1917 in Russia and 1918 in Germany as well as the defensive war against an “Eastern Bolshevik menace” that was supposed to save the new European order were also essential elements of National Socialist propaganda.⁴² However, this broad topic shall not be addressed in the remaining part of the present chapter, which instead will take a closer look at more recent events during which this motif and its related images have been revived for populist campaigns and their nationalist demands.

Populist Nationalism and the “Decline of the West”

The Arab Spring(s)⁴³ and the Syrian Civil War⁴⁴ have created turmoil in large parts of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region since 2010/11 and thereby forced people to seek refuge and hope for a better future in other countries. In addition, a stream of migration that was created by a strong north-south divide within the different zones of Wallerstein’s world system, namely between the industrialized core on the one hand and the exploited peripheral and semi-peripheral regions on the other, reached the industrialized states of the European Union in particular. In Europe, the arrival of refugees fueled a debate about migration due to which anti-immigration and anti-Islam organizations, as well as Eurosceptic, neo-populist, and even neo-fascist parties, like the French Front National (since June 2018, the Rassemblement National), the German AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), or the Hungarian Fidesz party, gained or increased their

Full of our thoughts and feelings and desires. One never stops learning with Spengler. Our volkish idiots do not understand him a little bit.” Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1924–1945*, 4th ed., vol. 1, ed. Ralf Georg Reuth (Munich/Zurich: Piper, 2008), 180. For the work Goebbels refers to, see Oswald Spengler, *Neubau des Deutschen Reiches* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1924).

42 For an exemplary discussion, see Frank Jacob, “The Semiotic Construction of Judeo-Bolshevism in Germany, 1918–1933,” in *War and Semiotics: Signs, Communication Systems, and the Preparation, Legitimization, and Commemoration of Collective Mass Violence*, ed. Frank Jacob (London: Routledge, 2020), 106–127.

43 Angelika C. Dankert, *Europe under Pressure: The Development of the European Union under the Influence of the Arab Spring, the Refugee Crisis and the Global Threat of Terrorism* (Marburg: Tectum, 2017); Bernhard Schmid, *Die arabische Revolution? Soziale Elemente und Jugendprotest in den nordafrikanischen Revolten* (Munster: Edition Assemblage, 2011).

44 Adam Baczko, Gilles Dorronsoro and Arthur Quesnay, *Civil War in Syria: Mobilization and Competing Social Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

political influence in some member states.⁴⁵ In France, Marine Le Pen's party, "despite political opponents condemning it as racist, Islamophobic, xenophobic and hate-mongering," has been able to increase its share of the popular vote. In Germany, fascists like Björn Höcke, an important figure on the right wing of the AfD, revived the rhetoric of National Socialism,⁴⁶ warning the German people against "Überfremdung" (foreign infiltration).⁴⁷ Spengler's warning of a cultural downfall, the "decline of the West," was being used as an accusation against Muslim refugees in particular, who resembled, according to populist claims, a threat to Western nations and their traditional values.

Such views were also expressed by popular protest movements in Germany, first and foremost by PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident), whose organizers were able to attract thousands of people to protest in Dresden, where they not only expressed their fears related to immigration but also re-defined slogans from the anti-totalitarian protests against the GDR leadership in the late 1980s, e.g. "Wir sind das Volk!" (We are the people!), which were reinterpreted in a sense that demanded protection from foreign immigrants. The PEGIDA marches directed the anger of the people against those refugees who had supposedly only gone to Germany to exploit the country's social security system,⁴⁸ but the protesters in Dresden also expressed a strong anti-Islamic agenda and demanded that Europe be saved from a cultural decline.⁴⁹ Semiotically, two images were often used by the populist organizers, namely the wave of immigrants and the danger this wave presented with regard to a possible Islamization of the Occident. Considering what has been said before about the narratives that have existed since Gibbon debated the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, it is obvious that these motifs are, in a sense, a revival of pessimistic views about imperial or national declines that were circulating, of course in several different forms, in the late 18th century and throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

45 Angélique Chrisafis, "EU Vote Confirms French Far Right as Macron's Main Opposition," *The Guardian*, May 27, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/may/27/eu-vote-confirms-french-far-right-marine-le-pen-national-rally-as-emmanuel-macron-main-opposition>.

46 Andreas Kemper, "Den 'Kampf um die Sprache gewinnen': Zur NS-Rhetorik des AfD-Politikers Björn Höcke," *Zeitgeschichte-online*, April 1, 2017, <https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/kommentar/den-kampf-um-die-sprache-gewinnen>.

47 Raoul Löbber, "Björn Höcke: Der Volksempfänger," *Die Zeit Online*, January 21, 2019, <https://www.zeit.de/2019/04/bjoern-hoecke-nie-zweimal-in-denselben-fluss-rechtspopulismus>.

48 Klaus J. Bade, "Zur Karriere abschätziger Begriffe in der deutschen Asylpolitik," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 65, no. 25 (2015): 5.

49 Christiane Jacke, "Was will Pegida – und wer steckt dahinter?," *Stern Online*, December 9, 2014, <https://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/pegida-fragen-und-antworten-zu-der-anti-islamisierungsbewegung-3231836.html>.

The political elites in Europe reacted to these developments either by mimicking the rhetoric of the right-wing parties or at least by trying to address the fears of a “foreign takeover.” Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, also reacted when she created the position of a “vice-president for protecting the European way of life.” According to a report in *The Guardian*, “What supposedly threatens the ‘European way of life,’ according to the commission, is migration – the new role incorporates the duties of the previous migration commissioner, bundling together the responsibility for controlling Europe’s external borders with security, employment and education.”⁵⁰ When the EU consequently tries to address the fears of common Europeans, it fuels the narrative of right-wing parties and organizations. The foreign menace, as it has been labeled by different intellectual supporters of right-wing ideas, is now part of an official European agenda and will thereby continue to influence the overall rather negative perception of migration that has intensified again during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵¹

When Thilo Sarrazin’s “anti-Muslim dossier”⁵² *Germany Abolishes Itself* (Deutschland schafft sich ab)⁵³ was published in 2010, he demanded a stop to migration from the MENA region to Germany, as this migration, according to Sarrazin, threatened the German nation and its existence. Five years later, the French writer Michel Houellebecq painted a futuristic picture of an Islam-dominated France in his novel *Submission*.⁵⁴ Both of these books were bestsellers because they were positively perceived by readers who feared the dystopian vision the two books described. The success of Sarrazin and Houellebecq shows how deeply frightened many Europeans are with regard to the immigration of people from the Global South in general and from the Islamic world in particular. These people are not extremists but rather are often misinformed and thereby receptive to the populist as well as extremely nationalist images that have been spread, especially by right-wing media, in the last few years. Two of them shall be

50 Daniel Trilling, “‘Protecting the European Way of Life’ from Migrants is a Gift to the Far Right,” *The Guardian*, September 13, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/13/protecting-europe-migrants-far-right-eu-nationalism>.

51 Steven Vertovec, “Covid-19 und ein Stigma, das bleibt,” *taz*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.mpg.de/14741396/covid-19-und-ein-stigma-das-bleibt>.

52 Christian Geyer, “Thilo Sarrazin: Deutschland schafft sich ab – So wird Deutschland dumm,” *FAZ Net*, August 25, 2010, https://www.phil-fak.uni-duesseldorf.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Institute/Sozialwissenschaften/BF/Lehre/WiSe10_11/KK_Migration_und_Bildung/So%20wird%20Deutschland%20dumm%20.pdf.

53 Thilo Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2012).

54 Michel Houellebecq, *Soumission* (Paris: Éditions J’ai lu, 2015).

taken into closer consideration here, namely the wave of immigrants as well as the Islamization of the West.

The Wave of Immigrants and the Islamization of Europe

When immigrants tried to reach Europe via the Balkan route or by crossing the Mediterranean Sea, they were often referred to as a wave that threatened Western societies.⁵⁵ Only secured borders that had turned the continent into a “fortress” were considered the right method to defend Western culture and the societies that represent it. The fear of foreign infiltration and cultural exchange, i.e. the Islamization of the Occident, increased and historically revived semiotic traditions that had existed in Europe since the Turks besieged Vienna in 1683. However, it was not only the continental press that often expressed such fears, as British newspapers were “the most aggressive in reporting on Europe’s ‘migrant’ crisis,” and its “right-wing press consistently endorsed a hardline anti-refugee and migrant, Fortress Europe approach.”⁵⁶ The vote for Brexit was ultimately also stimulated by anti-immigration sentiments, which had been used by nationalist populists to rally against the European Union and the dangers continued British membership would present with regard to the menace of uncontrolled immigration to the United Kingdom. Obviously, “[p]ride in the nation was stronger than the wish to remain part of a union that is supposedly based on humanitarian values. One could argue that British nationalism is particularly disastrous, as it destroys the nation state itself while claiming to defend its heritage in a way that rather suits nineteenth-century nationalism.”⁵⁷

The anti-European populists in Britain consequently revived a rhetoric of defense that can be traced back to the Victorian age, when the famous British historian Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859), in his *Lays of Ancient*

55 Joonyeop Baek, “Visual Metaphorical Conceptualization of the Syrian Refugees Crisis in Political Cartoons” (MA thesis, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, 2016).

56 Mike Berry, Iñaki Garcia-Blanco, and Kerry Moore, “UK Press is the Most Aggressive in Reporting on Europe’s ‘Migrant’ Crisis,” *The Conversation*, March 14, 2016, <http://theconversation.com/uk-press-is-the-most-aggressive-in-reporting-on-europes-migrant-crisis-56083>.

57 Frank Jacob, “The ‘Decline of the West’ as a Semiotic Strategy Against a European Union,” in *Images of Europe: The Union between Federation and Separation*, eds. Francesco Mangiapane and Tiziana Migliore (Cham: Springer, 2021), 98.

Rome (1842), depicted Horatius defending the Sublician bridge against the menace symbolized by the Etruscan army:

Then out spake brave Horatius,
The Captain of the Gate:
"To every man upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late.
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his Gods."⁵⁸

The Brexiteers claimed to defend the integrity of the British nation and the Western traditions and values it had represented for such a long time. At the same time, the "greatness" of the British Empire was conjured up, and revisionist historians tried to rewrite an imperial history that is supposed to contribute to a strong and proud British nation.⁵⁹ Of course, this is not an exclusively British debate: nationalist forces in other countries also warn their governments and the public of the negative impact they anticipate to be a consequence of this seemingly unstoppable wave of immigrants that threatens to destroy everything Western culture supposedly represents.⁶⁰

One aspect that is considered the main threat to the "European way of life" and a consequence of unrestricted immigration – as it shocked EU member states in 2015 and against which many populists have tried to stir up feelings – is the idea that the arrival of large numbers of Muslims would lead to the Islamization of the West. Considering that most Syrian refugees did not reach Europe but are currently living in neighboring countries, e.g. Lebanon,⁶¹ this fear is out of proportion to the reality. The actual number of refugees who have reached

⁵⁸ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The Lays of Ancient Rome* (London: Longman, 1847), 56. My emphasis.

⁵⁹ Jeremy Black, *Imperial Legacies: The British Empire Around the World* (New York: Encounter Books, 2019). For a critical review of Black's "alternative account" (Black, *Imperial Legacies*, ix) of the history of the British Empire, see Kim A. Wagner, "Imperial Legacies by Jeremy Black Review – Whitewash for Britain's Atrocities," *The Guardian*, August 10, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/10/imperial-legacies-jeremy-black-review-empire-multiculturalism>.

⁶⁰ Constant Méheut, "New Military Letter Warning of 'Brewing' Civil War Prompts Outrage in France," *The New York Times*, May 12, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/12/world/europe/france-letter-military-civil-war-warning.html>.

⁶¹ Anchal Vohra, "Lebanon Is Sick and Tired of Syrian Refugees," *Foreign Policy*, July 31, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/07/31/lebanon-is-sick-and-tired-of-syrian-refugees/>.

Europe since 2015 does not suffice to sanction the expressed fears, but problems and negative events are usually taken as an invitation by populists to demand a better defense of their nation in particular and Western values and traditions in general:

It was and still is feared that larger Muslim communities would change the internal dynamics within European societies and lead to a civilizational decline. Many cartoons and caricatures consequently highlighted the dangers related to Muslim immigration. Discussions about European values were often mixed with Islamophobic statements, and the stereotype of the Muslim terrorist was repeated again and again.⁶²

Terrorist attacks in Berlin, Brussels, Nice, Paris, and other cities in Europe⁶³ naturally stimulated the fears of many people, but this does not mean that the majority of refugees from the MENA region are dangerous. However, for the populist narratives of the “decline of the West,” such events are more than welcome, as they can be exploited to the fullest to prove that predictions like those of Sarrazin and Houellebecq are not as dystopian as less nationalist media and experts would consider them. Anti-immigration and anti-Islam discourses, like the debate in Germany about the prohibition of minarets in 2016, could consequently be instrumentalized by right-wing parties like the AfD.⁶⁴

Conclusion

Although the modern nation state is not endangered by migration at all,⁶⁵ the so-called “refugee crisis” since 2015 challenges the West as it changes its societies, which now have to deal with larger groups of people who represent cultural and religious differences. These people demand a diversification of the existent nation, which is why reactionary populist forces, who argue that they are defending the traditional image of the nation against such a transformation, can use the fears of common people, who feel threatened by culturally different

⁶² Jacob, “The ‘Decline of the West’ as a Semiotic Strategy,” 98.

⁶³ Marc Helbing and Daniel Meierrieks, “Terrorism and Migration: An Overview,” *British Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (2020): 977–996.

⁶⁴ FAZ Online, “Islamkritik: Petry fordert Minarett-Verbot in Deutschland,” *FAZ Online*, April 29, 2016, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/islamkritik-petry-fordert-minarett-verbot-in-deutschland-14206046.html>.

⁶⁵ Frank Jacob and Adam Luedtke, “Introduction,” in *Migration and the Crisis of the Modern Nation State?*, eds. Frank Jacob and Adam Luedtke (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2018), v–xiv.

and unknown elements, i.e. the foreign “Other,” to gain political influence, leading to tremendously challenging decisions, like the Brexit vote in the UK. Recent years have shown that nationalist populism has actually been able to change the rather liberal political climate that had been in place since the end of the Cold War, leading to a tangible revival of nationalism.⁶⁶ Populist narratives, however, often rely on images based on stereotypes and prejudices that are used to demonize the immigrant community and revive the menace of a “decline of the West” that has been debated by European intellectuals since the late 18th century.

Regardless of such populist arguments, European societies, as well as American society, will necessarily change. Whether the re-definition of the nation is reached peacefully or whether this reconfiguration demands a violent toll will ultimately be decided by the people. The more of the latter who are attracted by populist nationalism, the more violent the process will probably become. It would be wiser to learn more about the Other first instead of solely condemning people who have tried to save their own lives by escaping war and destruction for their ancestry, religion, or fate. For them, Europe was the promised land, a place where liberty, equality, and fraternity represented the basis of a peaceful modernity, rather than being the hotbed of populist nationalism that had destroyed those people’s homes in the first place.

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⁶⁶ For a detailed discussion of these developments, see Frank Jacob and Carsten Schapkow, eds., *Nationalism in a Transnational Age: Irrational Fears and the Strategic Abuse of Nationalist Pride* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021).

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4 Populism in Russian Political Discourse

Introduction

We want to start with a question: can we discuss populism using the example of Russia, bearing in mind the prevailing view of populism as an imminent deficit of a democratic political system? Can we talk about populism in a semi-authoritarian regime? Some deny that Russia is populist: “Populist leaders adore connecting with people and can spend hours talking to them . . . Putin’s regime is the opposite: he famously avoids public politics and refuses to take part in the debates.”¹ The populist leader is (traditionally) expected to be politically active and able to mobilize the opposition, while the political regime in Russia does not. Jussi Lassila does not observe the conflict inherent in populism between “the elite” and “the people” in the Kremlin’s symbolic-political legitimation.² Lassila also denies that the Russian government’s populist identification is based on morally determined straightforward antagonisms: “Russia’s post-imperial uncertainty fits poorly with populism’s emotionally-driven identification between ‘us’ and ‘them’.”³

Russian official politics has demonstrated a combination of abstract ideational orientations rather than any populist-like concreteness that increases proximity with “the people” by valorizing the people-centrism with clear-cut enemy images.⁴ Luke March, in turn, points to the poor structural conditions needed to allow populism to emerge in Russia. From his point of view, Russian politics lacks pluralism. Vladimir Putin is an anti-populist leader who only employs “populist rhetoric” while remaining elitist and co-optive, oppressing social movements and “regarding genuine populism as a dangerous threat” to his rule.⁵

“Patrimonial legacies limit populism,” March states.⁶ In his view, populism is more a feature of opposition parties and campaigns than it is of executive

1 Grigoriy Yudin and Ilya Matveyev, “A Politician Without a People: Is It Right to Refer to Putin as a Populist?” [in Russian], *Republic*, May 12, 2017, <https://republic.ru/posts/82802>.

2 Jussi Lassila, “Putin as a Non-Populist Autocrat,” *Russian Politics* 3, no. 2 (2018): 178.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*, 194.

5 Luke March, “Populism in the Post-Soviet States,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 214.

6 *Ibid.*, 228.

power: “The twin pressures of dominant authoritarian/clientelist elites and weak societal pluralism/mobilization mean that populism’s ability to sustain itself in office is far poorer even than in a more developed democratic system.”⁷ Lassila notes that “Putin’s anti-institutionalist position has not manifested by increasing proximity with the people with clear-cut ‘other,’ not even by evoking to the people in his speeches.”⁸ Lassila also does not see “sincere populist identification as a form of moral politics based on straightforward antagonisms.”⁹

In contrast, M. Steven Fish,¹⁰ Tatiana Zhurzhenko,¹¹ and others see the populism of official Russian politics as manifested through an anti-liberal, conservative discourse that appeals to sexist, anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQ+ symbols in domestic and foreign policy. Fish also sees the extraordinary personalization of power in Russia as a populist feature. Fish goes on to argue that there are only two politicians in Russia, Vladimir Putin and Alexei Navalny,¹² and the policy of the state, as well as the responses of the opposition, are populist. Russian political representation is divided into two camps: United Russia (Putin’s ruling party) versus “Russia without Putin.” Political rhetoric is essentially limited to the dichotomy of being for or against Putin.¹³

The Russian state’s “parapolitics” aims at “the inscription of oppositional demands and the cooption of dissidents.”¹⁴ Philipp Casula considers Russian populism to work “from above” but while completely obeying the Laclauian understanding of populism “from below”: “It has attempted to construct a people, to divide the political space and create various enemies, and to produce collective symbols.”¹⁵ According to Casula, Russian politics is accompanied by depoliticization and de-antagonization, which are clear signs of its populist nature.¹⁶

7 Ibid.

8 Lassila, “Putin as a Non-Populist Autocrat,” 180.

9 Ibid.

10 M. Steven Fish, “The Kremlin Emboldened: What is Putinism?,” *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 4 (2017): 61–75.

11 Tatiana Zhurzhenko, “The Importance of Being Earnest: Putin, Trump and the Politics of Sincerity,” *Eurozone*, February 26, 2018, <https://www.eurozine.com/importance-earnest-putin-trump-politics-sincerity/>.

12 Fish, “The Kremlin Emboldened,” 69.

13 Ibid.

14 Philipp Casula, “Sovereign Democracy, Populism, and Depoliticization in Russia: Power and Discourse during Putin’s First Presidency,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 3 (2013): 8.

15 Sofia Tipaldou and Philipp Casula, “Russian Nationalism Shifting: The Role of Populism since the Annexation of Crimea,” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 27, no. 3 (2019): 349.

16 Casula, “Sovereign Democracy,” 8.

This populist politics internally homogenizes and presents “the people” as a unified One. It constructs the people while trying to overcome all internal divisions, including ethnic nationalism, and antagonizes the historical enemies of the Soviet identity: corrupt elites, “fascism,” and the West.¹⁷ The theme of nationalism, attractive by itself, cannot serve as mobilizing content in modern Russia because of the risk of increasing ethnic tensions within the country and because of the need to work on the integration of migrants in Russia.¹⁸ Thus, conservatism comes to replace nationalism. In contrast with nationalism, conservatism stigmatizes sexual rather than ethnic minorities, which becomes more effective and meets less resistance in the move toward internal/domestic depoliticization.

As one can see, the description of Russian populism, where it is seen at all, is not based on populism’s traditional features, such as the presence of antagonism between the elite and the people, the close emotional connection of a charismatic leader with the people, an expressive and passionate way of political campaigning, and other forms of political activism and mobilization among its supporters. The Manichean opposition between the pure people and the corrupt elites lies at the core of the populist ideology, but today this synthesis is complicated by the complication of the frame of reference in which it experiences new interpretations. In the context of globalization, populism is a changing political discourse: the frame of reference increasingly has international connections.

We demonstrate how Russian populism can be identified and explained through a Russian international relations frame, not simply through a Russian national politics frame. Based on Ernesto Laclau’s conception of discursive populism, we construct the connection between the lack of necessary signifiers in political language and the likelihood of the formation of populist sentiments and argue that the symbolic deficit of political language in Russia allows an equivalential chain of Russian populism to be built. We consider the internal political discourse of Russia to be a political discourse that is poor in political signifiers and rich in the symbols and semantics of consumption imagery dominating the interpretations of politics. This consumption imagery is a socially experienced economic deficit, translated into discursive symbolism, which compensates for the symbolic shortcomings of Russian political language. Thus, Russia’s inclusion on the international economic and political agenda, as well as the (pseudo) threat of the penetration of Western discourse, compel official Russian politics to

¹⁷ Tipaldou and Casula, “Russian Nationalism Shifting,” 370.

¹⁸ Marlene Laruelle, “Conservatism as the Kremlin’s New Toolkit,” *Russian Analytical Digest* 138 (2013): 2–4.

develop discursive means of defense. The apolitical, conflict-free, de-antagonized discourse of the “internal agenda” becomes political in the foreign policy frame of the struggle against the antagonistic West, whose empty signifiers are only *strong politics* in the dominant Russian domestic political discourse.

The novelty of our approach to explaining the roots of Russian populism is that it is global, as little previous research has looked at Russian populism beyond the internal political context. Such an approach to identifying populism in a political landscape opens up new possibilities for better understanding and preventing populist movements throughout the post-communist space.

We believe that Russia’s inclusion on the international economic and political agenda, even while maintaining its authoritarian politics, makes it open to the *formation* of a political identity in the context of its international relations. We can say that populism in Russia appeared as a result of its (albeit partial) democratization and as a result of the opening of Russia to the international community. The Russian political regime is not a dictatorship but a hybrid form of semi-authoritarianism. The hybridization of authoritarian regimes leads to new types of authoritarianism with formally existing, but not functioning, democratic institutions.¹⁹ The political regime in Russia presupposes political competition and electoral procedures as the main legitimizing mechanisms for a change of power. Russian politics is still competitive as its competitiveness is still set by the formally existing democratic institutions, and, while these are largely devoid of their communication and representative functions, they determine the political discourse through confrontation in the symbolic politics of the ruling power and the opposition.

In what follows, we demonstrate the nature of political discourse in Russia, why populism in Russia exists, and how it manifests itself in Russian political discourse. Our analysis starts with a brief overview of examples of populism in Western Europe and the USA to set the stage for an in-depth analysis of Russian political discourse. Drawing from Laclau, we then argue that the symbolic deficit of political language in Russia allows an equivalential chain of Russian populism to be built. Next, we show how the populist political discourse of the external and the internal blends to form a core of the Russian political discursive identity. Finally, we identify signifiers of foreign policy in Russian populism. We conclude that the internal political discourse of Russia is one that is

¹⁹ Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002): 5–21; Larry Diamond, “Elections Without Democracy: Thinking About Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21–35.

poor in political signifiers and rich in the symbols and semantics of consumption imagery dominating the interpretations of politics.

Populism in Western Democracies

Neoliberal financial policies and trade liberalization are often accompanied by the further impoverishment of third-world countries and the growth of migration problems in the countries of the West. In addition, the corruption of national politicians and the absence of serious political and financial consequences for banking corporations have intensified the resentment instrumentalized by populists. According to Taggart, it was European integration and globalization that reinforced European populism.²⁰ Following Paul Taggart, populism in Western Europe today mobilizes the globalization of “losers” against the globalization of “winners” through the defense of the nation-state and national community.²¹ The focus on European integration is therefore linked to larger globalizing trends. Mainstream political parties are in decline. This is accompanied by the emergence of new forms of populist movement parties and the general crisis of political representation in long-consolidated Western democracies.²² Populism is becoming more informal, ad hoc, discontinuous, context-sensitive, and often egalitarian.²³ Jean L. Cohen points to the erasure of national borders and the very mode of “thin-centered ideology”: “This entails constructing a frontier between ‘us’ and ‘them’, but the ‘them’ is never only the establishment – it invariably includes the parts of the population unallied with the populist party movement who may be stigmatized as elites, or outsiders or as undeserving populations coddled by elites.”²⁴

To better understand this juxtaposition, it might be helpful to consider Francisco Panizza’s example of two types of populism in American politics.²⁵ The first fits perfectly with the epistemological tradition of most studies of

20 Paul Taggart, “Populism in Western Europe,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 249–264.

21 *Ibid.*, 260.

22 Jean L. Cohen, “Hollow Parties and Their Movement-ization: The Populist Conundrum,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 45, no. 9–10 (2019): 1084–1105.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*, 1096.

25 Francisco Panizza, “Populism and Identification,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 407–425.

populism. This is the example of Bernie Sanders. The political divide was defined by Sanders in anti-establishment terms: Sanders called for a “political revolution” against the “billionaires and oligarchs” who had hijacked the country’s political system.²⁶ However, this mode of populism was inferior in this competition to the second type, the populism of Donald Trump, which offered a “more comprehended populism mode” based on the social-cultural divide.²⁷ Trump’s populism was not ideological and was well within the established ideological contradictions of the US party system.

This example is interesting because the antagonization and discursive construction of the people occurs on the part of someone who is not ideologically involved in party competition. Yes, formally, Trump belongs to the Republican Party, but in fact he is a “true outsider” for this party, as well as for the entire political party system in the United States.²⁸ It is often not about (re)shaping identities within the framework of active institutionalized political communication. Populism is not permanent political participation.²⁹ It is about the manipulation of “old” identities. Jan-Werner Müller successfully conveys the essence of these processes using the example of the populist construction of the people in Hungary, where “a referendum isn’t meant to start an open-ended process of deliberation among actual citizens to generate a range of well-considered popular judgments; rather, the referendum serves to ratify what the populist leader has already discerned to be the genuine popular interest as a matter of identity, not as a matter of aggregating empirically verifiable interests.”³⁰ Müller writes that populist movements are no longer “protest” movements but formations with more permanent identification.³¹ In the mediatized space of international politics, identity politics is becoming more and more effective. It is not ideological restrictions but special stylistic features and rhetoric that are “often expected to find more space in the media compared to other discourses . . . , which make them attractive to media outlets interested in generating controversies in order to attract their audience.”³²

26 Ibid., 416–417.

27 Ibid., 417.

28 Ibid.

29 Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 29.

30 Ibid.

31 Jan-Werner Müller, “Democracy and Disrespect,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 45, no. 9–10 (2019): 1208–1221.

32 Luca Manucci, “Populism and the Media,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 472.

The resources of political opponents are not equal, but these struggles and politics as such are constituted by a contingent appeal to a democratic constitution and formally existing democratic institutions and procedures.³³ Nadia Urbinati notes that “populism does not suspend free and competitive elections, nor does it deny them a legitimate role. In fact, electoral legitimacy is a key defining dimension of populist regimes as majoritarianist.”³⁴ Modern (Russian) authoritarianism also does not deny the legitimizing role of competitive elections, shifting the emphasis of reducing freedoms not to the satisfaction of political preferences but to their formation. The preservation of democratic institutions in the form of electoral authoritarianism, which is not viable under conditions of complete autarchy and complete isolation, is a way for authoritarian politics to survive under the conditions of a global political and economic liberal order.³⁵

Discursive Populism in Russia

Is official Russian politics populist? Should populism be measured by mobilization? To begin with, populism should not always be mobilizing.³⁶ Often, populism in Russia is not about mobilization but support, especially if we mean not oppositional populism as part of a democratic regime but “cultural” or discursive populism: “Many populist leaders substitute ‘rule by the people’ with ‘rule for the people,’ with the leader supposedly embodying the people’s will. In this sense, populism without participation is not an incoherent proposition.”³⁷ The low degree of political participation in Russia should not be misleading regarding the nature of Russian politics as populist or non-populist. Populism in Russia cannot be defined by the number of voters who turn out for elections and by the level of charisma of a political leader (as many do when surveying Russia). This study, with a focus on Russian populism, examines a discursive structure

33 Andreas Schedler, “The Contingent Power of Authoritarian Elections,” in *Democratization by Elections: A New Mode of Transition*, ed. Staffan I. Lindberg (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 291–313.

34 Nadia Urbinati, “Liquid Parties, Dense Populism,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 45, no. 9–10 (2019): 1071.

35 Michael Bernhard, Amanda B. Edgell, and Staffan I. Lindberg, “Institutionalising Electoral Uncertainty and Authoritarian Regime Survival,” *European Journal of Political Research* 59, no. 2 (2020): 465–487.

36 Laruelle, “Conservatism as the Kremlin’s New Toolkit,” 4.

37 Tina Burrett, “Charting Putin’s Shifting Populism in the Russian Media from 2000 to 2020,” *Politics and Governance* 8, no. 1 (2020): 196.

of citizens' demands in a systemic fashion and argues that such a structure bears responsibility for the rise of populist antagonism.

In general, we can say that approaches to the study of populism are divided into three main areas: the ideational approach,³⁸ which describes authentic people in their confrontation with a corrupt elite; populism as a discursive style, which does not take the form of ideology but rather political articulation around a dichotomy between 'them' and 'us';³⁹ and political strategy.⁴⁰ Following de la Torre, we argue that Russian populism is discursive, and we focus on the state of the symbolic instruments of the political language of Russians. For Laclau, the struggle for power is essentially a discursive undertaking. Following Laclau, the construction of the people occurs because of social demands, unrealized by the national institutional system, which are further transformed by the logic of the equivalential chain, as a result of which the dichotomization of the social space through the creation of an internal frontier occurs.⁴¹ Totality in politics takes into account its internal heterogeneous nature. As a possibility of overcoming this heterogeneity on the way to homogeneity and totality, Laclau formulates the rhetorical grounds for its appearance: "totality is both impossible and necessary."⁴²

Laclau argues that rhetoric can do it – but how exactly? To explain the formation of empty signifiers in the order of formation of the equivalential chain, Laclau uses the concept of catachresis. When Laclau begins defining catachresis, he refers to Cicero's description of language as "too poor," as a shortage of words. In rhetoric, catachresis is the attribution of a figurative term when a literal one is lacking or is "the nearest available term to describe something for which no actual (i.e., proper) term exists."⁴³ In Laclau, we see a conceptualization of the relationship between the quality of political language and the degree of effectiveness of rhetorical tools in the construction of "the people." Panizza also drew attention to the connection between the lack of necessary signifiers in political language and the likelihood of the formation of populist sentiments: "At their most radical, populist practices operate within a social space in which people

38 Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

39 Carlos de la Torre, "The Resurgence of Radical Populism in Latin America," *Constellations* 14, no. 3 (2007): 384–397.

40 Raúl L. Madrid, "The Rise of Ethnopolitism in Latin America," *World Politics* 60, no. 3 (2008): 475–508.

41 Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London/New York: Verso, 2005).

42 *Ibid.*, 70.

43 Patricia Parker, "Metaphor and Catachresis," in *Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice*, eds. John Bender and David E. Wellberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 60.

have grievances, desires, needs and wants that have not yet been constituted as political demands or, to put it in another way, people do not know how to name what they are lacking.”⁴⁴ Following Laclau, the “impossible” totality of politics is represented by an empty signifier, which occupies the place of the “missing” or “failed” object and whose main task is to confer the fictive coherence on the objectivity. Thus, the central role of catachresis “can be generalized if we face the fact that any distortion of meaning has, at its root, the need to express something that the literal term would simply not transmit. In that sense, catachresis is more than a particular figure: it is the common denominator of rhetoricity as such. . . . [I]f the empty signifier arises from the need to name an object which is both impossible and necessary, from that zero-point of signification which is nevertheless the precondition for any signifying process, the hegemonic operation will be catachrestical through and through.”⁴⁵ A successful chain of equivalence depends on the symbolic “poverty” of the populist symbols: “The so-called ‘poverty’ of the populist symbols is the condition of their political efficacy – as their function is to bring to equivalent homogeneity a highly heterogeneous reality, they can only do so on the basis of reducing to a minimum their particularistic content.”⁴⁶ Michael Kaplan notes that Laclau’s rhetorical construction of society implies a “contingent, discursive, and fundamentally tropological process that brings objective reality into existence by imposing on an array of heterogeneous elements the semblance of a structure within which they acquire identity/meaning.”⁴⁷

We proceed from the premise that the less authentic symbolic content of the political language is developed, the more rhetoric can act as linguistic techniques that are used strategically. David Howarth and Steven Griggs also point to Laclau’s position to highlight tropes and metaphors as articulating competing demands in the policy process, operating as “empty signifiers that name the ‘absent fullness’ of the disparate identities – their lack of unity and community.”⁴⁸ *The politics of metaphor* determines the choice of the figurative terms we use to approach political issues. The metaphorical style exploits and compensates for the symbolic poverty of a language by naming the un-nameable.

⁴⁴ Francisco Panizza, “Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy,” in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London: Verso, 2005), 10.

⁴⁵ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 72.

⁴⁶ Ernesto Laclau, “Populism: What’s in a Name?,” in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London: Verso, 2005), 39–40.

⁴⁷ Michael Kaplan, “The Rhetoric of Hegemony: Laclau, Radical Democracy, and the Rule of Tropes,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 43, no. 3 (2010): 258.

⁴⁸ David Howarth and Steven Griggs, “Metaphor, Catachresis and Equivalence: The Rhetoric of Freedom to Fly in the Struggle over Aviation Policy in the United Kingdom,” *Policy and Society* 25, no. 2 (2006): 30–31.

The Symbolic Deficit of Political Language and the Equivalential Chain of Russian Populism

Political and socio-economic transformations are not always accompanied by corresponding discursive changes. As Pierre Bourdieu noted, “a change of status does not necessarily imply the immediate changing of one’s ‘system of acquired dispositions’, that is, one’s ‘categories of perception and assessment’.”⁴⁹ In other words, while socio-political conditions change, the “level of cultural knowledge” necessary for explaining and understanding these changes may lag.

Previous research has already noted that the discursive emphasis on avoiding *the repetition of the past* instead of on *building a new future* hinders the development of new political identities as they remain locked within the old (e.g., Soviet) frame of symbolic references.⁵⁰ As Katherine Verdery⁵¹ and Serguei Alex Oushakine have both convincingly demonstrated, “the lack of mediating structures coincides with the lack of ‘tools’ with which to understand the transformation.”⁵² Such “arrested discursive creativity”⁵³ causes discord between the necessity to internalize social change, which has not been personally experienced, and the actual presence of already familiar, available, and articulated cultural signifiers. In particular, Oushakine noted the underdevelopment of the institutionalized field producing the new Russian culture and, accordingly, the “cultural inability to symbolically express the on-going social changes (or already changed reality) accompanied by regression to the symbolic forms of the past period.”⁵⁴

Exploring the political discourse of the 1990s in Russia, Mary McAuley⁵⁵ noted that there was an acute shortage of public language that was emotionally neutral and moderately abstract, capable of attaining generalizable qualities. In her article on the perturbations of public language in the era of perestroika, McAuley defined

49 Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

50 Michael Urban, “The Politics of Identity in Russia’s Postcommunist Transition: The Nation against Itself,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 3 (1994): 733–765.

51 Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999).

52 Serguei Alex Oushakine, “The Quantity of Style: Imaginary Consumption in the New Russia,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 17, no. 5 (2000): 106.

53 *Ibid.*, 102.

54 *Ibid.*, 107.

55 Mary McAuley, *Russia’s Politics of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

the practice of public discourse as “the linguistic chaos that came when the words were released.”⁵⁶ McAuley noted that the communicative practices of citizens and representatives of the state differ slightly and are made in two styles of speech that are polar opposites: one of them can be designated as a “kitchen language” and the other as a “bureaucratic language of officialdom.”⁵⁷ An interesting example of the symbolic poverty of political language in Russia is the example of the National Bolshevik Party (NBP), also known as the Natsbols movement, through which the discursive non-autonomy of certain parts of the political field in Russia is shown.⁵⁸ The NBP, from the point of view of Tomi Huttunen and Jussi Lassila, is a political movement that discursively belongs to the “literary artistic field” that “is maintaining its weak level of structuration, since this means, according to Lotman, the constant emergence of new cultural meanings and texts but not any established languages.”⁵⁹ The meaning of such discourse “points at the use of an old word in describing something new that does not have a name yet.”⁶⁰ A sample of this discourse can suggest “symbolic aphasia.”⁶¹ Citing, among others, Laclau, Huttunen, and Lassila characterize the NBP’s political discourse as semantically poor and as an example of catachresis. The authors understand catachresis as a “socio-semantic misuse of conventional concepts as well as a practice in which political identifications blur the distinctions defining established political activity.”⁶² As a result, political semantics is dominated by the semantics of “the literary field,” which illustrates “the importance of literary and artistic idols alongside with the commonly and collectively felt rootlessness and fatherlessness.”⁶³

The “literary artistic field” is not the only area in which Russian political language is semantically poor. Examples of the economization or marketization of political discourse are much more common. Andrey S. Makarychev has written the following about the displacement of political debate from the state-controlled sphere and the process of the “marketization of the state”: “The state under Putin was eager to become a ‘service provider,’ a type of corporate unit that, in accordance with business thinking, has to restructure its social commitments

56 *Ibid.*, 281.

57 *Ibid.*

58 Tomi Huttunen and Jussi Lassila, “Zakhar Prilepin, the National Bolshevik Movement and Catachrestic Politics,” *Transcultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (2016): 136–158.

59 *Ibid.*, 144.

60 *Ibid.*, 145.

61 Oushakine, “The Quantity of Style.”

62 Huttunen and Lassila, “Zakhar Prilepin, the National Bolshevik Movement and Catachrestic Politics,” 140.

63 *Ibid.*

and outsource the most ineffective and troublesome functions.”⁶⁴ He accurately defines the landmark changes in Russian politics resulting from depoliticization as homogenization and de-antagonization. We consider his description of the efforts of Russian official politics to depoliticize social institutions and practices to be rather accurate but not sufficient to understand the totality of this discourse in Russia. Such attempts to depoliticize the political space from above would be ineffective if they were not generally embedded into the dominant discourse of an old (e.g., Soviet) frame of symbolic references in Russia. Various researchers have demonstrated that the post-Soviet culture of symbolic shortage did not allow a departure from the vocabulary of the consumption genre inherited from the Soviet epoch.⁶⁵ Themes of consumption are central for post-socialist actors because they translate “political and economic processes into immediately understandable and consequential trends experienced by every Russian household.”⁶⁶ Olga Shevchenko further notes that the “[p]erpetual fluctuation of class, citizenship and professional identities only emphasizes the persistence of others, such as kinship and family-based ones. This of course does not necessarily mean that family relations became any more loyal or loving, but simply that they can be experienced as more permanent than other kinds of ties: one could stop being a Soviet citizen or an engineer, but one still remained a daughter, a sister or a wife.”⁶⁷ Scholars have interpreted the consumption imagery of Russian citizens as an effort to “master the practical disorderly environment” in order to acquire “pragmatic competence.”⁶⁸ An exception from “every level of the decision-making process” and a mistrust of the state institutions transformed Russians’ consumption practice to the rational substitution of those bureaucratic institutions that were held responsible for the realization of Russians’ corresponding needs, from healthcare to social security and product certification.⁶⁹ There is ample evidence that consumerist language and the semantics of consumption imagery are the dominant forms of discourse in interpretations of politics. One study revealed that the dominant media discourse to cover the economic crisis in 2018–2019 was structured strictly in utilitarian consumerist symbolism, despite the high political

⁶⁴ Andrey S. Makarychev, “Politics, the State, and De-Politicization: *Putin’s Project Reassessed*,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 55, no. 5 (2008): 65.

⁶⁵ Oushakine, “The Quantity of Style”; Olga Shevchenko, “‘Between the Holes’: Emerging Identities and Hybrid Patterns of Consumption in Post-Socialist Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 54, no. 6 (2002): 841–866; Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*.

⁶⁶ Shevchenko, “Between the Holes,” 848.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 855.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 858.

relevance of the topic.⁷⁰ The symbolic apparatus for describing generally significant, politically relevant problems operates not with the language of the universal symbolism of striving for morality and justice as a way of recognizing the political (conflict's) essence of the causality of a given crisis but with utilitarian language aimed at finding an optimal, effective solution by reducing causality to errors of administrative personnel (officials and business representatives). Consumerist language does not contain signs of institutional discourse in the process of assessing economic problems since the causality of their problems is inherent in this dominant discourse and is not of a socio-political nature.⁷¹ The prioritization and prevalence in Russian political discourse of such semantic figures as “politician-business executive” and the value of the “practical/managerial experience of a politician” occurs precisely through the prism of the symbolic consumerization and economization of political discourse.

The internal political discourse of Russia is a political discourse poor in political signifiers and rich in tropological symbols. This pattern was also methodologically designed by Laclau when he characterized the conditions for the occurrence of an equivalent circuit: “In the case of the ‘people’, as we have seen, the equivalential logic is based on an ‘emptying’ whose consequences are, at the same time, enriching and impoverishing. Enriching: the signifiers unifying an equivalential chain, because they must cover all the links integrating the latter, have a wider reference than a purely differential content which would attach a signifier to just one signified. Impoverishing: precisely because of this wider (potentially universal) reference, its connection with particular contents tends to be drastically reduced.”⁷² In other words, the lack of (political) signifiers in the political language is a gratifying environment for the formation of an equivalential chain. As a result, it provides multiple chances for an empty signifier to be alienated from the initial social demands. The undeveloped symbolic tools of the political language of Russian society look like they do not have sufficient internal differentiations, according to Laclau, to prevent the formation of a chain of equivalences. Hence, the erosion of individual requirements (homogenization) and unification into an empty signifier takes place.⁷³

Social atomization in Russia is also an inherent condition for the formation of an equivalential chain of populist politics. Howarth writes that populist-sensitive politics is characterized by “weak transcendence – a failed unicity – to

⁷⁰ Oleg Kashirskikh, “Utilizatrnny discurse of obschestvenno-politicheskoy povestki in Russian media” [Utility Discourse of Public Political Agenda in the Russian Media], *Kommunikatsii, Media, Dizain* 4 (2017): 67–90.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Laclau, “Populism,” 40.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 39–40.

constitute a progressive coalition of forces.”⁷⁴ Disparate identities arise as a result of failed unicity. Today’s official discourse in Russia seeks to construct a series of equivalential linkages between disparate identities and various populist rhetorical signifiers (e.g., Russia rises from its knees to face the West). How do these disparate identities influence the symbolic instruments of political discourse in Russia? Russian society’s structural conditions, atomization, and social disintegration greatly determine the success of political populism. Laclau writes that the formation of an equivalential circuit is always facilitated by broken social space: “the construction of the ‘people’ will be the attempt to give a name to that absent fullness. Without this initial breakdown of the social order – however minimal that something could initially be – there is no possibility of antagonism, frontier, or, ultimately, ‘people’.”⁷⁵ Zachary Bowden argues that Russia, in that sense, “seems to be the ideal space for positing the people, for the space of Russia is not only discursively divided, but seemed socially broken.”⁷⁶ Its discursive disparity is manifested in the inability to overcome barriers to obtaining the uniform and universal meanings in political discourse that can unite the majority around these signifiers. Today, the non-autonomous political language in Russia is equivalent to heterogeneity, precisely corresponding to the principle that Howarth sees in Laclau: “The greater the number of demands articulated into an equivalential chain across a greater number of social spaces, the greater the degree of populism.”⁷⁷ A large number of unintegrated demands are responsible for social disintegration and atomization, and their unification into an equivalential chain is facilitated by the cathartic nature of their political language. In the case of Russia, this *consumption imagery* is a socially experienced economic deficit, translated into discursive symbolism, which compensates for the *symbolic shortage* of Russian political language. This restricted political language does not allow politics to develop with a differential logic capable of articulating and negotiating demands. Laclau and Panizza recognize that such equivalence is possible only when, in the discursive construction of the people, these very people have something in common (their equivalence, or sameness). Only in the presence of such commonality is an antagonistic attitude toward the Other possible, such as *workers vs. bosses* or *local people vs. emigrants*. In our case, political

74 David Howarth, “Populism in Context,” in *Identity and Politics during the Putin Presidency*, eds. Philipp Casula and Jeronim Perović (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2014), 36.

75 Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 80.

76 Zachary Bowden, “Ordering Chaos: Russian Neo-Fascist Articulation,” in *Identity and Politics during the Putin Presidency*, eds. Philipp Casula and Jeronim Perović (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2014), 260.

77 Howarth, “Populism in Context,” 35.

discourse is articulated in quantitative, consumerist symbols that do not generate integration but equivalence.

External (Internal) Politics: “Uniqueness” and “A Special Way” as the Core of Russian Political Identity

Laclau says that for a chain of equivalence to occur, individual requirements need to have more similarities than differences.⁷⁸ Only in this case can it be united through an element that gives it its integrity, referring to it as a totality through an empty signifier. The internal similarity of this chain in Russia is the depoliticized, consumerist symbolic toolkit of the inherently political demand. We believe that the hegemony of utilitarian and particular symbolic tools in the perception and assessment of politics does not allow the construction of the people in the Russian internal political discourse but only in a frame of global references. This is the distinctive character of Russian populism: the inability to construct meaning through international political discourse and instead the sole utilization of a frame of global references. The refusal of some researchers to see authoritarianism as incompatible with populism⁷⁹ should be reconsidered by taking into account the changing global political space in which authoritarianism is integrated into the international system and develops the new (discursive) strategies it needs to maintain a regime of partial openness. When we talk about populism in a (semi)authoritarian political regime, then, at least in the case of Russia, we are talking about populism not in a national but in an international context.

Politics in Russia, as studies about the setting of the Russian media agenda clearly demonstrate,⁸⁰ is oriented toward confrontation with the West. Russian media latently cover issues of domestic politics in terms of administrative and technical discourse: issues of social policy, personnel issues of officials moving up the career ladder, economic issues, corruption scandals, and stories of criminality.⁸¹ The formation of the totality of discourse occurs exclusively in empty signifiers of antagonism with the West, which itself is one of the key empty

⁷⁸ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.

⁷⁹ Urbinati, “Liquid Parties, Dense Populism.”

⁸⁰ Anastasia Kazun, “Agenda-Setting in Russian Media,” *International Journal of Communication* 14 (2020): 4739–4759.

⁸¹ Makarychev, “Politics, the State, and De-Politicization”; Kashirskikh, “Utilizatny discourse.”

signifiers. Against the background of the deliberate de-antagonization and deprivation of conflict in the language of official politics (*systemic parties, systemic opposition*), this phenomenon fits perfectly into the terms of populism, which usually “seeks a strong concept of ‘the political’ and a disinterest in mere ‘ordinary’ politics or policy.”⁸² Foreign policy is the only *strong politics* in the dominant Russian domestic political discourse. Foreign politics alone has the potential for antagonism. Characteristically, the term “foreign politics” in Russian media is much more often accompanied by this political signifier (politics), while domestic politics is more often defined as the *internal agenda*. Casula, in one of his analyses of Russian populism, argues that the line of antagonism goes between the people and the institutional system: between “bad institutions,” which are not responsive, and “good institutions” (in the Russian case, the president) that side with the people.⁸³

Our observations do not allow us to agree with this thesis. In the political discourse of Russian citizens, which is poor in political signifiers, there is no differentiated understanding of the Russian political structure in the context of determining who is responsible for their grievances. Political language and politics as such in Russia have not yet acquired discursive autonomy, which would allow for a more targeted definition of such a connection. The omnipresentation of an empty signifier of *power*, when citizens describe the state as a political entity, too eloquently indicates the inability to find any differences in the institutional structure of the Russian government. There are also no contradictions at the level of *the elite—the people*, as Lassila rightly points out, as the “absence of populist of identification based on the confrontation between ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’ in the Kremlin’s symbolic-political legitimation is related to the nature of these resources in Russia.”⁸⁴ Again, populism in Russia is not an oppositional force.⁸⁵ The simplified political language of Russians does not see a “deep state” in political Russia, which it could make responsible for unfulfilled demands and unite around the president. Since there is no political identity (for the majority) *within* the country, the antagonistic frontier visible in the hegemonic public discourse of political opposition can only be found in *foreign* politics. Chantal Mouffe describes an essentially similar object, in principle: a state with a concessional democratic regime, which is characterized by the loss of the adversarial nature of

⁸² Andrew Arato, “How We Got Here? Transition Failures, Their Causes and the Populist Interest in the Constitution,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 45, no. 9–10 (2019): 1107.

⁸³ Casula, “Sovereign Democracy,” 10.

⁸⁴ Lassila, “Putin as a Non-Populist Autocrat,” 178.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

politics.⁸⁶ He argues that the loss of internal competitiveness (or conflict) is accompanied by maintaining a frontier outside its borders and the appearance of antagonism, which is framed in a moral vocabulary. However, the logic of political mobilization in moral rather than political terms looks universal enough to be extrapolated to other political regimes, including Russia. Mouffe writes that “politics always entails an us/them distinction. This is why the consensus advocated by the defenders of the ‘non-partisan democracy’ cannot exist without drawing a frontier and defining an exterior, a ‘them’ which assures the identity of the consensus and secures the coherence of the ‘us’. To put it in another way, the consensus at the centre . . . cannot exist without the establishment of a frontier, because no consensus – or no common identity, for that matter – can exist without a frontier. There cannot be an ‘us’ without a ‘them’, and the very identity of a group depends on the existence of a ‘constitutive outside’.”⁸⁷ Non-adversarial internal politics requires the birth of *the antagonistic Other*, who “needs to be condemned morally, not fought politically.”⁸⁸

In other words, the presence of consensus destroys politics, conflict, and differentiation and increases the degree of morality in politics and patriotism, and, at the same time, increases the likelihood of the antagonistic Other. In the case of Russia, we see consensus as a catachrestical quality of perception and assessment of politics and the replacement of *political meanings* with *consumerist*, economized ones. Articulated in quantitative economized discourse, social demands in Russia are not aimed at criticizing the insufficient political representation of citizens. This style of inquiry fully corresponds to the general style of political communication in Russia that has a high degree of personalization and a low level of trust and interest in representative institutions in politics.

Signifiers of Foreign Policy in Russian Populism

The most important empty signifiers in the hegemonic Russian discourse are the signifiers representing the main antagonist: the West. Today, liberal discourse is a constitutive Other, outside the formation of an internal political hegemonic discourse in the construction of the people in Russia. This discourse accompanies the construction of the people of Russia within the framework of

⁸⁶ Chantal Mouffe, “The ‘End of Politics’ and the Challenge of Right-Wing Populism,” in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London: Verso, 2005), 50–72.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

the global mediatized space. It accurately represents all the ideological activities of official Russian politics aimed at the inevitable need to become a part of the world community on its own terms: the concept of sovereign democracy, the Munich speech, the internal–abroad terminology, and the concept of Russia’s special path, to name but a few. All these ideological constructions are part of a conceptually shaped unwillingness to be equally integrated or institutionalized into an international concert and a desire to preserve the mode of interaction with the outside world in terms of the Westphalian system and spheres of influence. In this sense, Russian populism is quite consistent with its standard definition as “anti-status quo discourse.”⁸⁹ However, this consistency is only conceived in the frame of references of international relations, as we refer to the ideological dominance of conventional Western values and opposition to them. Therefore, frames of references that determines this confrontation of Russian populism is that of international politics. Unlike spaces with functioning institutions for the division of power and traditions of protecting their own rights (e.g., political, professional) through a representative institutional system, the undeveloped political language of Russians has nothing with which to oppose the antagonism of its foreign policy. Ilya Yablokov shows that the articulation of the political in the antagonistic terms of the powerful and the underdog (i.e., Russia as a global underdog), or “us and them” in Laclau’s terminology, is better understood in the context of the efforts undertaken by official Russian politicians to integrate themselves into the international media environment in order to influence their representation in international politics.⁹⁰

The signifiers of Russian hegemonic discourse were born in the struggle of Russian electoral authoritarianism for its international autonomy. And populism was the expected response to this struggle. Therefore, all types of political opposition within Russia itself are predicated as *Western* and *liberal*. It is the empty signifiers of foreign policy issues that construct *the people*, whose symbolic instruments do not see a worthy antagonist in the internal political struggle.

Antagonism is also external because Russian society and its representation in the dominant discourse, in its homogeneous particularistic essence, only develops a border when it interacts/collides with universal values. Müller rightly notes that “the core claim of populism is thus a moralized form of antipluralism.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Panizza, “Populism and Identification.”

⁹⁰ Ilya Yablokov, “Conspiracy Theories as a Russian Public Diplomacy Tool: The Case of *Russia Today* (RT),” *Politics* 35, no. 3–4 (2015): 304.

⁹¹ Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 20.

The globalization and mediatization of international and national politics, to a much greater extent than before, leads to “culturalized disagreements”, to a culture war between “cosmopolitan liberals” on one side and unified, authentic, and homogeneous people whose identity is sharply juxtaposed to that of outsiders on the other.⁹² The apolitical, conflict-free, de-antagonized discourse of the “internal agenda” becomes political in the foreign policy frame of the struggle against the antagonistic West. It is highly indicative that references to the “Western political experience” remain equally relevant both for critics of today’s official policy and for its adherents: the West is “a constant comparator against which Russian national qualities are interpreted.”⁹³ The West as a constitutive outsider generates an antagonistic frontier between liberalism and Russian conservatism in the international context of spreading universal “tendencies, associated with the processes of globalization.”⁹⁴ In the meaning of “sovereign democracy,” both words are significant. Formally, rhetorical adherence to democracy in its electoral sense remains part of the hegemonic discourse (by rhetorical adherence, we mean the essence of the regime of electoral authoritarianism that reduces the electoral process solely to a plebiscite – voting without discussion). The meaning “sovereign” has a foreign policy origin: “the ideational foundations of the project, whatever one may think of them . . . are not intended solely for internal and defensive purposes, but should enable Russia to return to the international market of ideas as an active subject of history.”⁹⁵ Sovereign democracy is the essence of the constitutive outside, in Laclau’s terms, the result of the dislocation of Russia’s identity as a result of the collapse of the USSR. Sovereign democracy helps to compensate for the (lack of) fullness of its identification. This slogan makes it possible to appeal to Russian statehood and the legacy of its great-power status. Victoria Hudson notes that, although the original idea of sovereign democracy was “to unite the disparate post-Soviet elites around a vision of achieving successful modernisation in the present,”⁹⁶ it is nonetheless “explicitly concerned with the fate of the Russian (rossiiskii) nation as a whole.”⁹⁷ The concept of a *special path* and sovereignty is also an example of the geopolitical discourse of

92 Müller, “Democracy and Disrespect,” 1208–1209.

93 Lara Ryazanova-Clarke, “The ‘West’ in the Linguistic Construction of Russianness in Contemporary Public Discourse,” in *Understanding Russianness*, eds. Risto Alapuro, Arto Mustajoki, and Pekka Pesonen (London: Routledge, 2012), 12.

94 *Ibid.*, 13.

95 Victoria Hudson, “Sovereign Democracy as a Discourse of Russian Identity,” in *Identity and Politics during the Putin Presidency*, eds. Philipp Casula and Jeronim Perović (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2014), 198.

96 *Ibid.*, 205.

97 *Ibid.*, 206.

Russia as a great power. Appeals to conservative, traditional values are “explicitly presented as an alternative” to Western liberalism.⁹⁸

Characteristically, Russian conservatism is not aimed at presenting Russia as an ethnic identity, but rather as a multi-ethnic society. According to Tipaldou and Casula, the nationalistic notes of Russian populism are not ethnic in nature but are “aimed at uniting the Eurasian nations under Russian leadership.”⁹⁹ As we argued earlier, conservatism functions as a form of de-politicization in a more effective and safer way than nationalism in Russian domestic politics. The potential for nationalism to revive political tensions in Russian domestic politics remains high. Conservatism in Russia, on the other hand, is an “ideology of the lowest cost, targeting the conservative majority.”¹⁰⁰ Like Casula, Marlene Laruelle sees in such an ideology of conservatism a successful ability to create a new space for depoliticized consensus and, at the same time, an ideology of participation in international politics. However, we want to emphasize that Russia’s new conservative turn was not simply a way to follow new trends in global nation branding. Such an amplification of conservatism was a defensive reaction against the possible liberal penetration of the West into Russian domestic politics under the forced conditions of economic and political-institutional coexistence with the countries of the West.

Russian conservatism is a political and cultural category, a special kind of fluctuating signifier in Laclau’s terms, where its political part is the external part that separates itself from the West, while the cultural part unites and depoliticizes possible internal Russian antagonism. Sergei Prozorov argues that “under the banner of conservatism,” the president could present himself as an arbiter, a “new” force standing beyond the confrontation between a nationalist right and a liberal left.¹⁰¹ From this perspective, we see the equivalence of particular demands under one name: “altering the individual demands to the extent necessary to make them fit into a discourse: populism ties previously dispersed demands into a single “parcel” – that is, “a large set of simultaneous demands presented as a unified whole.”¹⁰² In external and internal official political communications, conservatism is regularly articulated in the performance of

98 Marlene Laruelle, *Aleksandr Dugin: A Russian Version of the European Radical Right?* (Occasional Paper #294) (Washington, DC: Kennan Institute, 2006); Olga Oliker, “Putinism, Populism and the Defense of Liberal Democracy,” *Survival* 59, no. 1 (2017): 10.

99 Tipaldou and Casula, “Russian Nationalism Shifting,” 352.

100 Laruelle, “Conservatism as the Kremlin’s New Toolkit,” 2.

101 Sergei Prozorov, “Russian Conservatism in the Putin Presidency: The Dispersion of a Hegemonic Discourse,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 10, no. 2 (2005): 124.

102 Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 82.

aggressive masculinity, which includes sexist statements: “This ‘zero-ideology’ connects political power, sincerity and the rejection of ‘political correctness’ as a form of western hypocrisy. . . . Putin’s sincerity [is] an instrument of re-asserting Russia’s geopolitical status and its ‘sovereignty’ from the global elites.”¹⁰³ Hence, statements concerning non-femininity, non-homosexuality, the defense of the family, strength, dominance, courage, status, masculine privilege, or restrictive emotionality are often seen in the foreign policy discourse of Russia.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Electoral authoritarianism is reluctantly integrated into the system of international relations, which is linked, in addition to formal institutional arrangements, by a common media space. This structural condition creates contingency in Russia’s authoritarian political order, which decisively influences the formation of political discourse. Several authors have already noted multiple signs of the presence of populist politics in Russia: a simplified political space; the depoliticization of political meanings with the recognition of politics as a dirty business and a deliberate policy of depoliticizing the state, and a claim to a special morality, directed toward the conditional West.

The origin and functionality of the dominant Russian political discourse can be considered as populism, in line with Laclau’s concept and Mouffe’s radical concept of democracy. Tropological, political-hegemonic discourse in Russia heavily appeals to non-political signifiers. Such political discourse allows, among other things, the politics of metaphor to designate the way in which we use certain figurative terms rather than others for certain political phenomena. Its metaphorical style exploits the symbolic poverty of the language (e.g., “Russia is rising from its knees”). The limitations of Russian political language, its social deprivation, and its atomization (and dislocation) act as conditions that, against the background of an active official policy of de-antagonization and depoliticization, allow the conventional internal political discourse to be saturated with foreign political signifiers. Thus, *real* politics comes in the form of antagonizing the West. Foreign policy determinants are used to establish identity politics: sovereign democracy, conservatism, adherence to values, etc. Populism

¹⁰³ Zhurzhenko, “The Importance of Being Earnest,” 7.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Pichlmeier, “Masculine Russia: The Role of Gender Norms in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse towards NATO” (Unpublished Master’s thesis, Higher School of Economics, Moscow, 2018), 81.

in Russia takes the form of exploiting empty signifiers from the struggle against Western ideological penetration. As such, the Russian hegemonic political discourse neither requires an opposition within the country nor is expected to mobilize citizens to act.

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Mitterand M. Okorie

5 Populism in the ANC and the 2019 Xenophobic Violence in South Africa

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of populist rhetoric about foreign nationals by political actors in South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) and its role in catalyzing the xenophobic violence of September 2019. Drawing from the theory of populism, this work argues that the scapegoating of migrants and foreigners in South Africa as campaign rhetoric was exploited by the ANC in a bid to avoid more complex discussions about its failings toward its voting demographic, who are mostly poor, black South Africans. Importantly, the article highlights that populism often contains the seeds of its own destruction when its effects approach a point of saturation and the law of diminishing return sets in. The response of the ANC government and its key officials was to double down on the rhetoric of "criminal foreigners"¹ causing disaffection among the mainly black working-class population, whose effusion of angst against foreign nationals spilled into xenophobic violence. Yet, in choosing to stand by their campaign rhetoric, the ANC government alienated itself from the comity of African nations, leading to fractured diplomatic ties.²

The xenophobic violence erupted in September 2019 in Johannesburg, South Africa's commercial hub, and lasted for several days. The attacks were primarily instigated by a group known as the Sisonke People's Forum.³ A few weeks before the attacks began on 2 September, Zweli Ndaba, the leader of the group, had mobilized hostel dwellers in Johannesburg barrios and members of the All Truck Drivers Foundation (ATDF) to organize a national shutdown.

1 Savo Heleta, Sharon Ekambarang and Sibongile Tshabalala, "Are Foreigners Stealing your Jobs and Healthcare? Find Out," *Bhekisisa*, November 20, 2018, <https://bhekisisa.org/article/2018-11-20-00-immigrant-blame-game-motsoaledi-remarks-immigrants-strain-on-health-system/>.

2 Mills Soko, "Mills Soko: Can SA and Nigeria Press the Reset Button?," *Fin24*, October 3, 2019, <https://www.fin24.com/Opinion/mills-soko-can-sa-and-nigeria-press-the-reset-button-20191003-4>; eNCA, "Zimbabwe booed all South Africans: Ramaphosa," *eNCA*, September 17, 2019, <https://www.enca.com/news/zimbabweans-booed-all-south-africans-ramaphosa>.

3 Jan Bornman, "The People who Sparked the Xenophobic Violence," *Times Live*, September 16, 2019, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-09-16-the-people-who-sparked-the-xenophobic-violence/>.

The group distributed flyers that read “Enough is enough, on selling of drugs, on property theft, and on our work taken by foreign nationals.”⁴ Numerous attempts by the groups to meet with Johannesburg mayor Herman Mashaba failed, leading to frustration and anger, which ultimately boiled over. There is a context to this effusion of angst by black South Africans who feel priced out of economics and politics. Anti-immigrant sentiment has a long history in South Africa. It has been argued that the apartheid government used migrant labor to undermine the economic power of black South Africa, thus setting the tone for the native population’s aversion to immigrants.⁵ In view of this, anti-immigrant rhetoric gained traction in political discourse and electoral politics in South Africa. During general elections, concerns about immigration and foreign nationals become objects of intense populist rhetoric, and politicians promise stricter immigration controls in order to exert a strong mobilization pull among poorer South Africans, who often see migrants as “stealing their jobs”.⁶

About 12 lives were lost during the September 2019 attacks according to local media reports, even though Human Rights Watch estimated the numbers to be much higher.⁷ Although 680 persons were arrested by the police on account of the violence, no convictions had yet been secured at the time of writing. Besides feeble, face-saving condemnations, xenophobic violence in South Africa attracts little or no punitive action by the government.⁸

In the wake of the xenophobic attacks, the initial response of South Africa’s President Cyril Ramaphosa demonstrated a lack of spine in admitting that the violence had been targeted at migrant communities. His reaction was unsurprising, however, given his election campaign rhetoric in which he promised a crackdown on undocumented migrants.⁹ Against this background, the September 2019 xenophobia was the proverbial chickens coming home

4 Ibid.

5 World Politics Review, “How Xenophobia Has Become Normalized in South African Politics,” *World Politics Review*, May 21, 2019, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/27874/how-xenophobia-has-become-normalized-in-south-african-politics>.

6 Kate Hairsine, “South Africa’s Politicians Feed Anti-Foreigner Violence,” *DW*, February 4, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/south-africas-politicians-feed-anti-foreigner-violence/a-48157900>.

7 Human Rights Watch (HRW), “‘They Have Robbed Me of My Life’: Xenophobic Violence against Non-Nationals in South Africa,” *Human Rights Watch*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/09/17/they-have-robbed-me-my-life/xenophobic-violence-against-non-nationals-south>.

8 Loren B. Landau, “Introducing the Demons,” in *Exorcising the Demons Within*, ed. Loren B. Landau (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011), 1–25.

9 Hairsine, “South Africa’s Politicians.”

to roost, but it was also a situation that may have been too embarrassing for the President to own up to.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section presents a conceptual clarification of xenophobia and proceeds to examine populism as the theoretical framework upon which the article is built. The second section examines the politicization of immigration by the ANC as a pre-election populist agenda in which foreigners were securitized as an existential danger for South African communities. Importantly, this section points out the fallacies of this populist rhetoric, highlighting the tendency for political actors within the ruling party – the ANC – to attempt to bolster its popularity among poor, mostly black South Africans by scapegoating immigrants. The third and final section analyzes the cost of populism in the context of its putative impact on the ANC government in the wake of the xenophobic attacks. This section explicates how the government’s pre-election populist stance had backed it into an embarrassing position where they were forced to condemn the actions of the very people whose actions they had initially attempted to underplay.

Methodology

This work uses a qualitative approach and draws from secondary data sources that provide background information on the study area and strengthen the literature review and conceptual framework. Online newspaper collections and commentaries were used to make relevant inferences about the utterances of political actors and the implications of their populist rhetoric on xenophobic effusions. This method allows an understanding of the nexus between populism, partisan politics, and xenophobic violence to be gained. Generally, these secondary sources provided an understanding of how political actors in South Africa – especially within the ANC – deploy and exploit the discourse of illegal immigrants for electoral mileage. Also, through this method, the work critically examines the responses of top government officials of the ruling ANC party, explicating how and why xenophobic violence in South Africa is partly catalyzed by populist rhetoric and political exigencies.

Understanding Xenophobia in South Africa

Xenophobia can be defined as a process of discrimination against several or specific groups within a population on the basis of their foreign origin or nationality.¹⁰ Undergirding this process are attitudes, prejudices, and behaviors that reject, exclude, and vilify persons who are perceived as “foreign” or “outsiders” to the community.¹¹ Xenophobia, however, is not simply an attitude but also translates to actions that range from intimidation and structural violence to, sometimes, homicide. The latter appears to be true in South Africa, where disaffection toward perceived unwanted foreigners is expressed through violent actions such as arson attacks on their businesses, looting, and homicide.¹²

Xenophobia in South Africa is also considered a racialized phenomenon. The racialized dimensions of xenophobia in South Africa have been highlighted in a number of studies, which denote how bigotry and violence are often directed toward African immigrant communities,¹³ with Nigerians, Somalians, and Zimbabweans often the primary victims. Matsinhe,¹⁴ however, sees this lens of problematizing the xenophobia question in South Africa as reductive, considering how people of Chinese and South Asian descent have been victims of xenophobia whilst citizens of Swaziland, Lesotho, and Botswana have generally been spared.

That said, the starkly Afrophobic nature of much of the xenophobic violence in South Africa cannot be denied, especially given the utterances of some of the country’s political class and the effusion of hateful angst on social media by South Africans. For example, in the immediate aftermath of the xenophobic violence of September 2019, both South Africa’s Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor and its former President Thabo Mbeki reinforced the idea that the activities of Nigerian drug dealers were a justified source of grievance and a trigger for xenophobic

10 David Mario Matsinhe, “Africa’s Fear of Itself: The Ideology of Makwerekwere in South Africa,” *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2011): 295–313.

11 Belinda Dodson, “Locating Xenophobia: Debate, Discourse, and Everyday Experience in Cape Town, South Africa,” *Africa Today* 56, no. 3 (2010): 2–22.

12 Pumla Dineo Gqola, “Brutal Inheritances: Echoes, Negrophobia and Masculinist Violence,” in *Go Home Or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, eds. Shireen Hassim, Tawana Kupe, and Eric Worby (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), 209–222.

13 Bronwyn Harris, “Xenophobia: A New Pathology for a New South Africa,” in *Psychopathology and Social Prejudice*, eds. Derek Hook and Gillian Eagle (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2002), 169–184.

14 Mario Matsinhe, “Africa’s Fear of Itself.”

hostilities.¹⁵ Further, a report by the Center for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC), a non-profit organization at the University of Cape Town, conducted a study that revealed a deep-seated and organized anti-Nigerian campaign on social media by South Africans. According to the report, there were over 2,500 mentions of “kill,” “hang them,” and “shoot them” with regard to foreigners, and over 50,000 people organically engaged in the conversation within a 2-month period.¹⁶ Digital footprints also indicate that the hashtags #PutSouthAfricaFirst and #NigeriaMustGo often trended side by side on Twitter, pointing to the denigration of specific migrant communities as an existential threat. Taken together, the anti-Nigerian sentiments on the South African Twittersphere organically reinforced a populist talking point from the ANC’s political elites.

A complex mix of factors have been highlighted as contributing to xenophobic attacks in South Africa. Among the primary factors is the exclusionary legacy of South Africa’s apartheid past, which forced the South African black community to feel discontented with the prevailing social inequalities while watching migrant communities thrive within their communities.¹⁷ In post-apartheid South Africa, only a fraction of black South Africans have emerged economically secure; the majority, especially the uneducated, remain impoverished. Among the uneducated black South Africans, there exists a strong resentment toward fellow Africans who out-compete them in retail, trade, and petty services.¹⁸

Immigrants are also perceived as stealing valuable jobs, putting pressure on public infrastructures, and engaging in violent crimes.¹⁹ Over time, the perception of immigrants as stealing jobs, causing crime, and staying in South Africa illegally has been concretized by the local media. Pamela Dube has noted that 25 percent of news/commentary associated with migrants is associated with the aforementioned themes.²⁰ In economic terms, immigrant societies

15 Oluwakemi Abimbola, “Keep Drug Dealers, Human Traffickers Out of Our Country, South African Minister Tells Nigeria,” *Punch*, September 5, 2019, <https://punchng.com/video-keep-drug-dealers-human-traffickers-out-of-our-country-south-african-minister-tells-nigeria/>; Bayo Wahab, “Thabo Mbeki Says Xenophobic Attack Was against Criminals not Nigerians,” *Pulse Nigeria*, September 7, 2019, <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/thabo-mbeki-says-xenophobic-attacks-was-against-criminals-not-nigerians/vc1txyv>.

16 Center for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC), *Interim Report on Xenophobia on South African Social Media*, September 4, 2020, <https://www.cabc.org.za/reports/2020-09-04-interim-report-on-xenophobia-on-south-african-social-media/>.

17 Harris, “Xenophobia.”

18 Ademola Araoye, “South Africa, the Global Immigration Crisis and the Challenge of African Solidarity,” *The Thinker* 65 (2015): 8–15.

19 Hairsine, “South Africa’s Politicians.”

20 Pamela Dube, “Media Berated for Xenophobia,” *Sunday Independent*, February 27, 2000, 3.

around the world often benefit from the skills and industry of newcomers, and in South Africa, the targeted immigrant population often start from scratch with loans from relatives, frequently employ locals, work longer hours, and sell their goods and services more cheaply. But this scarcely reduces the anti-immigrant bigotry in a national context where competition for resources is reasoned in zero-sum terms.²¹

Notably, the local resentment of migrants is fuelled by political opportunism. Political parties scapegoat migrants for the economic insecurity and relative deprivation bedeviling their countrymen.²² Michael Neocosmos and Jean Pierre Misago have both highlighted the role of subtle xenophobic governmental articulations that create room for South Africans to take out their frustrations about unemployment and poverty on migrants.²³ The accusation that migrants cause “economic sabotage” has been made a consistent talking point in South African politics and has become emblematic of the ruling ANC party.²⁴ It is a discourse that effectively takes the focus away from their poor performance in government.²⁵

What is not often problematized as a contributory factor to xenophobia in South Africa is how populism is implicated in the exigencies and political tensions that arise out of competitive elections. Thus, the need to appeal to a certain voting demographic presents an opportunity for a demagogue or determined political actor to leverage populism. They can do so by latching onto populist rhetoric that reifies existing fault lines between the locals and the securitized migrant communities. The next section clarifies the related conceptual issues about populism.

21 Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, “Realities and Discourses on South African Xenophobia,” *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 37, no. 1 (2015): 200–204.

22 Nicola Jearey-Graham and Werner Böhmke, “‘A Lot of Them Are Good Buggers’: The African ‘Foreigner’ as South Africa’s Discursive Other,” *Psychology in Society* 44 (2013): 21–41.

23 Jean Pierre Misago, “Disorder in a Changing Society: Authority and the Micro-Politics of Violence,” in *Exorcising the Demons Within*, ed. Loren B. Landau (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011), 89–108.

24 Peter Fabricius, “Minister Naledi Pandor Dubs Attacks on Foreigners ‘Embarrassing’ and ‘Shameful,’” *Daily Maverick*, September 10, 2019, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-09-10-minister-naledi-pandor-dubs-attacks-on-foreigners-embarrassing-and-shameful/>.

25 Hakeem Onapajo, “Phobia or Scapegoatism? The Nigerianization of Crimes in South Africa,” *The Republic*, September 20, 2019, <https://www.republic.com.ng/august-september-2019/rivalry-between-south-africa-and-nigeria/>.

Conceptualizing Populism

Populism has been a constitutive element of representative democracy since the advent of democracy in ancient Greece. Plato warned about demagogues riding to power through wild promises and claims of championing the people's interest.²⁶ In academic scholarship, the concept of populism is broad and contested.²⁷ It has been defined as the promotion of policies that adopt anti-establishment methods to achieve power and economic redistribution²⁸ or a process whereby a political actor (or actors) targets the politically orthodox (whoever they may be) and casts them as being out of touch with the views of the people.²⁹ Typically, a populist figure charges existing officeholders or elites with being removed from "the people" and pursuing agendas antithetical to the needs of the people.³⁰ But what makes politics populist is not a definable set of values but rather an antagonism to prevailing orthodoxies and the way power is organized and distributed.³¹ In view of this, populism may simply be defined as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people."³²

Populism has been studied in relation to several political outcomes: how it leads to the collapse of political and economic restraint,³³ its weaponization by both right-wing and left-wing political parties,³⁴ and its regeneration over a decade, spanning political actors like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, the former

26 Nonso Obikili, "Unfulfilled Expectations and Populist Politics: Examining the Emergence of the EFF in South Africa," ERSA Working Paper 722 (January 2018).

27 Ibid.; Rogers Brubaker, "Why Populism?," *Theory and Society* 46, no. 5 (2017): 357–385.

28 Obikili, "Unfulfilled Expectations and Populist Politics."

29 Louise Vincent, "Seducing the People: Populism and the Challenge to democracy in South Africa," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29, no. 1 (2011): 1–14.

30 Alan Ware, "The United States: Populism as Political Strategy," in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, eds. Yves Mény and Yves Surel (London: Palgrave, 2002), 101–119.

31 Vincent, "Seducing the People."

32 Carlos de la Torre and Oscar Mazzoleni, "Do We Need a Minimum Definition of Populism? An Appraisal of Mudde's Conceptualization," *Populism* 2, no. 1 (2019): 82.

33 Dani Rodrik, "Is Populism Necessarily Bad Economics?," *AEA Papers and Proceedings* 108 (2018): 196–199.

34 Brubaker, "Why Populism?"; Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

United States President Donald Trump, and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro.³⁵ Taken together, these studies point out the contemporary nature of populism and its corrosive consequences.

In a political system, populism can serve as an effective mechanism for mobilizing political support or targeting specific electoral demographics. To do this, a populist would target citizens who may be disenchanted by the status quo by making them assume the worst of the current system. They can do so by, for example, disparaging the mainstream media as “fake news,” elections as “fraudulent,” opposition politicians as “treasonous,” judges as “enemies of the people,” protests as “paid rent-a-mobs,” intellectuals as “arrogant liberals,” and the constitution as “a rigged system.”³⁶ Populism has also been “routinely used by journalists and politicians to stigmatize and delegitimize appeals to “the people” against “the elite,” often by characterizing such appeals as dangerous, manipulative, and demagogic.”³⁷

In effect, it is important to highlight the pejorative dimensions of populism when it is used to denote an idea. This is loosely connected to the argument that populism does not have a stand-alone life – rather, it results from political developments within a society and is often a reaction to ideological, economic, or class grievances.³⁸ For example, Marie Le Pen's Rassemblement National (formerly the Front National) moved from the margins to mainstream politics in France following the increased incidence of Islamist terror in the country. The Rassemblement National was able to leverage growing fears about the Islamist threat in France and the failure of immigrants' integration.³⁹ Similarly, Bernie Sanders' political campaigns in the United States have been suggested to be a populist appeal to younger voters who feel priced out of both economic and political life.⁴⁰ This indicates that populism can exist on both the left and right wings of the political spectrum in so far as it can leverage various existing

35 Hugh Gusterson, “From Brexit to Trump: Anthropology and the Rise of Nationalist Populism,” *American Ethnologist* 44, no. 2 (2017): 209–214; De la Torre and Mazzoleni, “Do We Need a Minimum Definition of Populism?”

36 Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 5.

37 Brubaker, “Why Populism?,” 382.

38 Margaret Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,” *Political Studies* 47, no. 1 (1999): 2–16.

39 Gabriel Goodliffe, “Europe's Saliency and ‘Owning’ Euroscepticism: Explaining the Front National's Victory in the 2014 European Elections in France,” *French Politics* 13, no. 4 (2015): 324–345; Arthur Goldhammer, “Explaining the Rise of the Front National: Political Rhetoric or Cultural Insecurity?” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 33, no. 2 (2015): 134–142.

40 John B. Judis, “Rethinking Populism,” *Dissent* 63, no. 4 (2016): 116–122.

frustrations or grievances. Carsten Reinemann et al.⁴¹ maintained that there are two primary features that distinguish populism from other ideologies. The first is the creation of a new social identity among citizens to generate a sense of belonging to an imagined (usually threatened) community. The second is the otherization of elites or out-groups against which the people affirm their pre-eminence.

Populism is often deployed by a political figure to speak in the name of a bounded and distinct group against threatening outsiders or “foreigners”. Several factors have been pointed out as driving populism in both developing and consolidated democracies. First, migration crises across the globe tend to create a fear (real or imagined) that the influx of migrants will deplete scarce resources and put host communities at a disadvantage.⁴² This idea is loosely linked to the relative deprivation theory, which holds that people rebel against a sense of relative deprivation and feelings of perceived entitlement and unmet expectations.⁴³ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart’s *cultural backlash theory* explains how populism has risen in recent times by playing on global immigration and economic concerns.⁴⁴ In their study, they observed that populism has thrived on the oxygen of perceived material threats to the economic fortunes of the dominant group(s) in society. Drawing from the demographic data of citizens who voted for Donald Trump in America and those who voted for Brexit in the United Kingdom, they found that both demographics of voters had the same things in common: dwindling income levels and increased job losses within their localities. These groups were, thus, susceptible to the anti-establishment appeals of populist actors who deployed binary sloganeering of blaming outgroups (“them”) for stripping prosperity, job opportunities, and public services from in-groups (“us”).

Populism can arise from an ideological dive into nativism as an extreme form of nationalism, complete with its hostility to cultural diversity. Thus, political actors who adopt populist rhetoric as a means of political mobilization

41 Carsten Reinemann, Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Jesper Strömbäck, and Claes H. de Vreese, “Populist Political Communication: Toward a Model of its Causes, Forms, and Effects,” in *Populist Political Communication in Europe*, eds. Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Strömbäck, and Claes H. de Vreese (New York: Routledge, 2016), 22–36.

42 Daniël Louw, “The Mirage of ‘Rainbowism’ within the Nightmare of #MustFall Campaigns: Exploring the Penetrating Hermeneutics of Compassionate Being-With against the Background of Decolonising Activism and Xenophobic Suspicion,” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 2, no. 2 (2016): 321–346.

43 Biniam. E. Bedasso and Nonso Obikili, “A Dream Deferred: The Microfoundations of Direct Political Action in Pre- and Post-Democratisation South Africa,” *The Journal of Development Studies* 52, no. 1 (2016): 130–146.

44 Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*.

imagine society in terms of a duality of people: the native people (disadvantaged citizens) against the “elites” who allowed the influx of immigrants who entered and polluted their country.⁴⁵

Several studies have highlighted the nexus between populism and xenophobia,⁴⁶ but few studies have explored populism as a self-sabotaging variable in a democracy. This is the modest point of novelty this study attempts to contribute to the theory of populism, using the ANC in South Africa as a case study. I argue that while populism can be a strong mobilizing factor for voters during a competitive democratic election, the political beneficiary is often condemned to up the ante until their populist rhetoric reaches a saturation point and becomes a political liability.

ANC’s Pre-Election Populism: Incubating Xenophobic Tensions

One of the defining features of post-colonial democracies in Africa has been its inability to guarantee or improve the material wellbeing of its citizens.⁴⁷ The political class has often sought to deflect from this failure to transform the living conditions for the vast majority by appealing to the primordial or nativist anxieties of their people. In South Africa, rising unemployment and increasing poverty levels have been conveniently blamed on “foreigners”, while the growing disaffection in the host community toward migrants is blamed on “Nigerian drug dealers” whose actions decimate the black South African community and defy the law enforcement agencies. Anti-immigrant rhetoric has had a presence

45 Aitana Guia, “The Concept of Nativism and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments in Europe,” EUI Working Papers (MWP 2016/20).

46 Aristos Doxiadis and Manos Matsaganis, “National Populism and Xenophobia in Greece,” in *Populist Fantasies: European Revolts in Context*, eds. Catherine Fieschi, Marley Morris, and Lila Caballero (London: Counterpoint, 2012), 31–98; Carla Ruzza and Stefano Fella, “Populism and the Italian Right,” *Acta Politica* 46, no. 2 (2011): 158–179; Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, “Trump and the Xenophobic Populist Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse,” *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 2 (2017): 443–454; Bethuel S. Ngcamu and Evangelos Mantzaris, “Xenophobic Violence and Criminality in the KwaZulu-Natal Townships,” *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 15, no. 1 (2019): 8.

47 Thomas A. Koelble, “The Politics of Violence and Populism in Post-Colonial Democracy: The Role of Political Society in South Africa,” WZB Discussion Paper SP V 2018–102; Leslie M. Dikeni, “Populism and Nationalism: Implications for South Africa,” *Focus: The Journal of the Helen Suzman Foundation* 80 (2017): 14–20.

in mainstream political discourse in South Africa for some time.⁴⁸ For example, a survey conducted in 1998 found that 52 percent of the respondents believed that illegal immigrants caused crime in their areas, and three-quarters of the respondents said that they took jobs away from local South Africans.⁴⁹

It is therefore important to analyze the ANC's populist rhetoric in the build-up to the 2019 general elections in South Africa and how this may have set the stage for the xenophobic violence that ensued a few months later. Populism as a political variable has often found the topic of immigration tantalizing.⁵⁰ In South Africa, the obsession of all the political parties with immigration is not an accident. It reflects a widely held belief that South Africa is a primary destination for migrants across the African continent whose presence depletes South Africa's scarce resources. Thus, in the 2019 elections, the major parties (the ANC and the Democratic Alliance [DA]) advocated stricter controls on immigration despite immigrants being only 6.9 percent of the country's population. In reality, the municipalities across the country faced more challenges coping with the increasing number of South Africans moving to the bigger cities.⁵¹ The Scalabrini Centre of Cape Town, an anti-xenophobia advocacy group, captured the pre-election mood of political campaigns in 2019, noting that:

Migration is a key issue in South Africa's 2019 election campaigns. Different political parties have made calls for tougher measures to manage migration. Playing the "migration card" risks a move towards campaigns rooted in populism and fear – echoing tactics in other countries and campaigns such as Trump and Brexit. . . . Migrants are often linked to chaos and anarchy. They are also linked to disease, counterfeit goods and adulterated food. . . . Those without documents are referred to as "illegal immigrants", further linking migration and crime. These linkages are not a truthful reflection of the majority of non-nationals.⁵²

48 World Politics Review, "How Xenophobia has Become Normalized."

49 Nahla Valji, "Creating the Nation: The Rise of Violent Xenophobia in the New South Africa" (Unpublished Master's thesis, York University, 2003).

50 Cas Mudde, "Why Copying the Populist Right Isn't Going to Save the Left," *The Guardian*, May 14, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/may/14/why-copying-the-populist-right-isnt-going-to-save-the-left>.

51 Antony Sguazzin, "Trump-like Immigrant Attacks Adopted by S. Africa Opposition," *Bloomberg*, April 24, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-24/trump-style-immigrant-bashing-clouds-south-african-election>.

52 Scalabrini Centre of Cape Town, *Reporting on Migration in South Africa: A Journalist's Guide* (South Africa, 2019), 3 and 5, https://scalabrini.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Scalabrini_Centre_Cape_Town_Reporting_on_Migration_in_South_Africa_Journalists_Guide_2019-1.pdf.

As the party that has held the reins of governance in South Africa since the end of apartheid, the ANC had few explanatory mechanisms to justify the party's inability to live up to the expectations of the majority of black South Africans. Politically, such repeated failures rendered it vulnerable in a competitive election, given that its major electoral demographics are the poor and the working class.⁵³ But among these demographics is also a concretized feeling of self-hate fuelled by the envy of successful immigrants.⁵⁴ Thus, the opportunity to scapegoat immigration and foreigners for its shortcomings proved tempting for the party. The statistics for unemployment were unprecedentedly abysmal. In an election year, the unemployment rate was 31 percent, and the unemployment rate between 15–24-year-olds was 55 percent. Scapegoating a vulnerable minority (immigrants) for what seemed a systemic problem is hard to imagine, yet, as a populist mantra, it held considerable promise given the widely-held (albeit erroneous) notion that the presence of immigrants equaled economic sabotage.

The theory of populism suggests that populism may prove appealing to a mainstream party in order for it to cast aside the likelihood of being thought unresponsive to public grievances.⁵⁵ As the scholarly literature has pointed out, populism is hardly synonymous with far-right or extremist movements; traditional parties and their leaders tap into populist rhetoric if there are opportunities to mobilize voters or at least to avoid alienating their support base.⁵⁶ The ANC was therefore willing to ally itself with misdirected grievances and allow people to displace their frustration onto convenient targets.⁵⁷

According to Jacqueline Tizora,⁵⁸ the ANC's pre-election rhetoric convinced voters of its commitment to tackling immigration and the economy by painting

⁵³ Ralph Matheka, "The ANC 'Leadership Crisis' and the Age of Populism in Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *African Politics: Beyond the Third Wave of Democratisation*, ed. Joelen Pretorius (Cape Town: Juta, 2008), 131–149; Raymond Suttner, "The Place of the Popular and the Populist," *Polity*, October 24, 2018, <https://www.polity.org.za/article/the-place-of-the-popular-and-the-populist-2018-10-24>.

⁵⁴ Adam and Moodley, "Realities and Discourses on South African Xenophobia."

⁵⁵ Patrick Liddiard, *Is Populism Really a Problem for Democracy?* (Washington, DC: The Wilson Center, 2019).

⁵⁶ Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Roberta Bracciale, "Socially Mediated Populism: The Communicative Strategies of Political Leaders on Facebook," *Palgrave Communications* 4, no. 1 (2018): 50.

⁵⁷ Ngcamu and Mantzaris, "Xenophobic Violence and Criminality"; Brij Maharaj, "Human Rights and the Scapegoating of Foreign Migrants," *Daily Maverick*, March 18, 2019. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2019-03-18-human-rights-and-the-scapegoating-of-foreign-migrants/>.

⁵⁸ Jacqueline Tizora, "We Are Not Xenophobic, We Are Afrophobic," *Mail & Guardian*, April 25, 2019, <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-04-25-00-we-are-not-xenophobic-we-are-afrophobic>.

undocumented migrants as being responsible for crime and sabotaging economic progress among low-income earners. For example, ANC Secretary-General Ace Magashule warned in a press briefing in March 2019 that combating the rising crime rate in South Africa had been made difficult by undocumented migrants, the issue with whom was that “you can’t get their fingerprints.”⁵⁹ In the same month, President Ramaphosa addressed an ANC rally where he promised a crackdown on undocumented migrants, saying that “everyone just arrives in our townships and rural areas and sets up business without licenses and permits. We are going to bring this to an end.”⁶⁰ By introducing tropes about undocumented migrants despite their knowledge of their marginal numbers in South Africa, these politicians were securitizing immigrants. While Ramaphosa’s campaign speech bypassed the more cumbersome discussion on the forces that cause inequality in South Africa to endure (choosing instead to continue the polarizing discourse of immigrant-blaming), Magashule’s blaming of undocumented immigrants for violent crimes had no grounding in reality. All of these played into dated political rhetoric in South Africa, where foreigners have become a scapegoat for frustration.⁶¹

Research by the monitoring group Xenowatch indicates that foreigners are disproportionate targets of violent crimes in South Africa.⁶² Further, when the ANC’s rhetoric on immigration during the 2019 campaign is appraised against the background of what public officials have said in the past, a pattern of populism dependency begins to emerge. Aaron Motsoaledi, the Minister for Home Affairs, once questioned the presence of asylum seekers in South Africa when, in his view, there were no conflicts on the continent. But even more damaging were his remarks accusing businesses of favoring asylum seekers over South African citizens for job positions.⁶³ In his previous role as Minister for Health, Motsoaledi claimed that South Africa’s hospitals are overburdened by immigrants who “get admitted in large numbers” and cause overcrowding and failed infection controls.⁶⁴ In reality, the percentage of foreigners in South Africa is hardly the kind of numbers to overwhelm public services, but the immigrant

⁵⁹ Hairsine, “South Africa’s Politicians Feed Anti-Foreigner Violence.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*; BBC News, “ANC Manifesto: Land, Jobs and Blockchain,” *BBC News*, January 13, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46855359>.

⁶¹ Clarence Tshitereke, “Xenophobia and Relative Deprivation,” *Crossings* 3, no. 2 (1999): 4–5.

⁶² World Politics Review, “How Xenophobia has Become Normalized.”

⁶³ S’thembile Cele, “International Judges Slam SA Courts’ Rulings on Foreign Nationals,” *City Press*, September 24, 2019, <https://city-press.news24.com/News/international-judges-slam-sa-courts-rulings-on-foreign-nationals-20190924>.

⁶⁴ Heleta, Ekambaram and Tshabalala, “Are Foreigners Stealing Your Jobs and Healthcare?”

bogeyman was electoral campaign rhetoric that proved too tempting for the ANC to ignore.⁶⁵

Yet, while the campaign rhetoric of top political actors in the ANC appealed to the nativist sentiments of black South Africans, who are their largest voting demographic, it soon became a political albatross the party could not shake off. After the election had been won, it became apparent that the party would not institute draconian anti-immigrant policies against spaza shop owners and retail businesses as promised. This inflamed existing anxieties between the local population and immigrant traders. In view of this, the possibility of the former taking laws into their own hands became a tempting prospect in the face of the government's inability to follow through with its populist election rhetoric. It is reasonable to infer that the language of the ANC's political campaign inadvertently emboldened xenophobia and gave an official imprimatur to the resentment black South Africans feel toward immigrant communities engaged in the retail sector.

Possibly conducted by the ANC to make good on its election promise, there was a series of raids in August 2019 that involved the deployment of 1,500 police officers and the detention of 600 foreign nationals. These raids led to aggressive altercations between the police and foreign nationals who mostly operated in retail stalls in Johannesburg's Central Business District. Responding to this, the Minister of Police Bheki Cele discussed the event as though the foreign nationals were an existential threat to the country.⁶⁶ He is reported to have said, "We are not cowards. We believe we are doing the proper work as the SAPS [South African Police Service] and we will win this battle. . . . [W]e can't have co-governance with criminality".⁶⁷ When xenophobic violence eventually erupted on September 2, it was unsurprising that hoodlums attacked the very sites that the SAPS operatives had been raiding weeks earlier, and several legitimate businesses were destroyed. Yet, contrary to the Minister of Police's comment, there is no evidence that foreigners are responsible for the high levels of crime in South Africa. Statistics from the Ministry of Justice and Correctional

⁶⁵ Nomboniso Gasa, "Politicians Need to Stop Using the Immigrant Bogeyman," *City Press*, April 23, 2019, <https://city-press.news24.com/Voices/politicians-need-to-stop-using-the-immigrant-bogeyman-20190423>; Business Live, "Editorial: Aaron Motsoaledi's Toxic Xenophobia," *Business Live*, March 6, 2019, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/editorials/2019-03-06-editorial-aaron-motsoaledis-toxic-xenophobia/>.

⁶⁶ The Citizen, "Cops Avoid 'Bloodbath' in Joburg CBD Raid, 600 Arrested," *The Citizen*, August 7, 2019, <https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/crime/2164857/pics-cops-avoid-blood-bath-in-joburg-cbd-raid-600-arrested/>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Services showed that foreign nationals formed only 8 percent of 161,054 prison inmates in 2017.⁶⁸

At any rate, the populist rhetoric reached its saturation point only after the ANC government made one last push to justify the actions of the xenophobic mob, deploying the familiar bogeyman of Nigerian drug dealers for causing the unrest within the local community. In the aftermath of this, the law of diminishing returns emerged in the form of condemnation of the ANC government by several countries across the world.

Populism and the Saturation Point: The ANC's Escalating Populist Response to the 2019 Xenophobic Attacks

An interesting analysis that can be made about populism concerns the manner in which it rises and falls and how it succeeds and fails. The life cycle of populism occurs on an upward sloping arc until it reaches a saturation point, whereupon it becomes a liability to the political actor(s). At the saturation point, there are no further benefits to be derived from doubling down on the populist narrative even though there is a chance to walk back the political rhetoric, which may leave the political actor embarrassed. When the saturation point is reached, the escalation or de-escalation of the populist rhetoric leads to diminishing returns. This outcome pattern can be inferred from how populism enabled Donald Trump to mobilize white working-class voters (in America's Rust Belt) who were convinced the deindustrialization caused by the neoliberal trajectory of globalization was responsible for their job losses⁶⁹ while also exciting "ideological racists, nativists and misogynists."⁷⁰ But what is also important is how Trump played down the use of face masks as a COVID-19 containment measure, turning a scientific recommendation into a political argument about stifling individual freedoms. To maintain his stance that masks were a ploy to suppress individual freedoms in America, he encouraged his supporters not to

68 Heleta, Ekambaram and Tshabalala, "Are Foreigners Stealing Your Jobs and Healthcare?"

69 Nancy Fraser, "Progressive Neoliberalism Versus Reactionary Populism: A Hobson's choice," in *The Great Regression*, ed. Heinrich Geiselberger (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 40–48.

70 Michael McQuarrie, "The Revolt of the Rust Belt: Place and Politics in the Age of Anger," *The British Journal of Sociology* 68 (2017): S121.

use the mail-in voting option but to vote in person, even though a few high-ranking Republican members warned that it might affect the party in swing states.⁷¹ Having labeled the contagion a “modest threat [that] was going to disappear any day,”⁷² he had boxed himself into a corner. On the contrary, his rival Joe Biden and the Democratic Party encouraged their supporters to use the mail-in voting option. There is no certainty as to how much this hurt Trump’s re-election bid, but there have been arguments that the mail-in votes boosted Biden’s overall vote tally as Democrats gained votes in counties that returned more mail-in ballots.⁷³ Trump’s aggressive anti-mail-in voting stance occurred at the saturation point of the populist arc and could only count against him at that point.

In South Africa, a similar pattern of saturation can be determined from the ANC’s initial responses to the xenophobic attacks, which either mischaracterized the violence or invoked the familiar strawman of “Nigerian drug dealers.” For example, President Ramaphosa and ANC officials first insisted that the violence was random and not aimed at foreigners.⁷⁴ This was a worrying reaction at the time, considering that the police were yet to fully investigate the violence.⁷⁵ In a sense, this might have been a ploy for Ramaphosa’s government to distance itself from its pre-election rhetoric, which had been leveraged on the immigrant bogeyman. Further, the ANC has a tendency to feel embarrassed by the xenophobic label even though they simultaneously play to the xenophobic gallery.⁷⁶ In the 2008 xenophobic violence that left 100,000 foreign nationals displaced, 700 wounded, and 60 lives lost, the ANC government similarly blamed the attacks on “criminals.”⁷⁷ In 2015, when foreign-owned shops were looted in Soweto and Durban’s Central Business District, there was the usual passivity in declaring the attacks xenophobic, opting instead to label them

71 Anita Kumar, “‘A Huge Risk’: Trump’s Allies Can’t Sway Him on Mail-In Voting,” *Politico*, September 12, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/12/trump-mail-in-voting-411608>.

72 Ashley Parker, Josh Dawsey, Matt Viser, and Michael Scherer, “How Trump’s Erratic Behaviour and Failure on Coronavirus Doomed His Re-Election,” *The Washington Post*, November 7, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/interactive/2020/trump-pandemic-coronavirus-election/>.

73 Sam Levine and Alvin Chang, “Democrats Took a Risk to Push Mail-In Voting. It Paid Off,” *The Guardian*, December 3, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/dec/03/democrats-mail-in-voting-2020-election-analysis>.

74 Hairsine, “South Africa’s Politicians Feed Anti-Foreigner Violence.”

75 Fabricius, “Minister Naledi Pandor Dubs Attacks on Foreigners ‘Embarrassing’ and ‘Shameful’.”

76 Adam and Moodley, “Realities and Discourses on South African Xenophobia.”

77 Ngcamu and Mantzaris, “Xenophobic Violence and Criminality.”

“criminality” and offering convoluted excuses for the perpetrators.⁷⁸ There is an explanation for this contrived political posturing. Populism by nature involves both the politician and their political base(s) engaging in an organically reinforcing fantasy of “us” vs. “them”. This makes it dicey for politicians to criticize their base when their unlawful activities are inspired by the leader’s populist stance.⁷⁹ Such criticism would deplete their support base and bring the populist arc to its saturation point.

Conversely, the populist leader (or party officials) can double-down on the rhetoric to justify the actions of their supporters, as the response from high-ranking ANC officials indicated. For example, in her first interview after the xenophobic attacks began, South Africa’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Naledi Pandor, not only played down the seriousness of the attacks but also argued that it was a result of justifiable anger by the locals because Nigerians “are dealing in drugs in our country . . . [and] harming our young people by making drugs easily available to them.”⁸⁰ Also doubling down on the Nigerian bogeyman was former President Thabo Mbeki, who said, “The truth of the matter is that there are Nigerian criminals, who are involved in drug dealing, and that’s true. There are Nigerian criminals who are involved in prostitution and that’s true.”⁸¹

These attempts to play up the narrative of Nigerians in South Africa being mainly drug dealers at a time when the ANC should have been very keen to focus on the fight against xenophobic crime was not accidental. It fed into prejudice and a perceptual gap among black working-class South Africans that Nigerians in the country were mostly traffickers and drug peddlers⁸² and that the survival activities of foreigners are criminal.⁸³ This suggestive language used by the two senior ANC officials mentioned above indicates a wilful use of dog-whistling mechanisms. Moreover, it was deployed against a background of unscrupulous stereotyping of Nigerians by the local press, in which they are mostly covered in relation to drug-related events.⁸⁴

There is no denying the involvement of Nigerians in drug-related offenses in South Africa, but the official statistics on Nigerians arrested for these offenses are marginal and do not justify the usual generalizations and blanket

78 Adam and Moodley, “Realities and Discourses on South African Xenophobia.”

79 Jean Comroff, “Populism and Late Liberalism: A Special Affinity?,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 637, no. 1 (2011): 99–111.

80 Abimbola, “Keep Drug Dealers, Human Traffickers Out of Our Country.”

81 Wahab, “Thabo Mbeki Says Xenophobic Attack Was Against Criminals Not Nigerians.”

82 Soko, “Mills Soko: Can SA and Nigeria Press the Reset Button?”

83 Ngcamu and Mantzaris, “Xenophobic Violence and Criminality.”

84 Valji, “Creating the Nation.”

stereotyping of Nigerian nationals in South Africa. Frank Nabolisa, arrested in 2011,⁸⁵ and Edwin Elochukwu Anyaoku, who was extradited to the United States in 2019 to face drug charges,⁸⁶ are the biggest Nigerian kingpins in recent memory. Currently, Nigerians are famed for leading the drug businesses in areas of Johannesburg like Hillbrow, Berea, Yeovil, Ellis Park, Orange Grove, and Rosettenville, but these are areas that are heavily populated by foreigners of diverse origins. Nigerian drug syndicates first established themselves in Johannesburg in the late 1990s⁸⁷ as part of an organized international drug network linking Latin America (cocaine), Asia (heroin), and Western Europe.⁸⁸ But groups associated with Cosa Nostra were already operating on the ground before then.⁸⁹ Convicted Indian drug lord Vicky Goswami had also established a reputation as a high-level mandrax trafficker in 1995.⁹⁰

Also, the majority of high-profile drug busts by the South African authorities involved various nationalities. In 2012, for example, three Zambian nationals transporting drugs worth R34 million into South Africa were caught.⁹¹ In 2011, the Eastern Cape Province cocaine bust led to the arrest of the Cuban national Nelson Pablo Yester-Garrido in which 166kg of cocaine was seized.⁹² The biggest drug bust in South African history involving cocaine worth R500M and discovered on a farm in Villiersdorp involved suspects of European nationalities.⁹³ The frustration over the lack of police intervention about drugs in poor

85 David Hundeyin, “The ‘Giant of Africa’ and its Impotent rage: Reality Dawns, Harshly,” *BusinessDay*, September 5, 2019, <https://businessday.ng/columnist/article/the-giant-of-africa-and-its-impotent-rage-reality-dawns-harshly/>.

86 Sahara Reporters, “Nigerian Drug Kingpin Arrested in South Africa, Extradited to Face Drug Charges in the US,” *Sahara Reporters*, June 24, 2019, <http://saharareporters.com/2019/06/24/nigerian-drug-kingpin-arrested-south-africa-extradited-face-drug-trafficking-charges-us>.

87 Carla Bernardo, “Migration of the Nigerian Mafia,” *University of Cape Town News*, May 16, 2017, <https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2017-05-16-migration-of-the-nigerian-mafia>.

88 UNODCCP, *South Africa Country Profile on Drugs and Crime*, https://www.unodc.org/documents/southafrica/sa_drug.pdf.

89 *Ibid.*

90 Caryn Dolley, “Goswami’s SA Mandrax Secrets,” *Daily Maverick*, August 15, 2019, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-08-15-goswamis-sa-mandrax-secrets/>.

91 SA News, “Zambian Nationals Arrested for Drug Trafficking,” *SA News*, July 2, 2012, <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/zambian-nationals-arrested-drug-trafficking>.

92 Sally Evans, “Gun Links Murder, Cocaine Bust,” *Mail & Guardian*, July 22, 2011, <https://mg.co.za/article/2011-07-22-gun-links-murder-cocaine-bust>.

93 News24, “Inside SA’s Biggest Drug Bust – 5 Things That Have Emerged So Far,” *News24*, June 26, 2017, <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/inside-sas-biggest-drug-bust-5-things-that-have-emerged-so-far-20170626>.

black neighborhoods is a failing both the police and government authorities tend to ignore, choosing instead to suggest that their city has been overrun by foreign nationals.⁹⁴ There have also been cases where police operatives were reportedly on the payroll of drug kingpins,⁹⁵ which stifled the agency's ability to deal with drug-related crimes decisively. Interestingly, the fact that South Africans themselves are highly implicated in drug trafficking is rarely emphasized; indeed, there are presently over 1,000 South African citizens in foreign prisons over drug-related offenses.⁹⁶ The above anecdotes are invoked to reveal the discursive dishonesty in narrowing South Africa's drug problem down to a specific nationality (Nigerians) and the dangers such stereotyping incubates.

Furthermore, recent statistics on drug-related arrests do not support the stereotype that Nigerian nationals created a drug problem in South Africa. In 2018, 765 Nigerian migrants were arrested. Of this number, 212 were arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol, 193 for possession of a false driver's license, and 206 for fraud-related crimes. Only 87 Nigerians were arrested for the possession or dealing of drugs. By contrast, 95 percent of the 1.5 million arrests in South Africa in the same period were South African nationals. The attempt to create a strawman to justify whatever discontent that fed the xenophobic attacks was a populist move that backfired, as several countries condemned the ANC's government's management of the crisis. The attempt to push the populist narrative of "foreigners are the problem" had reached its saturation point and hurt the party's and the government's image.

The Nigerian government was the first to express concerns over the safety of their citizens and the lack of strong condemnation from the South African government over the violence. Nigeria recalled its Ambassador, withdrew its participation from the World Economic Forum that was going on at the time, and promised to repatriate 600 of its citizens who had indicated their interest in leaving

94 Sguazzin, "Trump-like Immigrant Attacks Adopted by S. Africa Opposition."

95 Lindile Sifile, "Joburg's Underworld Killing Fields," *IOL News*, September 26, 2018, <https://www.iol.co.za/the-star/news/joburgs-underworld-killing-fields-17228222>; Mandy Wiener, "Hawks Nab One of Johannesburg's 'Biggest Drug Dealers'," *News24*, December 13, 2018, <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/hawks-nab-one-of-johannesburgs-biggest-drug-dealers-20181213>.

96 *IOL News*, "Crime Kingpin Krejcir Sentenced to 15 years in his Home Country," *IOL News*, March 29, 2018, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-kingpin-krejcir-sentenced-to-15-years-in-his-home-country-14145116>; *SABC News*, "SAA Flight Attendants Arrested in Hong Kong for Alleged Drug Trafficking," *SABC News*, October 3, 2019, <http://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/saa-flight-attendants-arrested-in-hong-kong-for-alleged-drug-trafficking/>.

South Africa.⁹⁷ Nigeria’s evacuation of its citizens at a time when the country was not a war was a huge diplomatic slap in the face for the South African government. The government of Singapore also warned that xenophobic attacks harmed tourism and investment from their country.⁹⁸ The Zambian government strongly condemned the ANC government, canceling a friendly football game that had been scheduled between South Africa and Zambia.⁹⁹ Uganda, Egypt, Senegal, and Pakistan all also expressed concerns about the safety of their citizens in South Africa.¹⁰⁰ Two weeks after the xenophobic violence, when President Ramaphosa visited Zimbabwe to speak at the memorial service for the late Robert Mugabe, his speech was routinely interrupted by jeers from Zimbabweans expressing their disappointment with the ANC government. In fairness to the President, when he returned to South Africa, he was frank enough to address a rally in which he noted that the country’s global stature had been tainted by xenophobic violence.¹⁰¹ The writing was already on the wall that populism had run its course and that it was time to detour to a more honorable path. It remains to be seen, however, if the ANC will no longer rely on immigration rhetoric as a voter mobilization strategy in the future.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the 2019 xenophobic violence in South Africa and the implications of the ANC’s populist rhetoric regarding immigration as a central factor in the effusion of angst against foreign nationals. The work makes a modest contribution to populism as a political concept – specifically in how it is both an asset and a liability for a political actor. Populism served as important leverage for the ANC to mobilize voters around the topic of immigration, a familiar grievance. But once this effusion of angst toward non-nationals turned into xenophobic violence, the party found itself needing to double down on the populist narrative of “immigrants” and “Nigerian criminals” being the cause of the disaffection that had led to the violence. This course of action

97 Bayo Wahab, “Xenophobia: SA Minister Says Many Nigerians in Their Country Are Drug Traffickers,” *Pulse Nigeria*, September 5, 2019, <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/xenophobia-south-african-minister-says-many-nigerians-in-their-country-are-drug/mq2wdmn>.

98 Fabricius, “Minister Naledi Pandor Dubs Attacks on Foreigners ‘Embarrassing’ and ‘Shameful’.”

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 eNCA, “Zimbabwe Boomed All South Africans.”

proved counterproductive because the populist rhetoric had reached a saturation point where it became a liability for the political actors. Populism may thus be regarded as a political pathology with a limited shelf life, and, as can be seen in the case of the ANC's leadership in South Africa, it is possibly better to confront the complex questions about social inequalities than attempt to divert the population's anger onto imaginary enemies.

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Section 2: **Strategies of Nationalism and Populism**

Maximilian Kreter

6 “We are the streets and we are the law, the 4th Reich is what we are fighting for.” Four Decades of White Power Music in Germany: A Historical-Sociological Reconstruction

White Power Music: Juvenile Rebellion, Political Propaganda, or an Extreme Right Lifeworld?¹

June 2019, Themar, a village in Eastern Thuringia: eleven bands and 700 attendees at the second edition of the “Days of the National Movement” (*Tage der nationalen Bewegung*), organized by Sebastian Schmidtke, Patrick Schröder, and Tommy Frenck.²

April 2018, Ostritz, a Saxon village on the German-Polish border: ten fighting events, eleven bands, and 1,200 attendees for the first edition of the “Shield and Sword” festival (*Schild und Schwert Festival*), organized by Thorsten Heise.³

June 2017, Themar: seven bands and 6,000 attendees at “Rock Against Superalienation II” (*Rock gegen Überfremdung II*), organized by Tommy Frenck.⁴

1 German quotes and proper names, except for band, venue, and company names, have been carefully translated by the author.

2 Kira Ayyadi, “Tage der Nationalen Bewegung 2’: Am Wochenende wollen Neonazis in Themar wieder ‘abhitlern’,” *Belltower News*, July 4, 2019, <https://www.belltower.news/tage-der-nationalen-bewegung-2-am-wochenende-wollen-neonazis-in-themar-wieder-abhitlern-87271/>; Henrik Merker, “Bier weg, Bands weg, Stimmung weg,” *Die Zeit Online*, July 7, 2019, https://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/2019/07/07/bier-weg-bands-weg-stimmung-weg_28690.

3 Maximilian Kreter, “Zwischen Ideologie, Geschäft und Subkultur – die Rechtsrockszene in Sachsen,” in *Jahrbuch Öffentliche Sicherheit 2018/2019*, eds. Martin H. W. Möllers and Robert Christian van Ooyen (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag für Polizeiwissenschaft, 2019), 201; Tilman Steffen, “Unter Belagerung,” *Die Zeit Online*, April 19, 2018, <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2018-04/neonazi-festival-ostritz-sachsen-gegner>.

4 Jonas Miller, “6.000 Neonazis feiern ungestört in Thüringen,” *Die Zeit Online*, July 16, 2017, https://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/2017/07/16/6-000-neonazis-feiern-ungestoert-in-thuerin-gen_24365; Thueringen Rechtsaussen, “Neonazi-Konzert mit 6.000 Besuchern am 15. Juli in Themar, Auswertung: Gelder, Strukturen und der Umgang der Behörden,” *Thueringen Rechtsaussen*,

Note on the quote: “Hail Blood & Honour,” track 8 on Race War, *The White Race Will Prevail*, Micetrap Records, 2001.

October 2016, Unterwasser, a village in the canton of St. Gallen, Switzerland: six bands and 5,000 attendees at “*Rocktoberfest*”, organized by Steffen Richter.⁵

The concerts listed above were four of the largest and most important White Power Music concerts that took place in Europe between 2016 and 2021, all organized by German neo-Nazis and social movement entrepreneurs.⁶ Most of the social movement entrepreneurs referred to here had or still have close ties to the National Democratic Party (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, NPD), ranging from Frenck, Schröder, and Richter, who served as candidates in various (local and regional) elections for the party, to Schmidtke and Heise, who are both members of the party’s federal executive board. The alliance of extreme-right parties, the extreme-right movement, and the White Power Music scene in the concert business dates back to the early 2000s when the NPD started hosting events like the “Thuringian Day of the National Youth” (*Thüringentag der nationalen Jugend*), the “Festival of Peoples” (*Fest der Völker*), or “Rock for Germany” (*Rock für Deutschland*). They make use of the “party-privilege” (Parteienprivileg) in Article 21(1) of the German Basic Law [*Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, GBL], according to which political parties are guaranteed special protection. Other than regular associations, they can only be banned by the F[ederal] C[onstituitinal] C[ourt].⁷ Additionally, Article 5 (Freedom

July 26, 2017, <https://thueringenrechtsaussen.wordpress.com/2017/07/26/neonazi-konzert-mit-6-000-besuchern-am-15-juni-in-themar-auswertung-gelder-strukturen-und-der-umgang-der-behoerden/>.

⁵ Björn Resener, “5.000 Neonazis feiern ungestört in der Schweiz,” *Die Zeit Online*, October 17, 2016, https://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/2016/10/17/neonazis-schweiz-rock-konzert_22534; Thueringen Rechtsaussen, “150.000 € bei Rechtsrock-Konzert in der Schweiz – Geld landet auf Konto der Thüringer Neonazi-Szene,” *Thueringen Rechtsaussen*, October 17, 2016, <https://thueringenrechtsaussen.wordpress.com/2016/10/17/150-000-e-bei-rechtsrock-konzert-in-der-schweiz-geld-landet-auf-konto-der-thueringer-neonazi-szene/>.

⁶ This notion relates to the typologies of John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald as well as of Suzanne Staggenborg. John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1227; Suzanne Staggenborg, “The Consequences of Professionalization and Formalization in the Pro-Choice Movement,” *American Sociological Review* 53, no. 4 (1988): 586–590. Precisely speaking, a social movement entrepreneur lives entirely politically, socially, and economically off, by, and for the scene and the movement. They have often been involved for years or even decades and thereby have a lot of (professional) knowledge, and they are often charismatic leaders with distinct organizational skills. Thomas Grumke, “Die rechtsextremistische Bewegung,” in *Die sozialen Bewegungen in Deutschland seit 1945: Ein Handbuch*, eds. Roland Roth and Dieter Rucht (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2008), 482.

⁷ Geliijn Molier and Bastiaan Rijpkema, “Germany’s New Militant Democracy Regime: National Democratic Party II and the German Federal Constitutional Court’s ‘Potentiality’ Criterion for

of expression, arts and sciences) and Article 8 (Freedom of assembly) of the GBL allow them to set up a political meeting with two major advantages: The party enjoys special legal protection from the GBL, the Federal Law of Assembly (FLA), and the various state laws of assembly; and the entrance fees can be declared as donations.⁸ In order to meet the minimum criteria of the laws of assembly, a certain share of speakers that is relevant for (political) opinion formation has to be part of each event, even though most of the visitors attend to watch the bands. On top of this, most of the events offer a supporting program that often includes sales booths with White Power Music products, militaria, clothing, and much more, as well as activities for children, fighting events, or tattoo conventions. Due to the mixed character of these events, the visitors come from different scenes and spectrums of the extreme-right movement, ranging from the Autonomous Nationalists to Free Comradeship (Freie Kameradschaften) activists, party officials, politically predisposed but not (yet) organized youngsters, and, of course, skinheads and similar White Power Music fans.

Social movement entrepreneurs like Thorsten Heise managed to understand that (political) survival hinges upon the mobilization and recruitment of people beyond the main target groups and their connection with the extreme-right movement – especially via the White Power Music scene. This is based on the idea of Ian Stuart Donaldson, the founder and singer of the first White Power Music band, Skrewdriver, as well as the founder of the extreme-right network *Blood & Honour*: “You go to a concert and listen to a group that you agree with, it is a lot more enjoyable than going to a political meeting. And, ehm, we can get over to a lot more people that way and maybe, if they listen to the lyrics, they believe in what they say, maybe they will go out and get involved in the nationalist party, within their own country, and that can only be good really.”⁹ By instrumentalizing music and its subculture for a political scene and its movement, they are able to make low-threshold offers to enter and remain (!) in this movement by offering not only political content and action but also a whole lifeworld. In

Party Bans: Bundesverfassungsgericht, Judgment of 17 January 2017, 2 BvB 1/13, National Democratic Party II,” *European Constitutional Law Review* 14, no. 2 (2018): 395.

⁸ This depends on the way the organizers ask for donations and how the local tax office assesses each individual case. See, for example, FG Thüringen 23.04.2015–1 K 743/12.

⁹ Quoted in Karl-Heinz Käfer, *Lieder der Verführung* (Mainz: ZDF/ARTE, 1994), 60 min, 07:05–07:24 min. While Donaldson aims equally at the social and political functions of music, Matti Sundquist, the singer in the band Svastika, describes this function much more directly and as a tool of ultimate political struggle: “Music is our weapon and our white skin is our uniform.” Quoted in Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, *Lions of the North: Sounds of the New Nordic Radical Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 17.

this way, the movement can overcome mobilizing deficits and barriers because the transitions from the White Power Music scene to the extreme-right movement are fluid in both directions as the musicians perceive themselves as voices of the movement, which – in turn – builds on the mobilizing potential of the White Power Music (scene).¹⁰

Against this backdrop, the following questions are raised in the course of this article. First, which continuities and discontinuities shaped the developments in the German White Power Music scene from 1977 to 2017? Second, is White Power Music a tool for propaganda and agitation, an expression of juvenile rebellion, or part of an extreme-right lifeworld that offers both types in varying degrees, depending on factors such as age, family and job situation, or political involvement?

Terminology and Definitions: Music, Ideology, and Movement

The belittlement of definitions is wrong on three counts. First, since definitions declare the intended meaning of words, they ensure that we do not misunderstand each other. Second, words are also, in our research, our data containers. Therefore, if our data containers are loosely defined our facts will be misgathered. Third, to define is first of all to assign limits, to delimit. Hence the definition establishes what is to be included and conversely what is excluded by our categories.¹¹

The terms used for music with extreme-right lyrics vary across time, region, and language. Terms like “skinhead music” or “Nazi rock” are still used,¹² but the term “White Power Music” is most common in the Anglosphere,¹³ while in

10 Kirsten Dyck, *Reichsrock: The International Web of White-Power and Neo-Nazi Hate Music* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 4–6; Martin Langebach and Jan Raabe, *Rechtsrock und rechter Terror* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2012), 23.

11 Giovanni Sartori, “Where Is Political Science Going?,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 37, no. 4 (2004): 786.

12 Ryan Shaffer, “From Outcast to Martyr: The Memory of Rudolf Hess in Skinhead Culture,” *Journal Exit-Deutschland: Zeitschrift für Deradikalisierung und demokratische Kultur* 7, no. 3 (2014): 115.

13 Dyck, *Reichsrock*, 2–3; Robert Futrell, Pete Simi, and Simon Gottschalk, “Understanding Music in Movements: The White Power Music Scene,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (2006): 275–277.

the Germanosphere, the term “*Rechtsrock*” is the most common one.¹⁴ White Power Music comprises the musical style of punk and Oi! as well as the ideology of right-wing extremism.¹⁵ But as the ideology of right-wing extremism does not emerge as a closed worldview in daily life but more in the form of a loose agglomeration of single ideologemes linked to subjective everyday reality, an open definition of ideology has been chosen: “The common man has a set of emotionally charged political beliefs, a critique of alternative proposals, and some modest programs of reform. These beliefs embrace central values and institutions; they are rationalizations of interests (sometimes not his own); and they serve as moral justifications for daily acts and beliefs.”¹⁶ This fits with an open, morphological definition¹⁷ of right-wing extremism: “Right-wing extremism is a pattern of attitudes whose connecting characteristic lies in the notion of inequality. Politically, they are expressed in an affinity for dictatorial forms of government, chauvinistic attitudes, and downplaying or justifying National Socialism. Socially, they are characterized by antisemitic, xenophobic, and social Darwinist attitudes.”¹⁸ Applied to music, it becomes clear that White Power Music

14 Christian Dornbusch and Jan Raabe, eds., *RechtsRock: Bestandsaufnahmen und Gegenstrategien* (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2002); Gideon Botsch, Christoph Schulze, and Jan Raabe, eds., *Rechtsrock: Aufstieg und Wandel neonazistischer Jugendkultur am Beispiel Brandenburgs* (Berlin: Bebra Verlag, 2019).

15 Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Richard Stöss, “Ideologie und Strategie des Rechtsextremismus,” in *Rechtsextremismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, eds. Wilfried Schubarth and Richard Stöss (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2001), 102.

16 Robert Lane, *Political Ideologies: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 15–16.

17 Michael Freeden, “The Morphological Analysis of Ideology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, eds. Michael Freeden, Lyman Tower Sargent, and Marc Stears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 115–126.

18 Oliver Decker, Marliese Weißmann, Johannes Kiess, and Elmar Brähler, *Die Mitte in der Krise: Rechtsextreme Einstellungen in Deutschland* (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2010), 18. A similarly open definition that is closely linked to the definition of the Federal Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht, BVerfG) in the seminal judgment BVerfG, 23.10.1952–1 BvB 1/51 regarding the ban of the Socialist Reich Party (Sozialistische Reichspartei, SRP) is offered by Hans-Gerd Jaschke: “By ‘right-wing extremism’, we mean the entirety of attitudes, behavioral patterns and actions, organized or non-organized, which are based on racial or ethnic social inequality, demand ethnic homogeneity, reject the principle of equality of human rights declarations, emphasize the primacy of the community over the individual, premise the subordination of the citizen to the reasons of state, reject the value pluralism of a liberal democracy, and want to reverse democratization. By ‘right-wing extremism’, we particularly mean objectives that seek to abolish individualism in favor of a folkish, collectivist, ethnically homogeneous community in a strong nation state and, closely linked to rejection and resolution, combat

is not a distinct style of music. The extreme-right political messages that come along with different styles of pop and rock music turn the latter into White Power Music.¹⁹ White Power Music, as the constitutive, central cultural form of expression of the White Power Music scene, is conceptually regarded as an independent but integral part of the extreme-right movement.²⁰ A social movement is defined as “a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity.”²¹ This definition must be distinguished from the concept of a scene. Structurally, the White Power Music scene is a sub-cultural subunit of the extreme-right movement, but contextually and formally, it is “simultaneously a network of people who share a common identity and a common set of subcultural or countercultural beliefs, values, norms, and convictions as well as a network of physical spaces where members of that group are known to congregate.”²² So White Power Music is a cultural medium of a scene as well as a political medium of a social movement. This intermediate space, where politics and everyday life can be depicted as a unit,²³ is defined as a movement scene: “Movements scenes [. . .] share a high degree of autonomy from dominant groups, all refer to networks of persons, groups and places, and are all prefigurative spaces created in the movement’s image rather than indigenous premobilization groups. Where they differ is that [. . .] [they] are seen as necessarily connected to and beneficial for social movements, and the concept of

against multiculturalism. Right-wing extremism is an anti-modernist movement that reacts to social upheavals in the development of industrial society which evolves as a form of protest throughout Europe.” Hans-Gerd Jaschke, *Rechtsextremismus und Fremdenfeindlichkeit: Begriffe, Positionen, Praxisfelder* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001), 30. For a summary of (the use of) German terminology in national and international contexts, see Uwe Backes, *Political Extremes: A Conceptual History from Antiquity to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2010), 140–151.

19 Christian Dornbusch and Jan Raabe, “Einleitung,” in *RechtsRock: Bestandsaufnahmen und Gegenstrategien*, eds. Christian Dornbusch and Jan Raabe (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2002), 9.

20 Thomas Grumke, “‘Und sie bewegt sich doch’: Rechtsextremismus als soziale Bewegung. Das Analysepotential der Bewegungsforschung zur Interpretation neuerer Entwicklungen,” in *Jahrbuch für Extremismus- und Terrorismusforschung 2008*, ed. Armin Pfahl-Traughber (Brühl: Hochschule des Bundes für öffentliche Verwaltung, 2008), 95–121; Thomas Kuban, *Blut muss fließen: Undercover unter Nazis* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2012).

21 Mario Diani, “The Concept of Social Movement,” *The Sociological Review* 40, no. 1 (1992): 13.

22 Darcy K. Leach and Sebastian Haunss, “Scenes and Social Movements,” in *Culture, Social Movements, and Protest*, ed. Hans Johnston (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 259.

23 Sebastian Haunss, *Identität in Bewegung: Prozesse kollektiver Identität bei den Autonomen und in der Schwulenbewegung* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004), 89.

a scene more explicitly addresses the importance of physical space as it relates to social movement action.”²⁴ The low-threshold cultural offers of movement scenes can work as ‘gateways’ to the movements, where (unconventional) direct political participation becomes very likely.²⁵ The (possible) political participation derives from different interior and exterior functions, whereas only exterior functions are considered for the intended purpose.²⁶ These functions can be divided into two categories: subjective-individual and collective-group. Each category can be further subdivided into social, political-ideological, and economic functions. The subjective-individual functions comprise social functions (listening pleasure; feeling of belonging/having a “surrogate family”; building networks), political-ideological functions (political recognition and (self-)justification; ideological affirmation/confirmation), and economic functions (secondary or primary livelihood as a “social movement entrepreneur”). The collective-group-related functions encompass social functions (leisure activities/structuring life and free time; (imagined) community building; unpolitical/social recognition; public attention (for political goals), political-ideological functions (propaganda: access and attachment to the scene; ideological affirmation/confirmation/radicalization; recruitment for political action), and economic functions (development of own business; funding the scene and the movement; funding political action (“direct action”)).²⁷

This set of functions (see Tab. 1) offers a wide scope of actions to the various actors to achieve the different goals of the scene and the movement, but it also entails several risks: the balance of the dynamics of scenes and movements is often fragile and can lead to distinct self-referentiality and to losing reference to each other and common goals. The risk increases the more youth cultural

24 Leach and Haunss, “Scenes and Social Movements,” 261.

25 Christoph Schulze, *Etikettenschwindel: Die Autonomen Nationalisten zwischen Pop und Antimoderne* (Baden-Baden: Tectum Verlag, 2017), 58–59.

26 The interior perspective is largely covered by Ian Stuart Donaldson’s quote that reflects the functions and effect of the White Power Music scene’s efforts regarding the impact on the extreme-right movement.

27 These functions have been derived from the following works: Ugo Corte and Bob Edwards, “White Power Music and the Mobilization of Racist Social Movements,” *Music and Arts in Action* 1, no. 1 (2008): 10–17; Michaela Glaser and Tabea Schlimbach, “‘Wer in dieser Clique drin ist, der hört einfach diese Musik’. Rechtsextreme Musik, ihre Bedeutung und ihre Funktionen aus der Perspektive jugendlicher rechtsextremer Szeneangehöriger,” in *Rechtsextreme Musik: Ihre Funktionen für jugendliche Hörer/innen und Antworten der pädagogischen Praxis*, eds. Gabi Elverich, Michaela Glaser, Tabea Schlimbach, and Anna Schnitzer (Halle: Deutsches Jugendinstitut, 2009), 30–60; Thorsten Hindrichs, “Funktionen von Musik für die extreme Rechte,” in *Hass und Kommerz: RechtsRock in Thüringen*, ed. Mobit (Erfurt: Mobit, 2018), 10–12.

Tab. 1: Functions of White Power Music.

Exterior Functions					
Subjective-Individual Functions			Collective-Group-Related Functions		
Social Functions	Political-Ideological Functions	Economic Functions	Social Functions	Political-Ideological Functions	Economic Functions
1. listening pleasure	1. political recognition and (self-) justification	1. secondary or primary livelihood (as a “social movement entrepreneur”)	1. Leisure activities / structuring life	1. propaganda: access and attachment to the scene	1. development of own business
2. feeling of belonging (having a “surrogate family”)	2. ideological affirmation / confirmation		2. (imagined) community building: unpolitical / social recognition	2. ideological affirmation / confirmation / radicalization	2. funding the scene and the movement
3. building networks			3. Public attention (for political goals)	3. recruitment for political action	3. funding political action (“direct action”)

influences shape the character of a scene as, in most cases, these are opposed to the political and strategic goals of the movement in question.²⁸

Methodology and Approach: Historical-Sociological Reconstruction

In order to analyze the development of the White Power Music scene, a historical-sociological reconstruction is undertaken, i.e.

a sociological elucidation of the [. . .] conditions by reconstructing their historical genesis. [. . .] Their objects form spatio-temporally specified social and cultural orders [. . .] and the goal of the study is to carve out the singular or the individual of this social or cultural order in a typifying way. Accordingly, the methodological emphasis is on

²⁸ Haunss, *Identität in Bewegung*, 268–269; Schulze, *Etikettenschwindel*, 60.

understanding these orders [. . .] and individualizing comparisons to aim at the formation of singular causal judgments.²⁹

This historical-sociological reconstruction includes a temporal and an analytical dimension. The analytical dimension encompasses bands, concerts/live events, and businesses. By analyzing these interwoven units, insights regarding their political-ideological, social, and economic functions and the relevance of the music to the movement and scene as such can be expounded. The temporal dimension comprises structuring the course of events into four sections, referred to as phases. A temporal delimitation of the single phases is based on (the identification of) key events at the beginning and end of the respective phases. These key events lead to lasting changes or manifestations of certain developments and are defined as follows:

Key events are usually characterized by an extreme expression of features such as surprise, damage, range, or relevance. They provoke extreme orientation reactions in journalists, politicians, and the population and lead them to search for comprehensive information that can be used to interpret and classify the event. [. . .] This process includes the updating of similar past events, reports on much smaller but structurally similar events, intensive research into backgrounds, responsibilities or comments, and statements by political and social actors.³⁰

Key events are not necessarily limited to single moments. They can expand to a particular timespan that evokes the above-mentioned reactions. Initially, key events are determined to delimit the phases from each other (see Tab. 2). Secondly, the historical-sociological reconstruction of the developments in the individual phases follows (the patterns of) the categories of the analytical dimension. The reconstruction is limited to those events that were central to and of particular importance for the development of the scene and the movement. Detailed descriptions of the genesis of the scene and movement as well as extensive case studies are deliberately omitted.³¹ The last step encompasses the presentation of

29 Rainer Schützeichel, *Historische Soziologie* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2004), 9, 11.

30 Florian Arendt, Hans-Bernd Brosius, and Patricia Hauck, “Die Auswirkung des Schlüsselereignisses ‘Silvesternacht in Köln’ auf die Kriminalitätsberichterstattung,” *Publizistik* 62, no. 2 (2017): 137.

31 For an overview, see Ingo Heiko Steimel, “Musik und die rechtsextreme Subkultur” (PhD diss., Aachen University, 2008). For case studies, see Christian Dornbusch, Jan Raabe, and David Begrich, *RechtsRock: Made in Sachsen-Anhalt* (Magdeburg: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Sachsen-Anhalt 2007); Maximilian Kreter, “Rechtsrock in Sachsen – Sprachrohr fremdenfeindlicher Militanz?,” *Totalitarismus und Demokratie: Zeitschrift für internationale Diktatur- und Freiheitsforschung* 15, no. 1 (2018): 99–125; Maximilian Kreter, “Sachsen und Thüringen – Hochburgen des Rechtsrock in Deutschland?,” in *Sachsen – Eine Hochburg des Rechtsextremismus?*, eds. Uwe

the results of the individual phases in the overall development context in order to identify the (dis)continuities in the development of the scene and movement as well as the main function(s) of White Power Music.

40 Years of White Power Music: A Historical-Sociological Reconstruction

Formation – White Power Music as a “Cultural Import” and Juvenile Rebellion

The first phase lasted from 1977 to 1989 and thus includes the process of its creation as well as its development up to the fall of the Berlin Wall. The extreme-right movement was politically and culturally isolated after the Second World War. Collateral organizations³² such as the Viking Youth (Wiking Jugend, WJ) and parties like the SRP still had strong ties to the traditions of the Third Reich. Even the NPD – founded as an extreme-right melting pot party in 1964 – was very successful in the following years, and its university organization, the National Democratic University Association (Nationaldemokratischer Hochschulbund, NHB), still considered beat and pop music an “acoustic drug”³³ in the early 1970s. Nevertheless, the first German white power band, Ragnaröck, was founded in the surroundings of the NHB. The attempt to establish a certain degree of bonding with the youth failed: first because of the complete lack of a rebellious habitus among the members, and second because the conservative, reactionary lyrics did not match with the youth’s attitude toward life.³⁴ Under the influence of British

Backes and Steffen Kailitz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 315–337; Christoph Schulze, “Rechtsrock in Brandenburg,” in *Rechtsrock: Aufstieg und Wandel neonazistischer Jugendkultur am Beispiel Brandenburgs*, eds. Gideon Botsch, Christoph Schulze, and Jan Raabe (Berlin: Bebra Verlag, 2019), 45–142.

32 Collateral organizations are groups that aggregate and articulate interests. They are formally or informally tied to a party, movement, or at least a certain political direction. Thomas Poguntke, *Parteiorganisation im Wandel: Gesellschaftliche Verankerung und organisatorische Anpassung im europäischen Vergleich* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2000), 35–48.

33 *Deutsche Stimme*, quoted in Toralf Staud, *Moderne Nazis: Die neuen Rechten und der Aufstieg der NPD* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2006), 158.

34 Christian Dornbusch and Jan Raabe, “20 Jahre RechtsRock. Vom Skinhead-Rock zur Alltagskultur,” in *RechtsRock: Bestandsaufnahmen und Gegenstrategien*, eds. Christian Dornbusch and Jan Raabe (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2002), 19.

bands like Skrewdriver and Brutal Attack, German bands such as Endstufe, Kraft durch Froide (KdF), Böhse Onkelz, or Kahlkopf formed and constituted the first generation of White Power Music bands. Only Endstufe remains active until the present day; the others defected from the scene or just dissolved and reunited at irregular intervals. Reliable data on which and how many bands existed at that time are not available, partly because the scene only connected and remained active in socially closed circles.³⁵ By 1989, only a few more bands – some of which are continuously active until today – namely Radikahl, Störkraft, Commando Pernod, Noie Werte, and Tonstörung, had been founded. At first, the music had a predominantly social function, but in the course of its further development – the increasing politicization and radicalization of the scene – the political-ideological function continuously gained significance.³⁶ At the beginning of the first phase, the lyrics were still dominated by a diffuse adaptation of the “skinhead way of life” from Great Britain and the description of one’s own life circumstances, which were characterized by (fantasies of) massive violence, alcoholic excesses, and exaggerated masculinity ideals. But toward the end of this phase, most of the active bands turned to openly right-wing extremist and partly criminally relevant lyrics.³⁷ In addition, the bands used militaristic National Socialist symbolism and rhetoric without abandoning their subcultural roots. By these means, they unconsciously began to approach party-political symbolism and activities from which they had initially tried to keep as much distance as possible.³⁸

In the early days of the German White Power Music scene, concerts took place almost completely unnoticed by the public, often in rehearsal rooms,

35 Dornbusch and Raabe counted 26 different releases from various bands, whereas the responsible security authorities did not or only rarely monitor the scene, and as a result only have selective or no data available. *Ibid.*, 36.

36 Timothy S. Brown, “Subcultures, Pop Music and Politics: Skinheads and ‘Nazi Rock’ in England and Germany,” *Journal of Social History* 38, no 1. (2004): 167.

37 Heinz Hachel, “Für Klasse, Rasse und Nation. Der doppelte Romantizismus völkischer Glatzen,” in *Die Skins. Mythos und Realität*, ed. Klaus Farin (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1998), 142–166; Heinz Hachel, “Alex & Co. Glatzensymbol,” in *Die Skins: Mythos und Realität*, ed. Klaus Farin (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1998), 167–176.

38 Klaus Farin, “Reaktionäre Rebellen. Die Geschichte einer Provokation,” in *Rock von Rechts II: Milieus, Hintergründe und Materialien*, ed. Dieter Baacke, Klaus Farin, and Jürgen Lauffer (Bielefeld: Gesellschaft für Medienpädagogik und Kommunikationskultur in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1999), 14–25; Michael Weiss, “Begleitmusik zu Mord und Totschlag. Rechtsrock in Deutschland,” in *White Noise: Rechts-Rock, Skinhead-Musik, Blood & Honour – Einblicke in die internationale Neonazi-Musik-Szene*, ed. Searchlight, Antifaschistisches Infoblatt, Enough is enough, and rat (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2004), 69–71.

youth clubs, or similar venues. They were organized according to the “do it yourself” (DIY) principle that is often practiced in subcultures, and thus they were neither professionally conducted nor primarily geared to commercial interests. The concerts mainly had a social function since members of the scene as well as potential followers perceived them as a community experience among like-minded people, but they were also seen as means of making new contacts or merchandise, preferably new sound carriers, for purchase.³⁹

The music was distributed almost exclusively by Herbert Egoldt, an entrepreneur from outside the scene, via his record label Rock-O-Rama Records. He achieved prominence by releasing the records of big names on the scene, such as the Böhse Onkelz, Skrewdriver, and even Endstufe. In addition, the distribution of music was conducted through the exchange of self-dubbed cassettes or the bands’ sale of merchandise in limited editions at concerts. Other professional infrastructure like small, scene-owned record labels was not available at that time. Thus, there was no direct economic function since no money flowed back into the scene or movement or into political work through Egoldt, and even with the concerts, there was (still) hardly any money to be earned.⁴⁰

In its first phase, White Power Music hardly played any role as an instrument of political propaganda for the extreme-right movement. It was primarily a newly emerging subculture that – at this time – was largely opposed to party politics. The actors had hedonistic motives that were satisfied through social functions. Through similar realities in life, recurring group experiences, and clear images of oneself and one’s enemies, the actors created relief mechanisms or release valves for their (social) tensions in everyday life.

Radicalization – State Prohibition and Executive Measures I

The second phase lasted from 1989 to 1994 and was marked by the events surrounding German reunification and the “primal scenes of racist violence in East Germany”⁴¹ in Hoyerswerda and Rostock-Lichtenhagen. The fall of the Iron

39 Klaus Farin, “‘In Walhalla sehen wir uns wieder . . .’. Rechtsrock,” in *Die Skins: Mythos und Realität*, ed. Klaus Farin (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1998), 238–239.

40 Klaus Farin and Henning Flad, “Reaktionäre Rebellen. Rechtsextreme Musik in Deutschland,” in *Reaktionäre Rebellen: Rechtsextreme Musik in Deutschland*, ed. Archiv der Jugendkulturen (Berlin: Thomas Tilsner Verlag, 2001), 11–14, 19–27.

41 David Begrich, “Hoyerswerda und Lichtenhagen. Urszenen rassistischer Gewalt in Ostdeutschland,” in *Generation Hoyerswerda: Das Netzwerk militanter Neonazis in Brandenburg*, eds. Heike Kleffner and Anna Spangenberg (Berlin: Bebra Verlag, 2016), 32–44.

Curtain in November 1989 was the initial key event that demarcated the first phase from the second. This historical event opened a new reservoir of potential followers for a recently decimated scene (especially band-wise). Thus, the still existing white power music bands⁴² from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) (Deutsche Demokratische Republik, DDR) – Brutale Haie and Pitbull (Bomber)⁴³ – successfully integrated themselves in the second phase into the all-German scene. Besides the merging of the existing scenes, numerous new bands were formed, such as Frontalkraft, Macht & Ehre, Spreegeschwader, and Landser, around the singer Michael “Lunikoff” Regener, who still has cult status on the scene today.⁴⁴ In the phase from 1989 to 1994, the number of active White Power Music bands increased from a low single-digit number to up to 23 in Germany.⁴⁵ The reasons for this rapid increase can be traced to the circumstance whereby, until late 1992, bands could operate largely off the radar of government agencies.⁴⁶ Their lyrics, which were heavily ideologically charged, provided the “incidental music for murder and manslaughter”⁴⁷ and for nationwide racist riots. While the lyrics of the first generation were still strongly influenced by hedonistic and self-referential themes, the second generation of White Power Music bands focused on the articulation of hatred, the annihilation of political opponents, and the ideological idealization of their own race and nation.⁴⁸ This did not go unnoticed by state agencies. The danger of prosecution increased, and a large number of records were audited and subsequently banned by the Federal Review Board for Media Harmful to Minors (Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Schriften/Medien, BPjS/BPjM⁴⁹). In

42 Hammerschlag (from Frankfurt an der Oder) was active between 1985 and 1986, at which point it was broken up by the Ministry for State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, MfS). Schulze, “Rechtsrock in Brandenburg,” 59–64.

43 The band was founded in 1988 under the name Pitbull, and it was renamed Bomber in 1990. Dornbusch and Raabe, “20 Jahre RechtsRock,” 47.

44 Schulze, “Rechtsrock in Brandenburg,” 56–59, 65–68.

45 Apabiz, “Verzeichnis RechtsRock-Bands,” in *RechtsRock: Bestandsaufnahmen und Gegenstrategien*, eds. Christian Dornbusch and Jan Raabe (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2002), 433–463; Erika Funk-Hennigs and Johannes Jäger, *Rassismus, Musik und Gewalt: Ursachen, Entwicklungen und Folgerungen* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1995), 171–173.

46 David A. Jacobs, “The Ban of Neo-Nazi Music: Germany Takes On the Neo-Nazis,” *Harvard International Law Journal* 34, no. 2 (1993): 571–576.

47 Weiss, “Begleitmusik zu Mord und Totschlag,” 67–92.

48 Henning Flad, “Trotz Verbot nicht tot. Ideologieproduktionen in den Songs der extremen Rechten,” in *RechtsRock: Bestandsaufnahmen und Gegenstrategien*, eds. Christian Dornbusch and Jan Raabe (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2002), 96–98.

49 The agency’s name was changed on 1 April 2003 from Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Schriften (Written Works) to Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Medien (Media) in recognition of technological changes. Daniel Hajok and Daniel Hildebrandt, “Jugendgefährdung

addition, offenses that had hardly been prosecuted up to that point were now laid as criminal charges under §§ 86, 86a, 111, 130, 130a, 131, 184, and 184a of the German Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch, StGB)⁵⁰ and the corresponding media were confiscated.⁵¹ As a result, the bands split into two groups. A large number, including Noie Werte and Kroizfoier/Kreuzfeuer, adapted their lyrics to the German legal framework and had their works examined by lawyers before their release in order to avoid (renewed) prosecution by the security authorities. A second, much smaller group, to which well-known representatives such as Landser, Kraftschlag, and Deutsch Stolz Treue (D.S.T.) belonged, chose the opposite path to the underground.⁵² The lyrics became more radical, hardly considering possible prohibitions, which was partly in order to compensate for their lack of (musical) skills.⁵³ To protect themselves from criminal prosecution, the members prepared, recorded, and distributed their releases conspiratorially. The production and distribution of the sound carriers often took place in neighboring countries.

Regarding concerts, the second phase, especially the years 1993 and 1994, marked a clearly visible change. At the peak of the development – in 1993 – the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV) registered 30 concerts. The scene shifted its activity and event focus from West to East Germany. This was to escape the more intense pressure of prosecution in the West in order to make use of free spaces in the social (and partly legal) vacuum in East Germany after the breakdown of state order in the GDR.⁵⁴

im Wandel der Zeit: Perspektiven des Jugendmedienschutzes auf das Gefährdungspotenzial von Medien und den besonderen Schutzbedarf von Kindern und Jugendlichen,” *Diskurs: Kindheits- und Jugendforschung* 12, no. 1 (2017): 86.

50 On the one hand, the literary camouflage is intended in particular to circumvent statements that criminalize the above-mentioned offenses, which, despite prior examination by lawyers, does not always succeed, as the OLG Bamberg (OLG Bamberg, 08.10.2008–3 Ss 112/2008) and BGH (BGH, 03.04.2008–3 StR 394/07) judgments show. On the other hand, their use serves as a form of linguistic agitation and identification, which, as a common code, creates and promotes a feeling of belonging together. Thomas Naumann, *Rechtsrock im Wandel: Eine Textanalyse von Rechtsrock-Bands* (Hamburg: Diplomica Verlag, 2009), 43–65.

51 Jacobs, “The Ban of Neo-Nazi Music,” 576.

52 Florian Pascal Bülow, “Bis an die Zähne bewaffnet mit Schlagzeug und E-Gitarre . . .” – Der Wandel rechter Musik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” *Journal Exit-Deutschland: Zeitschrift für Deradikalisierung und demokratische Kultur* 7, no. 3 (2014): 205–207; Kirsten Dyck, *Race and Nation in White Power Music* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2012), 12–14.

53 Friederike Wißmann, *Deutsche Musik* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2015), 240–241. The lack of skill is expressed through – even for non-professionals – clearly perceptible playing errors in studio and live recordings. In addition, the musicians mostly use simple, constantly repeated structures in their compositions. Steimel, “Musik und die rechtsextreme Subkultur,” 208–211.

54 Schulze, “Rechtsrock in Brandenburg,” 69–84.

This became apparent primarily with the organization of larger concerts, which could only take place largely undisturbed in East Germany or in neighboring countries. But due to the rising pressure of prosecution, the number of concerts decreased within one year to only 20 in 1994.⁵⁵

Initial changes also became evident in the trade and distribution of White Power Music merchandise. Rock-O-Rama Records was affected by the wave of bannings and confiscations and was therefore only able to act within a very limited (business) range. Moreover, the record label’s owner, Herbert Egoldt, was a controversial person on the scene due to dubious business practices.⁵⁶ In the mid-1990s, the right-wing extremist multifunctionalist Torsten Lemmer founded the label Funny Sounds Records. Since he was able to offer musicians more professional production and distribution structures, he succeeded in developing new bands and signing already relatively commercially successful ones to his label.⁵⁷

Although the second phase lasted only five years, it nevertheless brought profound changes. The bands not only became opinion leaders within their subculture, they also gained significant and sustainable influence on the development of the extreme-right movement. While the first phase focused on social functions such as the experience of community among like-minded people and leisure activities with a rebellious habitus, political-ideological functions came to the fore in the second phase. On the one hand, music and potential community were used as low-threshold offerings for (disoriented) young people and as propaganda tools in the struggle for the prerogative of interpretation on current political issues. On the other hand, it was increasingly instrumentalized for party work,⁵⁸ and economic functions also became far more important. Torsten Lemmer, the (supposed) prototype of a right-wing extremist multifunctionalist, held a dominant position in the market. He was able to earn his living from the scene for the movement and vice versa. Although concerts

55 Bundesministerium des Innern, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 1994* (Bonn: Bundesministerium des Innern, 1995), 97.

56 Egoldt released and sold a large number of sound carriers without the permission of the bands and did not share the revenue with them. Christian Menhorn, *Skinheads: Portrait einer Subkultur* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2001), 208.

57 Henning Flad, “Zur Ökonomie der rechtsextremen Szene – Die Bedeutung des Handels mit Musik,” in *Moderner Rechtsextremismus in Deutschland*, eds. Andreas Klärner and Michael Kohlstruck (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006), 107.

58 Martin Langebach and Jan Raabe, “Die Genese einer extrem rechten Jugendkultur,” in *Autonome Nationalisten: Neonazismus in Bewegung*, eds. Jan Schedler and Alexander Häusler (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011), 41–46.

massively gained in importance in terms of their political-ideological and social function, their economic relevance did not grow at the same rate. This phase gave rise to the “Generation Hoyerswerda,”⁵⁹ which continues to shape the scene (and partly the movement) even today in terms of personnel, ideology, and economic issues.⁶⁰ Thus, the key events that characterize the second phase, which was quite short but extremely intense, are the deployment of prosecutions, which by 1994 were nearly at their full extent, and the resulting changes within the scene, i.e. the split into “legal” and “illegal” bands, the increasing number and size of concerts as well as their changing location, and, business-wise, the change from a nearly uncontested monopoly to a contested duopoly.⁶¹

Commercial Professionalization – State Prohibition and Executive Measures II

The third phase lasted from 1995 to 2005 and is divided into two intervals. The first interval was mainly shaped and delimited by the activities of the right-wing extremist network *Blood & Honour* from 1995 until its ban in 2000 as well as by the band Landser. During this phase, a third generation set out to serve the market with increasingly professional and commercially oriented products. By 1995, the number of bands had already doubled to 47, and in 2000, with 100 active

59 Heike Kleffner and Anna Spangenberg define the “Generation Hoyerswerda” as the cohort of right-wing extremists who more or less actively experienced or even shaped the racist violence, the rise of White Power Music to become a perceptible subculture, and the transformation of the various extreme-right scenes into a movement. Heike Kleffner and Anna Spangenberg, “Vorwort der Herausgeberinnen,” in *Generation Hoyerswerda: Das Netzwerk militanter Neonazis in Brandenburg*, eds. Heike Kleffner and Anna Spangenberg (Berlin: Bebra Verlag, 2016), 11–12.

60 Kreter, “Sachsen und Thüringen,” 334–337; Sven Pötsch, “Rechtsextreme Musik,” in *Handbuch Rechtsradikalismus: Personen – Organisationen – Netzwerke vom Neonazismus bis in die Mitte der Gesellschaft*, eds. Thomas Grumke and Bernd Wagner (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2002), 120–121.

61 The BfV summarized the changing scene with a wider scope and a general tone: “The right-wing extremist skinhead scene is in a phase of reorientation due to the emphatic and extensive executive measures [. . .]. Extremely short haircuts, tattoos, jeans, suspenders, Doc Martens boots, a bomber jacket and T-shirt are no longer mandatory outfits for skinheads. For tactical reasons, many skinheads increasingly adopt the outer appearance of ordinary people. [. . .] In the attitude of the skinheads, nothing has changed.” Bundesministerium des Innern, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 1993* (Bonn: Bundesministerium des Innern, 1994), 95.

bands in Germany, the scene had reached a new peak. White Power Music musically rooted in Oi! and punk continued to dominate the scene, and a few Heavy Metal elements were added to it, as in the cases of *Stahlgewitter*, *Division Germania*, and *Oidoxie*.⁶² Landser, who had chosen the path to the illegal underground and the concomitant conspiratorial release policy, produced their albums *Republik der Strolche*,⁶³ *Rock gegen oben*,⁶⁴ and *Ran an den Feind*⁶⁵ between 1995 and 2000, and they are still considered classics of the scene today.⁶⁶ Their racist, inciting, and inhuman content resulted in Landser becoming the first band in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany to be convicted as a criminal organization.⁶⁷ Only a minority of bands continued to follow Landser regarding their illegal way of producing and releasing records, acting against the prevailing trend on the scene of increasing content-ideological differentiation and literary camouflage.⁶⁸ In the course of using this tactic, blatant glorifications of Nazism, the call to arms, and the approval of crimes faded into the background in favor of coded messages with similar but rarely legally chargeable lyrics. Besides these

62 Kreter, “Rechtsrock in Sachsen,” 108.

63 Landser, *Republik der Strolche*, NS Records, 1995.

64 Landser, *Rock gegen Oben*, Rebell Records, 1997.

65 Landser, *Ran an den Feind*, Movement Records, 2000.

66 According to estimates, approximately 100,000 Landser CDs were already in circulation in 2002. Two studies on the subject of young people’s music consumption show that in 2010 and 2011, approximately 15% of those surveyed were familiar with the music of Landser. Georg Brunner, “Kraftschlag – rechtsextreme Musik. Eine Annäherung an ihre Rezeption und Wirkung,” in *Musik & Gewalt: Aggressive Tendenzen in musikalischen Jugendkulturen*, ed. Gabriele Hoffmann (Augsburg: Wißner Verlag, 2011), 102–103; Georg Brunner and René Gründer, “‘So einen Scheiß lade ich nicht auf meinen Laptop.’ Auswertung einer Studie zum Umgang von Schülern mit rechtsradikaler Musik,” in *Samples 10*, eds. Ralf von Appen, André Doehring, Dietrich Helms, and Thomas Phleps (Gießen: Gesellschaft für Populärmusikforschung, 2011), 1–33; Georg Seeßlen, “Gesänge zwischen Glatze und Scheitel. Anmerkungen zu den musikalischen Idiomen der RechtsRock-Musik,” in *RechtsRock: Bestandsaufnahmen und Gegenstrategien*, eds. Christian Dornbusch and Jan Raabe (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2002), 129.

67 KG, 22.12.2003–3 StE 2/02. BGH, 10.03.2005–3 StR 233/04. Armin Pfahl-Traughber, “Politisches Selbstverständnis und Gewaltorientierung rechtsextremistischer Skinheads – Eine Fallstudie zu den Tonträgern der Band ‘Landser,’” in *Jahrbuch Extremismus & Demokratie 13*, eds. Uwe Backes and Eckhard Jesse (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2001), 173–181.

68 “Literary ‘camouflage’ means: intentional difference between (indecent) surface text and [. . .] [here: right-wing extremist] subtext. [. . .] The offensive content is made publicly formulatable by transposing it into a non-offensive area and simultaneously signaling what was originally meant. This signalization [of the original content] can be phrased in such a manner that it can be perceived by all readers in principle, but can only be deciphered by ‘initiated’ readers.” Heinrich Detering, *Das offene Geheimnis: Zur literarischen Produktivität eines Tabus von Winckelmann bis zu Thomas Mann* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013), 30.

linguistic and lyrical changes, the musical spectrum of the scene expanded further. This becomes evident in the example of Die Zillertaler Türkenjäger, who musically drew on well-known songs (for example, “Sonderzug nach Pankow” by Udo Lindenberg) but modified the lyrics and charged them with an extreme-right ideology.⁶⁹

With his record label Funny Sounds Records, Torsten Lemmer had replaced Rock-O-Rama Records as the market leader in the White Power Music business in Germany. The first distributors and record labels managed by members of the scene were founded at the same time, including Movement Records by Jan Werner,⁷⁰ Pühses Liste⁷¹ by Jens Pühse, Nibelungen Versand by Jens Hessler, and WB-Versand by Thorsten Heise. Heise maintains personal and business relations with *Blood & Honour* (and with its militant wing, *Combat 18*),⁷² which in turn was responsible for the most serious change in the organization of concerts: the quadrupling of the number of concerts organized throughout Germany can be attributed in large part to *Blood & Honour*’s commitment as a concert promoter.

The ban of the German division of *Blood & Honour* on 12 September 2000⁷³ marked the turning point within the third phase of the development of White

69 Erika Funk-Hennigs, “Neuere Entwicklungen in der deutschen Rechtsrock-Szene,” in *Cut and Paste: Schnittmuster populärer Musik der Gegenwart*, eds. Dietrich Helms and Thomas Phleps (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2006), 101. Landser, for example, adapted “Capri-Fischer” and combined it with a short dialogue from the 13-part DEFA series “Archiv des Todes.” The result was the song “Polacken Tango” (Polack Tango) on their album *Rock gegen Oben*. “Capri-Fischer,” track 1 on Rudi Schuricke, *Capri-Fischer / Leise erklingen die Glocken vom Campanile*, Polydor, 1943; *Archiv des Todes*, 13 episodes, written and directed by Rudi Kurz (1980, DEFA, Potsdam; 2010 Icestorm Entertainment GmbH, Berlin); “Polacken Tango,” track 5 on Landser, *Rock gegen Oben*, Rebell Records, 1997.

70 Jan Werner was one of the leaders of *Blood & Honour* in Chemnitz, Saxony, as well as one of the closest confidants and supporters of the NSU core trio. Kulturbüro Sachsen, *Unter den Teppich gekehrt: Das Unterstützungsnetzwerk des NSU in Sachsen* (Dresden: Kulturbüro Sachsen, 2017), 21–23; Michael Weiss, “Der NSU im Netz von Blood & Honour und Combat 18,” in *Der NSU in bester Gesellschaft: Zwischen Neonazismus, Rassismus und Staat*, eds. Sebastian Friedrich, Regina Wamper and Jens Zimmermann (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2015), 12–14.

71 A little later, the distribution was integrated into the NPD-owned Deutsche Stimme Versand, which itself was taken over by Heise, the operator of WB-Versand, in 2015. Endstation Rechts, “Neonazi Heise übernimmt Deutsche Stimme-Versand,” *Endstation Rechts*, March 20, 2015, <http://www.endstation-rechts.de/news/neonazi-heise-uebernimmt-deutsche-stimme-versand.html>; Weiss, “Begleitmusik zu Mord und Totschlag,” 72.

72 Johanna Hemkentokrax and Axel Hemmerling, “Rechtsrockland” (Leipzig: MDR, 2018), 44min, 09:35–10:05 min; Weiss, “Begleitmusik zu Mord und Totschlag,” 81.

73 Bundesministerium des Innern, *Verbotsverfügung gegen “Blood & Honour Division Deutschland”* (Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern, September 12, 2000).

Power Music and the beginning of the third phase’s second interval from 2001 to 2005, which saw a decline in the number of concerts throughout Germany.⁷⁴ But the scene was able to counteract this trend in a short time by shifting the emphasis from predominantly conspiratorial, small concerts to larger events, primarily under the auspices of the NPD. In addition, there were increased attempts to register previously conspiratorial events with the authorities if the bands’ lyrics allowed this approach.⁷⁵ On the one hand, this was done to provide economic and legal certainty for the organizers and, on the other, to offer (potential) attendees a certain degree of security and certainty concerning the staging of the event. In 2005, just five years after the *Blood & Honour* ban, the number of concerts reached a new peak of 193 registered concerts nationwide.⁷⁶

A similar development with regard to the concerts – a short-term decline and a temporary boom – was seen in the trade and distribution of White Power Music. In 2000 and 2001, three of today’s most important distributors of White Power Music and merchandising in Germany, PC Records, Front Records, and V7-Versand, were founded.⁷⁷ In contrast, the once market-dominating record labels Funny Sounds Records and Rock-O-Rama Records almost completely disappeared, since Torsten Lemmer dropped out of the scene in 2001 and Herbert Egoldt’s label remained in a legally unresolved situation after his death in 2005.

74 Bundesministerium des Innern, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 1998* (Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern, 1999), 29. Bundesministerium des Innern, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2002* (Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern, 2003), 41.

75 AutorInnenkollektiv Argumente, “Das Alibi-Verbot im antifaschistischen Sommer 2000. Eine Nachlese,” in *White Noise: Rechts-Rock, Skinhead-Musik, Blood & Honour – Einblicke in die internationale Neonazi-Musik-Szene*, ed. Searchlight, Antifaschistisches Infoblatt, Enough is enough, and rat (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2004), 105–109.

76 Martin Langebach and Jan Raabe, “Zwischen Freizeit, Politik und Partei: RechtsRock,” in *Strategien der extremen Rechten: Hintergründe – Analysen – Antworten*, eds. Stephan Braun, Alexander Geisler, and Martin Gerster (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016), 381.

77 Don’t Call It Music!, “Nazi-Musiklabels – Agitatoren und Profiteure,” *Don’t Call It Music!*, December 24, 2017, <https://dontcallitmusic.noblogs.org/post/2017/12/24/312/>; Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Freistaat Sachsen, *Auswertung der Geschäftsunterlagen von PC-Records, Nordsachsenversand, DS-Verlag* (Dresden: Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Freistaat Sachsen, 2011), 2; Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Freistaat Sachsen and Ministerium des Innern des Landes Brandenburg, *Gemeinsames Lagebild der Verfassungsschutzbehörden Brandenburg und Sachsen zu aktuellen Entwicklungen im Rechtsextremismus 2008* (Dresden: Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Freistaat Sachsen, 2008), 18.

The resulting economic vacuum was exploited by a few larger distributors, including those mentioned above, but also by numerous smaller distributors who shared the market among themselves.⁷⁸

The differentiation of the distribution structures was accompanied by a further expansion of the musical spectrum.⁷⁹ The classic White Power Music bands still dominated the scene. However, the scene tried to assimilate other musical subcultures – for example, Black Metal and Hardcore in the form of National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) – such as the bands Absurd or Totenburg – or National Socialist Hardcore (NSHC) – such as the bands Moshpit or Brainwash. This often succeeded, but not always, as the examples of techno and dark wave demonstrate.⁸⁰ Alongside the musical differentiation, a further content-ideological development emerged in the bands' lyrics. It was characterized by lyrics that are open to interpretation, ambiguous, and in most cases not punishable under German criminal law. In addition, two major currents within the scene became visible: on the one hand, the attempt to tie in with the realities of life of the members of the scene and potential listeners (everyday problems in the family, at work, or in partnerships),⁸¹ on the other hand, stories that are characterized by strongly idealized myths and symbolic figures that offer the listener the possibility of escaping from reality into an idealized fantasy world.⁸²

78 Torsten Lemmer, *Rechts raus: Mein Ausstieg aus der Szene* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2004), 298; Ingo Taler, *Out of Step: Hardcore-Punk zwischen Rollback und neonazistischer Adaption* (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2012), 301.

79 Christian Dornbusch and Jan Raabe, “‘Protestnoten für Deutschland’,” in *Neonazis in Nadelstreifen: Die NPD auf dem Weg in die Mitte der Gesellschaft*, eds. Andrea Röpke and Andreas Speit (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2008), 184–189.

80 Don't Call It Music!, “Brainwash und Moshpit – Seit wann liegt Dresden in Thüringen?,” *Don't Call It Music!*, December 17, 2017, <https://dontcallitmusic.noblogs.org/post/2017/12/17/brainwash-und-moshpit-seit-wann-liegt-dresden-in-thuringen/>; Don't Call It Music!, “Nationalsozialistischer Black Metal – der Teufel trägt Flecktarn (Teil 1),” *Don't Call It Music!*, December 22, 2017, <https://dontcallitmusic.noblogs.org/post/2017/12/22/nationalsozialistischer-black-metal-der-teufel-tragt-flecktarn-teil-1/>; Funk-Hennigs, “Neuere Entwicklungen,” 101–106.

81 Jan Raabe and Martin Langebach, “Jugendkulturelle Dynamik – Vom Hardcore über den NSHC zu den ‘Autonomen Nationalisten’,” in *Autonome Nationalisten: Neonazismus in Bewegung*, eds. Jan Schedler and Alexander Häusler (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011), 162–165.

82 Irina Marie Manea, “Die mythische Denkweise im Rechtsrock. Volksgemeinschaft und Ahnenkult,” *Journal Exit-Deutschland: Zeitschrift für Deradikalisierung und demokratische Kultur* 4, no. 1. (2016): 208–224; Jens Zeyer, *Feindbilder – Mythen – Helden: Rechtsextreme Liedtexte und ihre weltanschaulichen Hintergründe* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2017), 186–332.

In the third phase, it becomes evident that the scene matured with its own development by no longer understanding itself only in terms of extreme positions (political-ideological versus self-referential-hedonistic). Both the bands and the concerts showed their adaptability, i.e. the balancing of social and political-ideological functions. Social movement entrepreneurs like Thorsten Heise and party officials like Udo Voigt mediated between supposedly incompatible structures such as the subcultural right-wing extremists or Free Comradeships and party cadres by pointing out the advantages of a flexible, cooperative strategy to their respective groups. In this way, political parties, primarily the NPD, offer mostly young bands and their audiences a safe and legal platform for their concerts with political rallies. In turn, the bands moderate the form and content of their performances in order to mobilize a broader audience for the parties. In addition, both benefit economically, as the parties can charge entrance fees disguised as monetary donations, while the target audience spends further money at the event. This, in turn, can be used to fund the livelihoods of some social movement entrepreneurs and political action.⁸³ Thus, the key events that characterize and delimit the third phase on the business side are the foundation and ban of *Blood & Honour* and, in particular, the larger and diversified concert business, which started to grow in 1995 until it reached its peak in 2005. The White Power Music merchandise market became more market economy-oriented due to the rising number of actors in the market, starting with Nibelungen Versand and Movement Records, up to the still existent (economic) market leaders PC Records and V7-Versand. Regarding the bands, specifically musically, the key events were the introduction of new music styles (NSHC and NSBM) while preserving their classic style. The above-mentioned bands, as well as, for example, Camulos and Brainwash, were established in their own sub-scenes but not yet as a part of the whole White Power Music scene, which can be explicitly observed in their choice of record label and the bands whom they joined on stage – in most cases, fellow sub-scene bands and rarely classic White Power Music bands.

⁸³ Marc Brandstetter, *Die NPD unter Udo Voigt: Organisation, Ideologie, Strategie* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2013), 300–302; Kai Budler, *Zwischen Gewalt, Rechtsrock und Kommerz: Der Multifunktionär Thorsten Heise* (Erfurt: Mobit, 2020).

White Power Music – Between Everyday Culture and Political Propaganda

The fourth phase in the development of White Power Music lasted from 2006 to 2017 and was characterized by various parallel trends. The most obvious development is the significant increase in the number of bands. While only 23 bands existed in Germany in 1993, their number peaked in 2012 with 182 known active bands. In 2015, 133 bands were still active.⁸⁴ In addition to the quantitative changes in the scene (drop-outs, inactivity, new bands, and reunions), a qualitative change took place in the form of a threefold differentiation, which coexisted largely cooperatively in the fourth phase. First, the scene split (again) into legally and illegally operating bands. This was followed by a differentiation of genre diversity, which now reflected almost the entire spectrum of the existing, original subcultures. In the end, a content-ideological intellectualization was on the rise. The boundaries between legal and illegal bands became increasingly fluid: (1) in the course of their existence, some bands adapted their lyrics to German legislation but occasionally still played forbidden songs live; (2) groups with predominantly banned songs appeared masked; and (3) for the most part, legally operating bands often played cover versions of forbidden songs.⁸⁵ Finally, a change was also expressed by the fact that – after the content-ideological developmental steps of the first three generations – the intellectualization of content and a partial stylistic transition to storytelling⁸⁶ enjoyed wide popularity within the scene. In comparison to the previous phases, the proportion of experience-oriented, still more subculturally rooted music (NSHC, NSBM) increased continuously, resulting in more frequent collaborations between the individual sub-scenes.⁸⁷

84 Senatsverwaltung für Inneres und Sport des Landes Berlin, *Rechtsextremistische Musik* (Berlin: Senatsverwaltung für Inneres und Sport des Landes Berlin, 2016), 11.

85 Dyck, *Reichsrock*, 48–49.

86 “Storytelling describes the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, sometimes with improvisation, theatrics or embellishment. Every culture has its own stories or narratives, which are shared as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation or instilling moral values.” Armand Faganel, Roberto Biloslavo, and Aleksander Janes, “Towards an Innovative Ecotourism Business Model Framework,” in *Strategic Business Models to Support Demand, Supply, and Destination Management in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry*, eds. Luisa Cagica Carvalho, Lurdes Calisto, and Nuno Gustavo (IGI Global: Hershey, 2020), 215.

87 Alexa Mathias, *Metaphern zur Dehumanisierung von Feindbildern. Eine korpuslinguistische Untersuchung zum Sprachgebrauch in rechtsextremen Musikszenen* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 306–312; Raabe and Langebach, “Jugendkulturelle Dynamik,” 162–163, 166; Manuel Trummer, “Rechtsextremismus und Black Metal. Zwischen Fascho-Chic, völkischer Ideologie

A similar development could be observed in the concert landscape of White Power Music. There was a tendency toward a significant decline until 2014 (55 concerts nationwide), but by 2017 the number had risen again up to 68 officially registered concerts.⁸⁸ Moreover, cross-genre concerts that would not have been possible, or only to a limited extent, in the original subcultures became normal in the scene, such that classic White Power Music bands shared the stage with Nazi hip-hop artists and modern NSHC bands. Regarding the framework of the concerts, the scene moved to a mixture of different forms of organization. Both conspiratorial concerts and, increasingly, public events of various sizes were organized, and venues in Thuringia – Kloster Veßra (Goldener Löwe), Kirchheim (Veranstaltungszentrum Erfurter Kreuz), and Eisenach (Flieder Volkshaus) – as well as in Saxony – Torgau-Staupitz (former inn) and Ostritz (Hotel Neißeblick) – were tested and approved, and even scene-owned venues formed gravitational centers.⁸⁹ The organizers tried to register these concerts well in advance as commercial events or as political assemblies, enjoying legal protection from the GBL, FLA, and various state laws of assembly. This was done, on the one hand, to prevent dissolutions and cancellations and to minimize economic risks and, on the other, to create low-threshold access to such events while at the same time achieving the desired publicity effect.⁹⁰

The market for White Power Music in Germany continued to diversify in the fourth generation. After a low in 2009, when 68 retail companies were counted on the scene nationwide, 88 distributors were active again in 2015. However, it must be taken into account that only a few social movement entrepreneurs are able to cover their entire living costs from profits.⁹¹ The nationwide market leaders are V7-

und politischer Aktion,” in *Kultur des Hasses: Extremisten und Musik*, ed. Ministerium des Innern des Landes Brandenburg (Potsdam: Ministerium des Innern des Landes Brandenburg, 2011), 51–55.

88 Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2017* (Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, 2018), 64.

89 Bianca Klose and Sven Richwin, “Organisationsformen des Rechtsextremismus,” in *Handbuch Rechtsextremismus*, eds. Fabian Virchow, Martin Langebach, and Alexander Häusler (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016), 217–218; Andrea Röpke and Jan Raabe, “Rechtsrock, Ideologie und Gewalt. Wie Mega-Konzerte Identität stiften, radikalisieren und vernetzen,” in *2018. Jahrbuch rechte Gewalt. Hintergründe, Analyse und die Ereignisse 2017. Chronik des Hasses*, ed. Andrea Röpke (München: Knaur Verlag 2018), 288–309.

90 Bernhard Forchtner, “Fancy a Show? Neonazi Concerts in Germany,” in *Tracking the Rise of the Radical Right Globally: CARR Yearbook 2018/2019*, ed. William Allchorn (Stuttgart: Ibdem Verlag, 2019), 153–156; Kreter, “Sachsen und Thüringen,” 336–337.

91 Staatsverwaltung für Inneres und Sport des Landes Berlin, *Rechtsextremistische Musik*, 55–56; Staatsministerium des Innern des Freistaates Sachsen, *Sächsischer Verfassungsschutzbericht 2016: Vorabfassung* (Dresden: Staatsministerium des Innern des Freistaates Sachsen, 2017), 109.

Versand, controversial within the scene, from Plüschow in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania⁹² as well as PC Records, highly respected scene-wide. The two mail-order companies differ in how much money they “reinvest” in political action and in the extent of their own political activity for the scene and the movement.⁹³

The fourth phase was mainly characterized by two developments. First, the number of bands decreased significantly compared to the peak in 2012. Second, there was a simultaneous differentiation in the diversity of genres as well as the extensive blurring of borders between legally and illegally operating bands. Regarding the social and political-ideological function of music, although the number of bands declined, listeners were able to personalize their consumption more without having to forego the community experience or even the political recognition and (self-)justification. Only the barriers to entry were raised somewhat since events such as the “Rock gegen Überfremdung” in Themar (2017) tended toward a higher degree of social closure than the “Rock für Deutschland” in Gera in 2009. With regard to the economic function, the situation changed in the fourth phase, as individual entrepreneurs were now setting up events rather than parties and organizations. In some cases, this enabled them to live from the scene for the scene. In contrast to organizations, these entrepreneurs were often subject to accusations of personal enrichment and were therefore under much greater pressure to reinvest a certain share of the money earned into the scene and the movement. Overall, the scene was much less polarized between the extreme positions of the first and second phases. However, it was more fragmented into the sub-scenes and camps that were still acting cooperatively during the third phase. They only cooperated when it was absolutely required. Thus, the key events that delimit the fourth phase are the changing modes of cooperation: on the one side, the bands from different sub-genres and sub-scenes started to cooperate and share the stage, release records at the same record label, and sometimes even exchange single musicians to help each other with session members. On the other side, actors like the entrepreneurs and parties (such as the NPD) only cooperated if it was unavoidable. These circumstances contributed to the normalization of the scene life but also showed – in line with Leach and Haunss – that while subcultural scenes can be

⁹² Uta Gensichen, “Zu viel Kaufmann – zu wenig Nazi,” *Die Tageszeitung (taz)*, August 23, 2007, 21.

⁹³ Jens Eumann and Nina Monecke, “Abhitlern’ an der Ostgrenze,” *Freie Presse*, April 16, 2018, <http://www.freiepresse.de/nachrichten/sachsen/Abhitlern-an-der-Ostgrenze-artikel10183272.php>; Andreas Speit, “Solidarität unter Kameraden,” *taz.de*, January 13, 2015, <https://www.taz.de/!5024048/>.

Tab. 2: Development of White Power Music in Germany from 1977 until 2017.

Phases	Key developments
I. Formation phase – White Power Music as a “cultural import” and juvenile rebellion (1977–1989)	White Power Music comes from Great Britain as a cultural import to Germany; formation of the first generation in Germany playing Oi!/punk music with extreme-right lyrics becomes the dominant style of music.
II. Radicalization – state prohibition and executive measures I (1989–1994)	Development of an all-German scene that radicalizes in the aftermath of the reunification; state prohibition and executive measures soon follow.
III. Commercial professionalization – state prohibition and executive measures II (1995–2005)	Professionalization of the scene and its corresponding business; split of the scene into illegal and legal bands; diversity of musical styles increases.
IV. White Power Music – between everyday culture and political propaganda (2006–2017)	Changing modes of cooperation between different actors politically and musically; economic growth; increasing content-ideological differentiation, further style diversification.

gateways to a movement profiting from a larger and committed community, this relationship is also fragile and not always beneficial for the movement.⁹⁴

The White Power Music Scene as an Extreme-Right Lifeworld between Community, Politics, and Business

In the 40 years of its existence, the White Power Music scene was based on certain unchanging pillars such as an ideological core and a small but significant group of people. But it was also characterized by many changes in the fields of bands, concerts, and trade. These (dis)continuities will be summarized by means of these three central pillars and their respective functions.

⁹⁴ Leach and Haunss, “Scenes and Social Movements,” 270.

The core of the White Power Music scene is the bands: “No concert without bands! [. . .] They represent one of the foundations of the experience of the extreme right-wing music scene. Their existence is [. . .] often a clue [. . .] for a lively Nazi scene with a youth-subcultural orientation.”⁹⁵ The purely quantitative development of the bands shows a wave-like upward trend through all phases until the year 2012, when 182 bands were active. Since then, the number has decreased significantly and stagnated at a similar level. It should be noted that, on the one hand, some bands have not disbanded but are only temporarily inactive. On the other hand, various musicians have retreated into supposedly apolitical projects in the subcultural “grey zone”, i.e. not openly right-wing extremist bands.

Alongside these quantitative developments, two formative qualitative changes have taken place. White Power Music differentiated itself musically and approached the diversity of subcultures by adapting many music styles, for example, Hardcore, Black Metal, and HipHop. With regard to the lyrics, their change in content and ideology is obvious, expressed by the use of, for example, literary camouflage and storytelling, especially in order to be able to disseminate similar content. One consequence of this is that images of the enemy and of the self in the lyrics of the bands communicate only sparingly and vaguely, whereas (more generalized) world views take up considerably more space.

In the beginning, the scene was characterized by a high turnover of personnel, which was reflected in the line-ups and their span of existence. A core of bands and individuals that shaped White Power Music for years became gravitational centers, which stabilized the scene on the one hand through their reproduction of classic content and forms of music with their bands and, on the other, through their influence as gatekeepers and catalysts for musical and lyrical innovations. On the all-German scene, these are the actors of the “Generation Hoyerswerda”. They and their often young and hand-picked recruits hold key positions on the scene and in the movement and therefore had the largest influence on major developments. One example is Daniel “Gigi” Giese, who is active in various bands and projects (including Stahlgewitter and Gigi & Die Braunen Stadtmusikanten) and supports younger bands with guest appearances in the studio and on stage. While music had an almost exclusively social function at first, the importance of the political-ideological and economic functions steadily increased, such that these functions are now almost equally important.

⁹⁵ Jan Raabe, “Verankert und etabliert – die Thüringer RechtsRock-Szene,” in *Hass und Kommerz: RechtsRock in Thüringen*, ed. Mobit (Erfurt: Mobit, 2018), 23.

In relation to concerts, as experiences of political and cultural affirmation, a similar wave-like development can be observed, although not parallel to the bands. While the number of concerts in Germany increased more than sixfold from 1994 (20) to 1998 (128), it had decreased again by 2001 (80). The developments during this phase are strongly linked to the activities of the *Blood & Honour* network. Although the organization was banned in 2000, the personal networks continued to function, and an all-time high was reached in 2005 with 193 concerts. After that, the concert activities of the scene declined continuously until they reached an absolute low in 2014 with 55 concerts. Since then, the number of concerts has risen again. Initially, the concerts were organized according to the DIY principle in private venues. They had an almost exclusively social function. Over time, the concert market was increasingly taken over by entrepreneurs and political activists, who contributed to its professionalization. A dual strategy of large public and small conspiratorial concerts increasingly took hold, with the degree of cooperation between the scene and the movement sometimes varying greatly. Overall, especially as a result of the larger events, the other two functions became much more important. The economic function slightly outweighs the other functions.

Within the business realm of White Power Music merchandising, a different development took place. Until the end of the 1990s, only a handful of entrepreneurs were active on the scene, and the market was dominated by the (relatively) off-scene entrepreneurs Herbert Egoldt (Rock-O-Rama-Records) and Torsten Lemmer (Funny Sounds Records). In the 2000s/2010s, a competitive market with up to 91 companies existed. After the demise of the two former major companies, smaller and larger distributors and record labels of the “Generation Hoyerswerda” gradually took over the White Power Music business in the third phase before fully taking over in the fourth phase. These are mainly social movement entrepreneurs who live for, of, and by the scene and the movement. Whereas the business was rather unimportant for the scene or even the movement as a whole – apart from a weak political-ideological function due to the spread of the sound carriers and thus a low-threshold offer – in earlier phases, it now has a predominantly economic function. The social movement entrepreneurs are (partially) able to live by the scene for the scene. That enables them to involve themselves in political activities to strengthen the other two functions.

Conclusion

A cursory depiction of its (dis)continuities allows an answer to the question of how to assess the movement scene of White Power Music as to whether it is an instrument of agitation and propaganda, the expression of juvenile rebellion, or even an extreme-right lifeworld that serves both main functions. At first, the focus was on social functions, especially the rebellion against the political and social establishment. In the first phase, and to some extent still in the second, the actors dissociated themselves from (party) politics in their lyrics and interviews. In contrast, they emphasized their own subcultural habitus. In the course of the second phase, and at the latest by the beginning of the third phase, political-ideological functions became increasingly important. As a result, the self-image as a mediator of a right-wing extremist ideology became established not only in external perceptions but also in self-perceptions. Thus, the social and political-ideological functions in the third and fourth phases became intertwined to form an extreme-right everyday culture. These two functions are tied together by the economic function, which enables a political and social communalization in an extreme-right lifeworld. This lifeworld supplies social movement entrepreneurs, binds activists, and recruits new followers without requiring the actors to lead a double life. In addition, the extreme-right movement was able to modernize its appearance drastically by adopting various musical subcultures without having to sacrifice the core of its own ideology. A culturally isolated political sect that sings folk and marching songs at party conventions has become a modern, socially partly (!) accepted movement scene that is attractive to young people. To sum up the role of music within the extreme-right movement: “If music were to be taken away from the right-wing extremist scene, it would be dead, even according to the self-assessment of right-wing extremist activists.”⁹⁶

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Vladimír Naxera

7 The Germans as a Threat to ‘Us’? The Use of History and Othering of Germans in the Speeches of the Czech President Miloš Zeman

Introduction

The following contribution, whose main subject is the idea of a threat posed by Germany presented in the speeches of Czech President Miloš Zeman, contributes to a discussion on political populism that has become one of the most important debates within current comparative political science. Academics from around the world increasingly use the concept of populism to characterize numerous phenomena in modern politics.¹ Current political science seems to be almost contaminated by the topic of populism – however, in many texts, there is a serious deficiency lying in the use of the ‘populist’ label without providing empirical evidence and argumentation.² Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser³ point out that the problem of numerous studies is the lack of following up on previous comparative research and, above all, authors’ reluctance to leave the comfort zone of their field, specifically the insufficient effort to link the study of populism with the study of other subjects. The presented text follows up on this remark and links the concept of populism with the interest in the instrumental use of history as a political tool.

Miloš Zeman is one of the most visible figures of Czech post-communist politics, and he has gone through a number of posts during his political career – he was the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, the Prime Minister, and in 2013, after several years of being retired from politics, he became the first President elected in a newly introduced direct election. Then, in 2018, he retained his mandate and entered the office for a second term. In his first term, Zeman

1 Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda,” *Comparative Political Studies* 51, no. 13 (2018): 1667–1693, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018789490>.

2 Kirk A. Hawkins, “Is Chávez Populist? Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective,” *Comparative Political Studies* 30, no. 4 (2009): 1040–1067, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414009331721>.

3 Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying Populism.”

had already used three fundamental principles of populism within his rhetoric – *the people, the elite, and the others*.

In this paper, the concept of populism relates to the issue of the instrumental use of history. History, conveniently grasped and interpreted, is a tool exploitable for legitimizing current political steps and political claims for the future.⁴ Disputes about history interpretation are a natural part of political struggle. What is easily exploitable are, among others, images of ‘historical enemies’ or those who are perceived as ‘the other’ in past or present politics. As such, they have a place in the collective memory.⁵ In the process of othering, it is also possible to use various historical (real or imaginary) injustices⁶ and conflicts. The principle of othering, thus determining the groups that are not part of the nation/people, or the ‘them-and-us’ mentality,⁷ is, according to many authors, an integral part of populism.⁸ This study turns the attention of populism research to whether, and ultimately how, historical references play a role in the process of populist othering.

As I show in one of the following sections, in the Czech context, the Germans are considered one of the main examples of ‘the other’ and historical enemies. The text intends to answer the following question: In his speeches, does Miloš Zeman populistically create a construct of Germany and the Germans as ‘the Other’ and a source of threat to the Czech people? In such a case, does he do so based on historical references or based on references to current German politics? The study is designed as a content analysis of every speech Zeman

4 E.g. Simone Benazzo, “Not All the Past Needs to Be Used: Features of Fidesz’s Politics of Memory,” *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 11, no. 2 (2017): 198–221, <https://doi.org/10.1515/jnmlp-2017-0009>.

5 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory (Heritage of Sociology)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

6 It is a principle similar to the one elaborated by the *grievance theory* that operates with electoral support and mobilization based on the grievances and injustices perceived by society. This theory mostly works with the influence the new injustices have on current politics – grievances can be connected with the effects of changes in the economy, an increase in migration, or the perception of corruption. See, e.g., Elisabeth Ivarsflaten, “What Unites Right-Wing Populists in Western Europe? Re-Examining Grievance Mobilization Models in Seven Successful Cases,” *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 1 (2008): 3–23, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414006294168>. The principle used in this article is similar, only here, injustice is understood as historical and unable to be atoned by or undone with an act of justice; however, the mobilization resulting from a threat of history repeating itself could be a functioning strategy today.

7 Alan Knight, “Populism and Neo-Populism in Latin America, Especially Mexico,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30, no. 2 (1998): 223–248.

8 Gabriela Lazaridis and Giovanna Campani, eds., *Understanding the Populist Shift: Othering in a Europe in Crisis* (London/New York: Routledge, 2017).

made during his first presidential term (2013–2018). The text follows on from the existing tradition of analyzing populism within the speeches of individual political actors and from discussions on the place of othering in populist politics. Empirically, it partially follows up on previous studies of various aspects of Zeman's populist actions.⁹ Even though the Czech president does not have extensive executive powers at his disposal, unlike a president in a presidential system,¹⁰ he accounts for a relevant subject of academic interest, especially considering his ability to influence public opinion and actors of political power (as well as to create an outward image of the country) through his speeches.¹¹

Populism, Czech Politics, and Miloš Zeman

Populism and 'the Other'

Populism is among the most frequent terms of current comparative political science and is widely discussed both in theory and in numerous empirical studies. At the same time, there is no clear consensus on what the essence of populism is. Various authors present populism as a 'thin-centered' ideology,¹² a style,¹³ a frame,¹⁴ or a mode of discourse.¹⁵ Since the aim of this text is not to contribute to the relevant conceptual discussion, it is sufficient to note that in most cases,

9 Vladimír Naxera and Petr Krčál, "'This is a Controlled Invasion': The Czech President Miloš Zeman's Populist Perception of Islam and Immigration as Security Threats," *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 12, no. 2 (2017): 192–215, <https://doi.org/10.2478/jnmlp-2018-0008>; Vladimír Naxera and Petr Krčál, "'You Can't Corrupt Eight Million Voters': Corruption as a Topic in Miloš Zeman's Populist Strategy," *Studies of Transition States and Societies* 11, no. 1 (2019): 3–18.

10 Michal Kubát and Miloš Brunclík, *Semi-Presidentialism, Parliamentarism and Presidents: Presidential Politics in Central Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

11 Miloš Gregor and Alena Macková, "Euro-scepticism the Czech Way: An Analysis of Václav Klaus' Speeches," *European Journal of Communication* 30, no. 4 (2015): 404–417, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323115582148>.

12 Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541–563, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x>.

13 Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

14 Paris Aslanidis, "Is Populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective," *Political Studies* 64, no. 1 (2016): 88–104, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12224>.

15 Yannis Stravakakis and Giorgios Katsambekis, "Left-Wing Populism in the European Periphery: The Case of SYRIZA," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19, no. 2 (2015): 119–142, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2014.909266>.

the essence of populism lies in creating the Manichaeist division into ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’, claiming the sovereignty of the people and applying the common will, for example, through institutes of direct democracy. Although the content of the term ‘people’ is often not clearly explained and serves as a classic *empty signifier*,¹⁶ it is frequently linked to the term ‘nation’, which applies mainly to right-wing populism.¹⁷

Populism has three significant variables – the people, the elite, and the others. As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser¹⁸ point out, creating an image of the other is linked only to extreme-right populism, not populism itself.¹⁹ Yet in the case of extreme-right parties, othering results from their nativism. However, populism and nativism are two different things.²⁰ Populism refers to a moral clash between ‘the pure people’ (the good ones) and ‘the corrupt elite’ (the bad ones), while nativism is related to an ethnic division into insiders (natives) and outsiders (aliens). The fuse of populism and nativism creates the image of ‘the pure people’ as the natives, whereas the (native) establishment is corrupt because it supports invaders and foreign influences that harm the good people. It is also often argued that the business elite financially exploits the immigrants, and their presence harms the people.²¹ Extreme-right parties use nativist rhetoric to criticize immigration and populist rhetoric to criticize the politicians who do not prevent immigration or who even support it. On the other hand, it is necessary to say that several recent studies have found a connection between the success of populist parties in general (not only extreme-right populist parties) and the cultural backlash.²² Creating ‘the other’ can be perceived as an accompaniment of populism without distinguishing between right-wing and left-wing orientations.²³ Recently, populist othering has

16 Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

17 Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist.”

18 Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying Populism.”

19 They mention the Greek political party Syriza as an example of an unambiguously populist actor that does not work with the concept of ‘the others’.

20 Cas Mudde, *The Populist Radical Right in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

21 Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying,” 1677.

22 Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, “Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash,” *HKS Working Paper No. RWPI6-026*.

23 Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser add that even though they do not see the creation of ‘the other’ as a defining feature of populism, the cultural backlash argument is not irrelevant to the latter’s study. After all, cultural difference between the people and the elite is one of the accompaniments of populism. Cultural backlash and its study ought to be bound with the issue of populism more than nativism. They give an example of the distinction between the “authentic pure low culture of the people” and the “unauthentic high culture of the corrupt elite.” See Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying Populism,” 1678.

been associated mainly with the matter of Islam and the *migration wave* to Europe, which is related to a phenomenon called *new xenophobia*²⁴ that is clearly directed at Muslims. The stigma is not connected to ethnicity or nationality but to religion, and the defense of the West against Muslims has become, to some extent, an ideological frame of current populists.²⁵

Should we set aside the animosity toward Muslims, or more generally toward all newcomers, many studies have shown that the members of long-time settled communities (the Roma, the Jews) are also perceived as 'the others'²⁶ or that 'the others' are not understood in an ethnic sense – they simply contain anyone who is not, for different reasons, perceived as a member of 'the people' (populists' concept of the people is highly exclusive). This may include homosexuals, adversaries of a populist politician, the corrupt elite, non-profit organizations, or defined enemies of the people in another way; for example, foreign elites (Angela Merkel) and transnational elites, both political ('Brussels') and economic (George Soros).²⁷ Populism simply needs to define the enemy – the 'us-and-them' mentality is, after all, one of the key principles of populism.

Miloš Zeman has been one of the most interesting figures of Czech politics throughout the whole post-communist development. At the beginning of the 90s, he built his career around the Czech Social Democratic Party and soon became their leader. After being the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament, he became the Prime Minister for the years 1998–2002. After an unsuccessful run for president in 2003, he retreated from politics and returned after almost ten years as a non-party candidate for the first direct presidential election in 2013 in which he prevailed and won in the second round after a radical campaign.²⁸ Among other things, Zeman owes his success to his reputation as an excellent speaker and a resolute style of politics that considerably polarizes Czech society. The polarization is caused, among other aspects, by the many scandals of Zeman and his circle and by the many cases of actions that Zeman himself characterized as a "creative way of interpreting the constitution" and that effectively

24 Tabish Khair, *The New Xenophobia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

25 Koen Vossen, "Populism in the Netherlands after Fortuyn: Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders Compared," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 11, no. 1 (2010): 22–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15705850903553521>.

26 Lenka Bustikova, "Revenge of the Radical Right," *Comparative Political Studies* 47 (2014): 1738–1765, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013516069>.

27 Attila Antal, "The Political Theories, Preconditions and Dangers of the Governing Populism in Hungary," *Czech Political Science Review* 24, no. 1 (2017): 5–20, <https://doi.org/10.5817/PC2017-1-5>.

28 Pavel Maškarinec, "Prostorová analýza prezidentských voleb v České republice v roce 2013," *Sociológia* 45, no. 5 (2013): 435–469.

entail an extremely loose interpretation and misuse of the presidential powers and responsibilities set by the constitution.²⁹ What is seen as problematic by a large part of society is Zeman's cooperation with populist and extremist parties on both the left and right ends of the spectrum³⁰ within domestic politics and with dictators and undemocratic regimes (mainly China and Russia) within foreign affairs.³¹ Despite his long-term membership of the Social Democrats, Zeman's presidential mandate relates to rather strong xenophobia (nativism), authoritarianism, and populism, ergo, with principles that Mudde³² classified as traits of the extreme right. For the purposes of this text, the question of populism is especially interesting. On the other hand, this text is not concerned about whether Zeman is or is not a populist. In accordance with many other authors,³³ I decided not to evaluate the 'populistness' of a politician but the 'populistness' of their statements. This is one of the reasons the present analysis is based on an empirical corpus consisting of Zeman's textual productions.

'The Others' and the Use of History in Modern Czech Politics

Within inconsistently conceived national histories and often colliding collective memories, 'the others' are irreplaceable – various actors who are not only perceived as national outsiders but are viewed as (historical, current, or timeless) national enemies. The image of national enemies tends to be related to events and phenomena that are often understood as a national trauma³⁴ or a dark age – possibly a genocide, military defeat, occupation, etc. A number of these references related to history are exploitable within current politics.

Given the way how the Czech nation constituted itself during the 19th century, the Germans are naturally the most important 'others'. From the beginning of the 16th century, the Czech lands were part of the Habsburg Monarchy,

29 Jan Wintr, Marek Antoš, and Jan Kysela, "Direct Election of the President and its Constitutional and Political Consequences," *Acta Politologica* 8, no. 2 (2016): 145–163.

30 Vladimír Naxera, "The Never-Ending Story: Czech Governments, Corruption and Populist Anti-Corruption Rhetoric (2010–2018)," *Politics in Central Europe* 14, no. 3 (2018): 31–54, <https://doi.org/10.2478/pce-2018-0017>.

31 Lubomír Kopeček, *Miloš Zeman. Příběh talentovaného pragmatika* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2017).

32 Mudde, *The Populist Radical Right in Europe*.

33 Matthij Rooduijn, Sarah L. de Lange, and Wouter van der Brug, "A Populist Zeitgeist? Programmatic Contagion of Populist Parties in Western Europe," *Party Politics* 20, no. 4 (2014): 563–575, <https://doi.org/10.1177/135406881436065>.

34 Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

and the modern process of national revival was led mostly against German cultural, political, and economic supremacy.³⁵ The perception of a German as an enemy remained to some extent not only after the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 but also long after the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, while it was fuelled by events such as the Munich Agreement and the loss of the Sudetenland in 1938 or the occupation and the period of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in 1939–1945. As Ladislav Holy³⁶ points out, for a large part of Czech society, a German does not relate to the image of a scientist or a philosopher but rather to the image of an aggressor, oppressor, or warlord. For that reason, in relation to the changes in the foreign policy and economic directions of the Czech Republic in the 90s and in relation to German capital entering the Czech milieu, many people started to assume that if Germany did not succeed at conquering the Czechs militarily, they would do so economically. Similar negative references to the influence Germany has on the Czech Republic have lasted until today and can be illustrated, for instance, with a Facebook status update by Lubomír Volný, one of the deputies of the extreme-right and populist party Freedom and Direct Democracy, who, at the beginning of 2019, wrote the following: “By accepting the Euro, the Czech Republic would confirm the German victory in the Second World War.” Currently, there are voices coming from the nationalist scene speaking against Germany not only in relation to economic supremacy but also against the notion of Germany dominating the European Union, supporting immigration into Europe, etc.

Germany and the Germans are often a reference point for the Czech state and nation's own nationalist perception as an active historical entity whose natural development was interrupted by several discontinuities that can, however, be undone. These discontinuities are usually associated with the German influence. The first of them is the Battle of White Mountain (1620), which ended the hopes of the anti-Habsburg Bohemian Revolt with their defeat. In the next period (from the late 1620s to the second half of the 18th century), further discontinuity came in the form of the Recatholicization and Germanization of Czech regions as well as the gradual replacement of old Czech aristocratic families in the highest state positions by Austrian ones. Afterward, this was undone with the establishment of the Czechoslovak state in 1918 and the enactment of wide-ranging legislation of an anti-German nature (for instance, it consisted of the revocation of nobility and a land reform that led to the expropriation of the land of noble families – the

³⁵ Karel B. Müller, *Češi a občanská společnost* (Prague: Triton, 2002).

³⁶ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

reform was indeed outlined as an atonement for White Mountain), with Czechoslovak Germans not being allowed to contribute to the constitution of a new state, and with their secondary position in the political milieu of interwar Czechoslovakia. Another discontinuity was marked by the Munich Agreement in 1938 and a decision made by the European powers that resulted in the loss of the Sudetenland to Germany – historical borderlands settled by German colonists for a thousand years. The Sudetenland was annexed by Germany, and the Czech residents were expelled. In the spring of 1939, the rest of the Czech territory was seized, and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was established, starting the period of German occupation. After the liberation in 1945, there came another atonement for injustices perpetrated by Germany in the form of the ratification of the Beneš decrees applying the principle of collective guilt, after which the German population (not only in the Sudetenland but anywhere in Czechoslovakia) were deprived of their property and citizenship and were consequently expelled to Germany, often very brutally.³⁷

A discussion on this topic was initiated again after the collapse of the communist regime³⁸ that contemplated the question of the Sudetenland's history and the legitimacy of the Beneš decrees. At the political level, the issue was resolved by means of bilateral agreements in the 90s;³⁹ however, despite the generally good state of German-Czech relations, it reappeared at the highest level of politics several times. For example, in October 2009, Czech President Václav Klaus enforced an exception from the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights for the Czech Republic to prevent – according to his words – the annulment of the Beneš decrees by the European courts.⁴⁰ Regardless of this case, it was usually extreme-right or extreme-left actors who attacked Germany in relation to the question of the Sudetenland and the Beneš decrees and who often criticized the activities of the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft (Sudeten German Homeland Association) led by Bernd Posselt. The question of the Munich Agreement, the Sudetenland, and the Beneš decrees has become an integral part of the public discussion. According to investigations by the Public Opinion Research Centre,

37 Kateřina Portmann, “‘Jednou Němec. Vždycky Němec.’ Německy mluvící obyvatelstvo v Československu po druhé světové válce,” in *“Nechtění” spoluobčané. Skupiny obyvatel perzekvovaných či marginalizovaných z politických, národnostních, náboženských i jiných důvodů v letech 1945–1989*, eds. Jaroslav Pažout and Kateřina Portmann (Prague and Liberec: ÚSTR and TUL, 2018), 28–42; Jürgen Tampke, *Czech-German Relations and the Politics of Central Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 73–93.

38 Václav Houžvička, *Návraty sudetské otázky* (Prague: Karolinum, 2005).

39 Tampke, *Czech-German Relations*, 149–150.

40 Lukáš Novotný, “Dekrety, odsun sudetských Němců v historické paměti Čechů. Výsledky reprezentativního dotazníkového šetření,” *Naše společnost* 10, no. 2 (2012): 30.

since the beginning of the 90s, there has been a decline in the number of people considering the Beneš decrees as an act of justice. However, it is still the dominant way of perceiving the post-war events – in 2016, 37% of Czech people viewed the Beneš decrees as fair, while another 25% considered them unfair but something that was a result of historical circumstances and which should be put to rest. Only 9% of the population thought it was something that should be apologized for, and only 4% claimed that it would not be enough to apologize and that the property must be returned and the rightful owners compensated.⁴¹ When asked whether the decrees should remain in effect, 43% of people spoke in favor, 45% were unable to answer, and 12% agreed with their annulment.⁴² Considering this opinion pattern of Czech citizens (and therefore voters), it is evident that, when grasped appropriately, it can play an important political role.⁴³

Throughout the whole development of the Czech Republic after the Velvet Revolution, it is possible to find several strong statements by Zeman against

41 CVVM, “Občané o odsunu a Benešových dekretech,” *Tisková zpráva Centra pro výzkum veřejného mínění* (Prague: CVVM, 2017), 1.

42 *Ibid.*, 2.

43 Regarding the occupation and conflicts, for the sake of completeness and overall context, it is necessary to briefly mention two more actors whose historical influence is reflected in current politics. The first one is Russia, especially due to the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia (1968–1989). A Soviet soldier in the streets of a Czech city became a symbol of ‘the other’, or the national enemy. In the post-communist development, this occupation of more than twenty years became a part of the political discourse as a negative historical experience, and it was expressed institutionally by the Czech Republic joining Western structures, including NATO. That is one of the reasons why we can find strong anti-Russian attitudes in current Czech politics. See Radka Klvaňová, “‘The Russians Are Back’: Symbolic Boundaries and Cultural Trauma in Immigration from the Former Soviet Union to the Czech Republic,” *Ethnicities* 19, no. 1 (2019): 136–155, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796817752740>. However, we can also find strong pro-Russian attitudes that are often carried by the same subjects as the anti-German and anti-Muslim attitudes. That brings us to the third historical experience with conflict and the threat of occupation and subjugation related to the efforts of the Ottoman Empire to invade Europe militarily. ‘Turks at Vienna’ is a concept that has become a timeless metaphor for the Islamic danger to Europe and was revived mostly in relation to the alleged immigration crisis of today. Although the Muslim community in the Czech Republic is insignificant in number and relatively well-integrated and almost no Muslims came to the Czech Republic as a part of the ‘migration wave’ of the last couple of years, Muslims have been put into the number one position of ‘the other’. This is a part of the above-outlined trend of European populism in which Muslims have become the main targets of the *new xenophobia*. In the Czech environment, the metaphorical image of ‘Turks at Vienna’ is often used as evidence for the ancient aspiration of Muslims to conquer Europe. See Ondřej Beránek and Bronislav Ostřanský, eds., *Stíny minaretů. Islám a muslimové jako předmět českých veřejných polemik* (Prague: Academia, 2016).

Germany, mainly regarding the Sudeten German question. As early as 1994, he stated it was inadmissible to consider the restitution of property confiscated after the war from German residents and their return by the Czech Republic; he also criticized the forthcoming Czech-German declaration, the goal of which was to end the history of mutual conflict. Not long before the presidential election in 2003, he called the Sudeten Germans “Hitler’s fifth column”, which was quite unfortunate considering the Czech efforts to join the EU. Among other things, it led to the postponement of German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder’s visit. We can also see Zeman attacking specific individuals – for example, he compared Bernd Posselt, based on his appearance, to “Hitler after fattening”. In other cases, Zeman adopted historical references related to Sudeten Germans or Nazism as labels for people whom he viewed as his political opponents – he compared the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to Adolf Hitler, and as early as 1992, he compared the Federal Prime Minister Václav Klaus to the Sudeten Nazi Konrad Henlein with regard to his plan for the dissolution of Czechoslovakia; he denounced Klaus’ efforts to destroy the state as unconstitutional, just as the Sudeten German efforts to dissolve the state before the Second World War had been.⁴⁴

Zeman presented his most interesting comments on the historical relation to Germany within the debates before the second round of the first direct presidential election in 2013.⁴⁵ During this campaign, Zeman’s opponent Karel Schwarzenberg⁴⁶ was repeatedly labeled a politician who defended the interests of the Sudeten Germans and whose motivation for being elected was enabling the restitution of the confiscated German property. A whole range of false statements was produced within the campaign – for example, that the above-mentioned Posselt supported Schwarzenberg’s candidacy. In a debate broadcast by Czech television, both candidates clashed over the issue of the Beneš decrees. In the following discussion led across several media platforms, many people (just like Zeman)

⁴⁴ Kopeček, *Miloš Zeman*, passim.

⁴⁵ Lukáš Novotný, “Die deutsch-tschechischen Beziehungen und die Präsidentschaftswahl 2013,” *Austrian Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 4 (2016): 13–24, <https://doi.org/10.15203/ozp.323.vol44iss4I>.

⁴⁶ Born in 1937, Karel Schwarzenberg (full name Karl Johannes Nepomuk Josef Norbert Friedrich Antonius Wratislaw Mena Fürst zu Schwarzenberg) is a member of the Czech branch of the German aristocratic Schwarzenberg family. After the communist coup in 1948, his family emigrated to Austrian exile. After the fall of the communist régime, Schwarzenberg returned to his homeland. In 1990, he was appointed chancellor (director of the presidential office) under Václav Havel. Since that time, Schwarzenberg has been a member of the Czech political elite. In 2009, he established a new conservative party called TOP 09. A significant part of his business companies are located in Austria.

viewed Schwarzenberg as someone who was trying to disparage the post-war President Edvard Beneš and the patriotism of Czech soldiers and citizens and to jeopardize the property and ownership rights of Czech citizens, as a result of which he would de facto re-establish the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.⁴⁷ The way that Schwarzenberg was depicted by Zeman (and his supporters) entirely corresponds with the principles of populism. Zeman put himself in the position of the protector of the interests of the people (in the sense of the nation), Schwarzenberg was presented as the corrupt elite who defended the political interests and assets of the people and the elite from a foreign (and de facto enemy) country, and therefore interests of 'the other', which harmed the Czech people.⁴⁸ Voting for Zeman was thus voting for the Czech national interest. This situation is an exemplary instance of the role that references to historical events can play in contemporary populist politics.

Each of the above-mentioned 'others' of Czech politics holds a different position in Zeman's rhetoric. Russia is not constructed as a source of threat by Zeman but as a partner.⁴⁹ This is incidentally typical for several Central European populists, for example, Viktor Orbán.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Muslims are perceived as the number one enemy, and Zeman's rhetoric against them has already been (at least partially) analyzed.⁵¹ Unlike Zeman's relation to Islam, however, his attitude toward Germany during his presidential term has not yet been analyzed in detail, which creates an interesting area that fits into the outlined debate on populism and the use of historical references for constructing 'the other'. This mainly relates to the way in which Zeman worked with images of (Sudeten) Germans within his internal political strategies (see above) shortly before being elected anticipated similar behavior during his mandate.

47 Hynek Jeřábek, Jan Rössler, and Pavel Sklenařík, "Mediální obraz Karla Schwarzenberga v tištěných denících před prezidentskými volbami 2013," *Naše společnost* 11, no. 2 (2013): 11–12, <https://doi.org/10.13060/1214-438X.2013.11.2.1>.

48 See Lenka Bušíková and Petra Guasti, "The State as a Firm: Understanding the Autocratic Roots of Technocratic Populism," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 33, no. 2 (2019): 313, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325418791723>.

49 See Naxera and Krčál, "This is a Controlled Invasion"; Kopeček, *Miloš Zeman*.

50 See Benazzo, "Not All the Past."

51 Ondřej Slačálek and Eva Svobodová, "The Czech Islamophobic Movement: Beyond 'Populism'?", *Patterns of Prejudice* 52, no. 5 (2018): 479–495, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2018.1495377>; Naxera and Krčál, "This is a Controlled Invasion."

Data and Methodology of the Analysis

The procedure of the following analysis will comply with the principles of a qualitative content analysis using CAQDAS,⁵² which is often applied when investigating the political practice of populism at the level of communication strategies.⁵³ Individual steps reflect the aspiration to identify populist communication strategies in the analyzed texts – strategies that aim to strengthen the principles of anti-elitism and people-centrism combined with creating the image of Germany and the Germans as ‘the other’. The empirical corpus consists of all the official speeches, statements, interviews, articles, etc. – ergo, the entire official production – of Miloš Zeman’s full first presidential term from March 2013 to March 2018. These data are available in textual form on Zeman’s personal website (<http://www.zemanmilos.cz>). The total volume of the empirical corpus is 730,192 words.

Based on previous research, knowledge of the context, and an initial reading of the data, two presumptions about Zeman’s vision of Germany posing a threat to the Czech people were made related to the questions asked in the introduction of this chapter: 1) *The Sudeten Germans supported by Hitler were a source of historical threat* (as a prelude to the occupation of the Sudetenland and the establishment of the Protectorate) *and they remain a threat even now*, and 2) *Angela Merkel’s migration policy is currently a source of threat*. Both presumptions indicate the construction of the Germans as ‘the other’ threatening the Czech people, whose representative Zeman claims to be. Regarding these presumptions, various terms were set and their lemmas mechanically looked up in the empirical corpus. The first term was Germany. However, other terms were also searched for: the first pair consisted of the actors representing the threat – Adolf Hitler and Angela Merkel. The second pair should have consisted of specific phenomena posing a direct threat to the Czech people – the Sudeten Germans and migration. Based on the knowledge of the context and familiarity with the corpus, it was evident that there would be a high frequency of the word ‘migration’ even when it was not related to the question of Germany, so the word was accordingly removed from the mechanically searched-for terms and manually looked up later within the search results (see below). Initially, using the MAXQDA 11+ software, the terms ‘Germany’, ‘Merkel’, ‘Hitler’, and ‘Sudetenland’ were found. This first phase of coding was carried out at the level

⁵² E.g. Roel Popping, *Computer-Assisted Text Analysis* (London: Sage, 2000).

⁵³ Ondřej Stulík, “Do We Have All the Necessary Data? The Challenge of Measuring Populism through Metaphors,” *Quality and Quantity* 53 (2019): 2653–2670, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-019-00878-6>.

of clauses/sentences, and the result was 728 unique sentences containing one of the searched-for terms.

Afterward, it was necessary to clean the results manually. When reading individual occurrences, some of the false results were removed from the corpus. For instance, this related to questions raised by the interviewer, the repetitive occurrence of the common Czech surname 'Němec' (meaning 'German'), etc. In the following step, I focused on the evaluation of the search results – initially, the findings with no connection to the idea of Germany as a source of threat were set aside.

The next step was to determine the context of the rest of the findings that were related to Germany as a source of threat, and these were the subject of the following analysis. The unit of reference was not a sentence but a paragraph that, with regard to the character of the empirical corpus, I understood as five consecutive sentences (before and after the occurrence of a searched term), which, among other things, made it possible to discover the term 'migration' in relation to Germany, which had been omitted for the purposes of the first search. When there were more than five sentences containing the searched-for term in the defined paragraph with a logical connection to each other, they were all assigned a search code. This approach (transferring from sentences to paragraphs) significantly reduced the number of findings. On the other hand, one paragraph could contain several different codes since there is a possibility of overlapping contexts.

As part of the following open inductive coding, two metacodes were created relating to the idea of Germany as a source of threat to the Czech people: THREAT IN THE PAST (46 occurrences in total) and CURRENT THREAT (120 occurrences in total); in some cases, the two metacodes overlapped (which means that Zeman created a parallel between historical and current dangers – for more details, see below). During the reading of the found passages, individual codes were assigned to the metacodes. In the case of the THREAT IN THE PAST metacode, there are the following codes: THE SUDETEN GERMANS WERE A THREAT (12 occurrences) and NAZI GERMANY AND THE OCCUPATION WERE THREATS (34). The code structure considers whether the source of threat was domestic (Sudeten Germans) or foreign (Nazi Germany as a whole). The CURRENT THREAT metacode was divided into the following codes: GERMANY SUPPORTS MIGRATION (37), GERMANY WILL DEPORT MIGRANTS TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC (14), GERMANY WILL CLOSE THE BORDERS (11), GERMANY SUPPORTS MIGRANT QUOTAS (7), and OTHERS (15).

The next section introduces statements representing individual codes, though it should be recalled that the main ambition of the analysis is to capture the populist practice of the speaker – President Zeman – by identifying a set of metaphors. The presented word-for-word quotes are meant to characterize the logic of the

empirical corpus; they are not presented for their uniqueness but, on the contrary, because they define the overall tone of the corpus.

Germany as a Source of Threat to the Czech People: Interpretation of Zeman's Statements

Although the frequency of codes classified under the THREAT IN THE PAST metacode is lower, it seems reasonable (with regard to the focus of this text) to start the analysis with this very metacode. From the frequency of codes related to the question of the Sudeten Germans, the first conclusion can be drawn – contrary to presumptions based on how often Zeman spoke negatively about this question before his presidential term (including dealing with the topic intensively as part of his election campaign), Zeman mentioned the Sudetenland issue only occasionally during his first term. Furthermore, he did not relate the topic to current political events, he only hinted at it in connection with the question of material compensation. On the contrary, in relation to this topic, he repeatedly stated: “History cannot prevent us from seeing the present and the future” or “the Sudeten German association became a harmless homeland association by changing their statute [they removed their claim for property confiscated in the Czechoslovak territory before the expulsion based on the Beneš decrees].”

We can draw similar conclusions in relation to the occupation of the rest of the country that followed shortly after the Sudetenland annexation. Zeman mentioned the issue of occupation and German supremacy several times: “[I am grateful that] we do not have to speak German in this country, given we were obedient collaborators with Aryan descent, that we do not have to say Heil Hitler, Heil Himmler, Heil Göring, or possibly Heil Heydrich, which would be particularly interesting. Remember that quoted Heydrich himself said in September 1941 at the Prague Castle that the Czechs had no place here on this territory after all. We were meant to be exterminated right after the Jews. Because the Slavic people were an inferior race.” We can find more examples, including the “apparent disapproval of the nation with the German occupation.”

The whole logic of Zeman's statements about the topic of the Sudetenland and its subsequent occupation can be summarized in this metaphorical scheme:

The Sudeten Germans were a source of danger (they harmed the Czech people) → The foreign elite helped the Sudeten Germans (Hitler, as well as the European governments through the Munich Agreement) → The danger was eliminated (by defeating Germany) →

The Sudeten Germans were rightly punished (with their expulsion from Czechoslovakia and property confiscation) → The Sudeten German Homeland Association is no longer a problem.

The Germans constituted 'the other' threatening the Czech nation with the support of the international elite; however, Zeman maintains this course only when reflecting on the period of the Second World War. In contrast to a couple of decades before Zeman took the presidential office and the several strong statements he made about this period of history, he does not currently refer to the annexation of the Sudetenland, the occupation, the establishment of the Protectorate, the Beneš decrees, or the expulsion of the Germans instrumentally within the populist othering of contemporary Germany. In that respect, we cannot qualify Zeman's rhetoric as populist.

We get considerably different conclusions when today's Germany is viewed as a source of threat. The vast majority of argumentation detected within the CURRENT THREAT metacode deals with the question of migration and Muslims. As has already been pointed out, it is a topic Zeman actively uses in his rhetoric strategies.⁵⁴ The GERMANY SUPPORTS MIGRATION code was most frequently represented. For this code, I assigned Zeman's statements claiming that Germany invites migrants directly (for example, via invitations) or indirectly (via generous social programs). This can be illustrated by the following statements: "Two or three years ago, Madam Chancellor publicly stated that multiculturalism was dead. Based on the insufficient or almost non-existent assimilation of the Muslim minorities in Western Europe. And now, by welcoming refugees, she clearly supports multiculturalism" and "Why are the refugees heading to Germany? Just for the country's social welfare system. They do not seek the high German salaries; they want to exploit the social programs."

The incoming Muslim population is, according to Zeman, inassimilable: "I spoke very clearly about the Muslim community and gave examples from France, Britain or Germany where this community did not get assimilated, with all respect to exceptions, and where they formed some sort of ghettos that are giving rise to terrorist actions." This connotes a threat not only to Western culture but also to the people because Zeman repeatedly connects incoming migrants and refugees with terrorism threats: "Do you know how many Syrian passports got falsified after Angela Merkel declared the intention to accept Syrians? However, I find it naïve to assume that there will be no jihadists smuggled in by the Islamic State" and "I see what is going on in Belgium, France, Germany, what is going on in other neighboring countries with regard to the wave of immigrants from

54 See Naxera and Krčál, "This is a Controlled Invasion."

the Middle East and Northern Africa.” According to Zeman, the risk of a terrorist attack is high: “The German Intelligence Service estimates that there are about 15 thousand of them [potential terrorists] in Germany alone, and since a number of them are so-called lone wolves, which means those who commit terrorist acts individually (although instructed from the Islamic center), you can expect quite a large number of terrorist attacks.”

Given all this, in Zeman’s view, the German government led by Merkel impairs the security not only of Germany but also of other European countries, mainly the Czech Republic. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, thanks to the Schengen Agreement, migrants can freely cross the German-Czech border. At the same time, according to Zeman, Germany can start activities leading to an increase in the number of migrants in the Czech Republic; these activities are expressed through other codes. The first one relates to the already-mentioned question of European quotas for migrant redistribution supported by Germany and protested against by the Czech Republic: “As perhaps the first sentence of the meeting, I told Madam Chancellor that you do not send your guests to your neighbor’s house for lunch either, which was a reference to the fact that they first invited illegal migrants and then, with the help of redistribution quotas, they wanted to reallocate them outside Germany.” In addition to migrant quotas, another threat lies in the closing of the German-Austrian border that would result in the discontinuation of a major migration route and its redirection to Germany through the Czech Republic: “The duty of the Army of the Czech Republic is to prevent specific acts of crime, which can be significant, especially in the event of closing the Austrian-German borders and, as the Chief of the General Staff has already noted, in the event the migration wave shifts to the Czech Republic as the transit country.” Zeman explicitly securitizes this scenario with references to the Czech Republic being flooded with a dangerous element in the event of the closure of the borders: “If Germany and Austria closed their borders, the Minister of Defence says that the Army would be prepared for action in six hours: not in weeks or days, but in six hours.” A third often-mentioned problem is connected with a situation where Germany would start returning the economic migrants who came to Germany through the Czech Republic: “I would like to warn against the illusion that nothing is going on, that people just pass to Germany and end up there. That would be true if they stayed in Germany; however, Germany itself stated that they will return the economic migrants, who, in my opinion, are in the majority, and they will naturally return them to the country where they came from – in this case, the Czech Republic.”

According to Zeman, this has clear repercussions: “The risk of a terrorist attack on Czech soil would increase with Austria and Germany closing their borders. That would make the Czech Republic a transit country for refugees

streaming to Germany, but also a country to which Germany would return the refugees who do not receive asylum.”

Based on the structure of Zeman’s argumentation, we can observe several basic principles connected with the perception of Germany as a source of threat to the Czech Republic due to the German migration policy. We can schematize the structure of Zeman’s statements with the help of these metaphors:

Germany supports (directly or indirectly) immigration from Islamic countries → Islam cannot be assimilated → Islam poses a security risk (there are terrorists among the migrants) → There is a threat to Germany → There is a threat to the Czech Republic (due to Germany’s efforts to redistribute or return migrants) → The foreign elite endangers the Czech people.

In relation to the image of Germany as a source of threat, it is possible to qualify Zeman’s rhetoric as populist. We find clear appeals to the nation and its security. Furthermore, it is apparent from Zeman’s statements (and inclusive terms such as ‘we’, ‘Czech’, ‘ours’, ‘us’, etc.) that the nation is the equivalent of the people. The people are threatened by ‘the others’ – their role is played mostly by Muslims, but also by Germany. Germany, personalized by Chancellor Merkel, simultaneously represents the bad international elite that (in liaison with other elites, perhaps the leaders of the EU enforcing the migrant quotas) is hostile to the (de facto German, but mainly Czech) people.

If Germany is the source of threat, the real source is Germany’s current activities, not the historical demands related to the Sudeten question. Nevertheless, there are several examples in the corpus of Zeman using historical references related to Germany in order to support current political claims. This concerns a couple of cases when Zeman generated a parallel between the threat of Nazism and Hitler’s efforts on the one hand and the current threat of Islam on the other. It should be remembered that Zeman does not distinguish between Islam and Islamism; he finds both terms (specifically the people behind them) equally problematic.⁵⁵ The lean toward this historical parallel is expressed in this example statement: “I talked about the fact that, in contrast to the Holocaust, an act of crime against the Jews would target the Slavs as well, but if Germany won the war, so now the danger comes from Islamic terrorism that states publicly to murder or enslave everyone who does not practice their faith.” Zeman discursively links Islam and Nazism in many cases: “A new enemy emerges, international terrorism based on hateful ideology, in a way very similar to the ideology of Nazi Germany” or “However, everyone who shows no concern about the migration wave resembles someone who was not concerned with the emergence of Nazism in Germany either.”

⁵⁵ See Naxera and Krčál, “This is a Controlled Invasion.”

Therefore, from the historical point of view, the Czech nation was threatened by the activities of Nazi Germany conducted by Hitler and which were (at least at the beginning and indirectly) supported and enabled by other European countries. Presently, the same threat is represented by Islam and Islamic terrorism that settle in Europe primarily thanks to Germany's current migration policy. Angela Merkel represents the role of the foreign elite supported by other members of this elite (the EU with their calls for quotas), whose activities directly endanger the Czech people by enabling (and de facto supporting) the infiltration of Islam, which is viewed as a security issue. Germany under Merkel thus plays the role of 'the other' who harms the Czech nation by supporting more 'others' represented by Muslims.

All statements related to this topic and completed with the above-presented metaphors can be schematized as follows:

Nazi Germany and Hitler threatened the Czech people → Islam is the same as Nazism → Chancellor Merkel and Germany's foreign policy support Islam → Contemporary Germany threatens the Czech people in a similar way to how Nazi Germany did.

In this regard, Zeman's rhetoric is clearly populist. We find all key elements of populism in it and an emphasis on the Czech people being threatened by the Muslims in the same way they were once threatened by Hitler's Germany, in both cases with the help of the international elite.

The Future Research Agenda?

Let us recall the situation in the period before the first direct presidential election in 2013. The way that Miloš Zeman approached the question of the Sudeten Germans during the pre-election debates was textbook populism. He actively defended himself as a protector of people's interests against the corrupt elite represented by Karel Schwarzenberg, who defended the interests of 'the others' at the expense of the Czech people. Zeman's rhetoric in this period was a climax of a series of statements he made related to the Sudeten Germans over the previous 20 years. After taking the presidential office, the situation changed, and Zeman ceased talking about the current threat from the Sudeten Germans. When speaking of the Sudeten Germans during the last few years, he only speaks of them as 'the others' harming the Czech nation with the help of the foreign elite in relation to history, and he does not present the current activities of the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft as a source of threat anymore. The first presumption of this text has thus been confirmed only partially and in relation to the historical event itself.

Conversely, Zeman focused his populist rhetoric vigorously on the activities of contemporary Germany, mainly on their migration policy.⁵⁶ The way he speaks on the topic is evidently populist and contains all its key components – targeting the necessity of protecting the people (the Czech nation) against the interests of the international elite (represented by Chancellor Merkel and the EU), who themselves are acting in the interests of ‘the others’ (Germans and especially Muslims, who are presented as a ‘cosmic evil’). The Germans are perceived as the problem, mostly because their policy enables the arrival and advance of the ‘principle evil’ in the form of the Muslims. The second presumption of the text has thus been fully confirmed.

During Zeman’s first presidential term, the topic of Islam, Muslims, and immigrants took the position of the biggest threat to the Czech nation within Zeman’s rhetoric.⁵⁷ He practically stopped speaking about other threats – the question of the Sudeten Germans is just one example of this. Although several politicians from the spectrum close to Zeman still discuss this issue,⁵⁸ the President himself no longer addresses it, which he explains by the fact that the Sudeten Germans have waived their property claims in the Czech Republic. Even though Zeman began to define the main source of threat to the Czech Republic (and Europe) unambiguously in relation to Islam, we cannot say he ceased to perceive Germany as a source of threat – he still does this actively, however, exclusively in relation to the questions of Islam and migration.

Although this analysis focused on the question of Germany as a threat to the Czech Republic’s borders, the results show that the German threat lies mainly in the fact that it mediates a much bigger danger than Germany itself does. The results demonstrate the relevance of extensive contemporary research into Islamophobia and the anti-Islamic attitudes of populist politicians. Islam has proven to be the frame of reference against which populists promise to protect Western civilization.⁵⁹ Hereby, the power of the topic of Islam manifests – even though there is no direct experience in the Czech Republic with the dangers arising from migration and Islam, the topic still somehow dominates Czech politics.

56 There are no other types of threats featured in Zeman’s rhetoric that might be present in the Czech environment (for example, the idea of German economic supremacy).

57 Michaela Strapáčová and Vít Hloušek, “Anti-Islamism without Moslems: Cognitive Frames of Czech Antimigrant Politics,” *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 12, no. 1 (2018): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.2478/jnmlp-2018-0001>.

58 One example is the Communist MEP Kateřina Konečná, who, just as this text was being finished, problematized the fact that the Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs assigned the Czech Ambassador in Germany for visiting the convention of the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft. Konečná interpreted this action as betraying the nation and defending foreign interests.

59 See Khair, *The New Xenophobia*; Vossen, “Populism in the Netherlands.”

Given that systematic analyses of Zeman's statements against Islam have only been carried out to a limited extent and with a specific grasp,⁶⁰ it would be useful for further research in the current debate on populism to focus on Zeman's perception of Islam and Muslims as 'the others' and a source of threat. Such research could also be aimed at narrow and specific topics. One of them could be the use of historical parallels and links intended to delegitimize Islam. The attention of the research on populism could then be focused on whether historical references play a role in the process of populist othering and, if so, what that role might be. Historical references used in such a way can be related to current issues that have no direct connection with the topic. History serves only as a frame of reference for defining oneself negatively, as shown in the above-described example of Zeman's rhetoric strategy classifying Islam as posing the same problem as Nazism did.

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⁶⁰ See Naxera and Krčál, "This is a Controlled Invasion."

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Armin Langer

8 Dog-Whistle Politics as a Strategy of American Nationalists and Populists: George Soros, the Rothschilds, and Other Conspiracy Theories

In April 2020, during the midst of the international coronavirus crisis, US President Donald Trump appointed Republican political strategist and media consultant Michael Caputo to be assistant secretary of public affairs in the Department of Health and Human Services. Caputo advised Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and was in charge of communications for New York. Caputo deleted tens of thousands of tweets just before his appointment, but journalists uncovered dozens of them. The strategist claimed in these tweets that the Rothschild banking family "crave control" through the coronavirus. Caputo also asserted that businessman and philanthropist George Soros's "political agenda REQUIRES a pandemic." On March 27, Caputo tweeted a photo of Soros captioned "[t]he real virus behind everything" and added skulls and crossbones.¹

Caputo was not the only one accusing Soros and the Rothschilds of seeking to exploit the pandemic to advance their alleged agenda of world domination. Californian GOP House candidate Joanne Wright suggested multiple times that the virus may be human-made or even connected to prominent Democratic public figures: "Doesn't @BillGates finance research at the Wuhan lab where the Corona virus was being created? Isn't @georgesoros a good friend of Gates?," Wright tweeted, earning hundreds of retweets and likes.² Former sheriff and spokesman for the pro-Trump super PAC America First David A. Clarke tweeted: "Not ONE media outlet has asked about George Soros's involvement in this FLU panic. He is SOMEWHERE involved in this."³ Canadian economist and *Russia*

1 Ron Kampeas, "Trump's New Health Spokesman Tweets about Soros and Rothschild Family 'Control'," *Haaretz*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/trump-s-new-health-spokesman-tweets-about-soros-and-rothschild-family-control-1.8795547>.

2 Emily Birnbaum, "California GOP Candidate Tweets Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories," *The Hill*, March 2, 2020, <https://thehill.com/policy/technology/485427-california-gop-candidate-tweets-coronavirus-conspiracy-theories>.

3 Zach Cheney-Rice, "Thank God David A. Clarke Isn't Running a County Jail Anymore," *Intelligencer*, March 17, 2020, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/03/david-clarke-says-go-to-bars-restaurants-during-coronavirus.html>.

Today contributor Michel Chossudovsky's Centre for Research on Globalization claimed on its website that the real danger behind the coronavirus pandemic is the implementation of an alleged Agenda ID2020. Its publication asserted that this agenda was the Rothschilds' attempt at population reduction so that fewer people, a small elite, can live longer and better with the reduced and limited resources on Earth.⁴

According to a 2020 Pew Research Center survey, about three in ten Americans say that the novel coronavirus was developed intentionally in a lab.⁵ As political scientist Cécile Guerin has explained, far-right populists are stepping into this atmosphere of uncertainty to encourage scapegoating, prejudice, and division. The internet and social media in particular are used as tools by nationalists and populists to share their views; while often confined to alternative social media websites, such as Gab, 4chan, or 8kun, conspiracy theories are frequently shared on mainstream platforms too.⁶ Most extremist movements depend on conspiracy theories to some extent. The Anti-Defamation League observed that in the United States, extreme right-wing movements have a particularly close relationship with conspiracy theories. Nationalists and populists promote "sharia law" conspiracy theories, for example, to increase Islamophobia. Anti-immigrant border vigilantes justify their patrols with conspiracy theories about Mexican drug cartels conducting an invasion of the United States. Conspiracy theories need villains. Soros and the Rothschilds seem to fulfill that role.⁷ But who are these people, and why are they targeted?

4 Peter Koenig, "The Coronavirus Vaccine: The Real Danger is 'Agenda ID2020'. Vaccination as a Platform for 'Digital Identity'," *Global Research*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.globalresearch.ca/coronavirus-causes-effects-real-danger-agenda-id2020/5706153>.

5 Pew Research Center, "Americans Immersed in COVID-19 News; Most Think Media Are Doing Fairly Well Covering It," *Pew Research Center*, March 17, 2020, https://www.journalism.org/2020/03/18/americans-immersed-in-covid-19-news-most-think-media-are-doing-fairly-well-covering-it/pj_2020-03-18_coronavirus-news1_0-01/.

6 Cécile Guerin, "Coronavirus, the 'Soros Bio-Weapon': How Far-Right Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories Are Infecting Mainstream Politics," *Haaretz*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-soros-bio-weapon-anti-semitic-far-right-coronavirus-theories-go-mainstream-1.8732195>.

7 ADL, "How Conspiracy Theories Can Kill," *ADL*, November 14, 2018, <https://www.adl.org/blog/how-conspiracy-theories-can-kill>; Joseph E. Uscinski, *Conspiracy Theories: A Primer* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 29.

When Criticism of Soros and the Rothschilds is Antisemitic

George Soros, a Hungarian Jew born in 1930, survived the Nazi occupation and moved first to the United Kingdom and then to the United States, where he became a US citizen.⁸ He settled down in New York and made a fortune as a hedge fund manager. Soros was an expert at buying currencies and securities in one market that he turned around and sold at a profit in the international market. In the 1980s, Soros began to contribute to several eastern European political and social movements to help the collapse of communism and the development of liberal, capitalistic societies. In 1993, he founded the Open Society Foundations, an international grant-making network whose name was inspired by Karl Popper's 1945 book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. According to its self-description, the philanthropy agency works toward building "vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable and open to the participation of all people."⁹ The foundation supports human rights organizations in more than 120 countries, with a focus on post-communist countries in central and eastern Europe and other democratizing nations, where it funds a range of initiatives. As philanthropy expert Waldemar Nielsen wrote, Soros "has undertaken through his philanthropy nothing less than to open up the once-closed Communist societies of eastern Europe to a free flow of ideas and scientific knowledge from the outside world." According to Nielsen, Soros "ranks with the greatest American philanthropists ever. His international efforts constitute a heroic chapter in the history of philanthropy – in terms of creativity, courage, timeliness, and scale of commitment. Not since Rockefeller and Carnegie has such a force been seen in the field of donorship."¹⁰

Over time, Soros increasingly became a target of nationalists and populists – and their criticism has too often employed classical antisemitic tropes. Opposing Soros is not what is antisemitic, however: "Saying that he controls

8 Waldemar A. Nielsen, *Inside American Philanthropy: The Dramas of Donorship* (Norman, OK/London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 77; Stephen J. Whitfield, "The Persistence of the Protocols," *Society* 55 (2018): 418.

9 Open Society Foundations, "Who We Are," [opensocietyfoundations.org](https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/who-we-are), <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/who-we-are>.

10 Armin Langer, "The Eternal George Soros: The Rise of an Antisemitic and Islamophobic Conspiracy Theory," *Europe: Continent of Conspiracies: Conspiracy Theories in and about Europe*, eds. André Krouwel and Andreas Önnarfors (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2021), 164–65. Nielsen, *Inside American Philanthropy*, 77–78.

ambassadors, employs FBI agents and isn't 'Jewish enough' to be demonized is," as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) CEO Jonathan Greenblatt wrote.¹¹

The earliest Soros conspiracy theory I could find originated in his home country in 1992 when far-right Hungarian Justice and Life Party leader István Csurka used Soros as a symbol of the Jewish world conspiracy and attacked him as being a representative of Jerusalem in lieu of the State of Israel. In the same year, the conservative Member of Parliament Gyula Zacsek published the essay "Termites are devouring our nation: reflections on the Soros Regime and the Soros Empire" in the far-right weekly *Magyar Fórum* ("Hungarian Forum"), which Csurka headed. Conspiracy theories surrounding Soros were also widespread in other central and eastern European countries, where most of Soros' activities were concentrated.¹² These conspiracy theories have reproduced various elements of classical antisemitism, most notably those of a Jewish world conspiracy. By presenting Soros as the "mastermind" behind Europe's political elite, they emulate the long-established antisemitic myth of the Jew as the puppet master of politicians.

Even though the Soros conspiracy theories have been around since the early 1990s, they did not gain mainstream prominence until two decades later. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán started to turn Soros into public enemy number one in 2013, portraying the billionaire as an enemy of the Hungarian people in posters and so-called public service announcements. During the so-called migration crisis in 2015, Orbán falsely claimed that Soros was willingly helping the predominantly Muslim refugees arriving in Europe to de-Christianize the continent. In Romania, the ruling elites blamed their countries' problems on Soros. Populists in Slovakia envisioned him as being behind press freedom protests. In Iceland, Soros was blamed for the fall of a former prime minister. After the Hungarian parliament enacted the so-called "Stop Soros" legislation in 2018, the Soros-backed Central European University left Budapest and moved its campus to Vienna. Vladimir Putin ejected the Open Society Foundations from Russia. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan did the same in Turkey. Both statesmen claimed that the organization was a threat to their constitutional system.¹³

11 Jonathan Greenblatt (@JGreenblattADL), "Opposing Soros isn't what's #antiSemitic. Saying that he controls ambassadors, employs FBI agents and isn't 'Jewish enough' to be demonized is. Our experts explain the #antiSemitism behind Soros conspiracies," Twitter, December 23, 2019, 8:02 p.m., <https://twitter.com/JGreenblattADL/status/1209187425492389888>.

12 Langer, "The Eternal George Soros, 163–183.

13 Ibid.; Vilhjálmur Örn Vilhjálmsón, "Iceland: A Study of Antisemitism in a Country without Jews," in *Antisemitism in the North: History and State of research*, eds. Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Heß (Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2020), 76; Hedvig Turai, "Back Up from the

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, open expressions of antisemitism are not tolerated in Europe. On the contrary, probably every single European leader has called for engagement against antisemitism.¹⁴ Viktor Orbán's Cabinet Office claimed that "No government has done more to fight anti-Semitism in Hungary than PM Orbán's."¹⁵ But despite the general condemnation of antisemitism, prejudices against Jews, which have been part of European civilization for centuries, have not disappeared. The ADL's 2012 opinion survey in ten European countries revealed that pernicious antisemitic beliefs continue to be held by nearly one-third of those surveyed. The foundation did, however, observe a decrease in antisemitic opinions in contrast to 2009 when it conducted a similar poll. Large swaths of the population subscribe to classic antisemitic notions, such as Jews having too much power in business or being disloyal to their own countries.¹⁶ All of these antisemitic canards are compatible with the Soros conspiracy theories.

To exploit the antisemitic stereotypes that are still alive in European societies today, nationalist and populist politicians turn to dog-whistle strategies. Political columnist William Safire defined dog-whistle politics as "[t]he use of messages embedded in speeches that seem innocent to a general audience but resonate with a specific public attuned to receive them."¹⁷ The term uses the analogy of the dog whistle used by shepherds. The whistle's high-frequency sound is audible to dogs but not to sheep and humans. Dog-whistle politics uses antisemitic and racist code words that empower antisemites and racists but might be glossed over by those unfamiliar with these resentments and conspiracy theories.¹⁸ Casting Soros, an individual whose Jewish origin is widely known, as a puppet master who manipulates national events for malign purposes mainstreams antisemitic tropes and supports bona fide antisemites who disseminate these ideas knowingly and maliciously.

Basement?," in *Opposing Colonialism, Antisemitism, and Turbo-Nationalism: Rethinking the Past for New Conviviality*, eds. Marina Gržinić, Jovita Pristovšek and Sophie Uitz (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), 464–477.

14 Langer, "The Eternal George Soros," 167–68.

15 About Hungary, "No Government Has Done More to Fight Anti-Semitism in Hungary than PM Orbán's," *About Hungary*, July 13, 2017, <http://abouthungary.hu/blog/no-government-has-done-more-to-fight-anti-semitism-in-hungary-than-pm-orbans/>.

16 ADL, "ADL Survey in Ten European Countries Finds Anti-Semitism at Disturbingly High Levels," *ADL*, March 20, 2012, <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-survey-in-ten-european-countries-finds-anti-semitism-at-disturbingly-high>.

17 William Safire, *Safire's Political Dictionary* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 190.

18 Langer, "The Eternal George Soros," 169.

Jewish World Conspiracy Theories Yesterday and Today

The first person to envision conspiracies against Christian Europe was the French Jesuit priest Augustin Barruel who published a four-volume work in 1797 entitled *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*.¹⁹ Barruel ascribed the French Revolution to a plot by the Freemasons trying to overthrow Christian civilization. His work led to papal condemnations of Freemasonry.²⁰ In 1806, Barruel received a letter from a certain Giovanni Battista Simonini, who congratulated the priest for unmasking the “infamous sects who prepare the ways of the antichrist” but criticized him for neglecting the most powerful force of them all: the Jews.²¹ Even though Barruel described the alleged conspirers as the “synagogue of impiety” and compared the philosophers of the Enlightenment to “blasphemous” Jews, he did not emphasize the Jews’ alleged role in the conspiracy.²² Simonini was not satisfied with Barruel’s antisemitic comparisons. He testified that both Freemasonry and the Illuminati had been founded by Jews and served the Jews’ aims for ultimate domination. Simonini’s letter is one of the earliest examples of antisemitic world conspiracies.²³

Many other authors followed suit and envisioned a secret international Jewish world conspiracy.²⁴ The wave of Jewish emancipation in the second half of the nineteenth century contributed to the proliferation of antisemitic conspiracy theories. By that time, the so-called Jewish international elite was considered a separate threat to the Freemasons.²⁵ Antisemitic conspiracy theories were also popular in Russia, where, in 1905, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was published. According to the publishers’ claims, the *Protocols* are the minutes of a late nineteenth-century meeting where Jewish leaders discussed their goal of global Jewish hegemony by subverting the morals of non-Jews and controlling

19 Svetlana Burmistr, “Jüdische Internationale,” in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus: Begriffe, Theorien, Ideologien*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Berlin/New York, NY: De Gruyter, 2010), 164.

20 Ronald Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism: Poland, 1933–1939* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), 47–48.

21 Reinhard Markner, “Giovanni Battista Simonini: Shards from the Disputed Life of an Italian Anti-Semite,” in *Kesarevo Kesarju: Scritti in onore di Cesare G. D. Michelis*, eds. Marina Ciccarini, Nicoletta Marcialis and Giorgio Ziffer (Florence: Florence University Press, 2014), 311.

22 Augustin Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (Fraser, MI: American Council on Economics and Society, 1995), 130, 171.

23 Langer, “The Eternal George Soros,” 170.; Markner, “Giovanni Battista Simonini,” 311–312.

24 Burmistr, “Jüdische Internationale,” 164–166.

25 Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 46.

the press and the world's economies. Although the origins of the *Protocols* are unclear, they were probably created by the Tsarist secret police, and they were soon translated into other languages and distributed all over Europe and the world. In the period between 1920, when the *Protocols* acquired international fame, and the defeat of the Nazis in 1945, the book was outsold only by the Bible.²⁶ As Norman Cohn wrote, this hoax eventually became a “warrant for genocide.”²⁷

Often, antisemites were not explicit, and they expressed their antisemitic conspiracy theories by using codewords. The first codeword for the Jewish world conspiracy described in the *Protocols* was the “Rothschilds.” The international banking dynasty of the Rothschilds, who combined Jewishness, financial wealth, and international connections, has been the epitome of the global Jewish conspiracy ever since the nineteenth century.²⁸ For nineteenth-century antisemites, the Rothschilds loomed as a symbol of the rising might of Jews under modern capitalism. The banking family was perceived as the new kings in an age where money was the source of power. The anti-Rothschild conspiracy theories blended antisemitism with anti-capitalism and antimodernism. Claims that the Rothschilds were behind the creation of sinister secret and semi-secret organizations have featured in most modern and even contemporary New World Order conspiracy theories. Even though the family failed to establish a solid outpost in the United States and their branches remain centered in Europe until today, the image of the Rothschild family has also been adopted by American antisemitic agitators.²⁹

The notion of the Rothschilds' alleged control resonates until today, as the reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic proved. However, the banking dynasty declined in the twentieth century, and none of the current family members are particularly well-known for their politics or social activism. According to S&P Global Market Intelligence data, the Rothschild & Co investment bank – which was created in 2003 after the British and the French branches of the family merged – was not among the 100 largest banks worldwide as of 31 December 2018.³⁰

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 49–55.

²⁷ Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1966); Langer, “The Eternal George Soros.”

²⁸ Armin Langer, “Deep State, Child Sacrifices, and the “Plandemic”: The Historical Background of Antisemitic Tropes within the QAnon Movement,” in *Antisemitism on Social Media*, eds. Monika Hübscher and Sabine von Mering (Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2022), 24.

²⁹ Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 104–106; Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 624–626.

³⁰ Francis Garrido and Saqib Chaudhry, “The World’s 100 Largest Banks,” *S&P Global Market Intelligence*, April 5, 2019, https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/news-insights/trending/t-38wta5twjgrrqccf4_ca2.

Nonetheless, the Rothschilds were accused of financing the spread of the novel coronavirus and of a series of other manipulations. Far-right writer and talk radio host Michael Collins Piper wrote in 2014 that the Rothschilds have too much influence within the GOP and suggested calling the Republican party the “New World Order” or the “Zionist Elite.”³¹ The conservative group Defend Rural America published several booklets asserting that the Rothschilds invented central banking, which “was only the means, however, for the ultimate objective of world government.”³² The group promoted their anti-Rothschild conspiracy theories in nationwide seminars attended by Republican legislators, such as Montana state senator Matt Rosendale.³³ But Democrats too engage in Rothschild conspiracy theories: District of Columbia council member Trayon White said that the Rothschilds were controlling the weather and urged his constituents to “pay attention” to the Jewish family’s “climate manipulation.”³⁴

In the antisemite’s phantasy, George Soros fulfills a similar role to that of the Rothschilds, which might explain why Soros and the Rothschilds are often mentioned in the same conspiracy theories. Republican Washington state representative Matt Shea offered in a radio program that “a lot of people personify that evil with George Soros, you know, Dr Evil, he’s the guy. But there’s a lot more to it than that.” His discussion partner on the show, Alex Newman, a writer for the far-right John Birch Society’s *New American* magazine, responded: “Soros is not the top of the pyramid . . . Soros got his start with Rothschild money.”³⁵ Alt-right cartoonist Ben Garrison, whose cartoons have been publicized by Steve Bannon’s alt-right portal *Breitbart*, among other outlets, depicted Trump’s former National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster and retired Gen. David Petraeus being manipulated by a puppeteer labeled “George Soros.” After McMaster’s and Petraeus’ conflicts with Trump, the pro-Trump camp perceived both men as traitors. In the same picture, Soros’ strings are pulled by a

31 Michael Collins Piper, “Rothschild Influence Deep within the GOP,” *American Free Press*, July 14, 2014, <https://americanfreepress.net/rothschild-influence-deep-within-gop/>.

32 Kirk F. MacKenzie, *Money: Defending Your Prosperity II* (Silent No More Publications, 2010), 37.

33 Tim Murphy, “GOP Congressional Candidate: I Don’t Actually Think an International Cabal of Bankers Controls the World,” *Mother Jones*, January 8, 2014, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/01/matt-rosendale-montana-rothschilds-rockefellers/>.

34 Jenny Singer, “Here’s Definitive Proof that Jews Don’t Control the Weather,” *Forward*, March 19, 2018, <https://forward.com/schmooze/396833/heres-definitive-proof-that-jews-dont-control-the-weather/>.

35 Jason Wilson, “Exposed: The Republican Who Stokes Fears of Civil War and Fuels Conspiracy Theories,” *The Guardian*, May 9, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/09/matt-shea-republican-stokes-fears-civil-war-conspiracy-theories>.

puppeteer labeled “Rothschild.” Alt-right radio host Mike Cernovich commissioned the cartoon.³⁶

Dog-Whistle of a Jewish World Conspiracy

Even though the Soros dog-whistle politics originate from Europe, they were met with open ears in the US. Although antisemitism in the United States might have a different history than in Europe, it is nonetheless widespread in the North American country too. For decades, Jews believed that they would be safe in the US from the Jew-hatred that colored their European experience. At the turn of the twentieth century, over two million European Jews went to the US.³⁷ It was a “mass migration” and “one of the largest waves of immigration in all of Jewish history,” to quote historian Jonathan D. Sarna. Most of them were fleeing the pogroms in the Russian territories and seeking a less oppressive society. New York City became known to the masses of eastern European Jews as the “promised city.”³⁸ Jews enjoyed privileges and duties of citizenship in the United States long before this became a reality in most European states. Notable American leaders had welcomed Jews since George Washington’s days. American lawmakers repeatedly condemned antisemitic violence and expressed their solidarity with the Jewish population in the US and worldwide and moved to help them. Consider, for example, Secretary of State John Forsyth’s 1840 statement expressing solidarity with the “oppressed Jews in Damascus” or President Ulysses S. Grant’s 1870 message of solidarity with the “persecuted Rumanian Jews.”³⁹

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, with the influx of eastern European Jewish migrants, the discourse on Jews in the American press took an antisemitic turn. It implied that Jews would never be able to become fully American and “lose their racial identity.” Many Americans reproduced European discourses on the Jews’ unwillingness and incapability to integrate into the

36 Josefín Dolsten, “Cartoonist Disinvited from White House Defends Image Widely Labeled as Anti-Semitic,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, July 10, 2019, <https://www.jta.org/2019/07/10/united-states/cartoonist-disinvited-from-white-house-defends-image-widely-labeled-as-anti-semitic>.

37 Armin Langer, “Liberal and Orthodox Jewish Responses to Antisemitism and Assimilationism in the United States during the 1920s,” *Amerikastudien/American Studies: A Quarterly*, 66(4), 680.

38 Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2004), 151–154.

39 Jacob Rader Marcus, ed., *The Jew in the American World: A Source Book* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 185, 202.

majoritarian societies.⁴⁰ Antisemitic conspiracy theories were spread in public, culminating in the 1915 lynching of the young Jewish businessman Leo Frank. In the early 1920s, the industrialist and automobile manufacturer Henry Ford published and distributed his four-volume set of antisemitic booklets known as *The International Jew*.⁴¹ However, since the 1930s, and definitely after the defeat of the Nazi enemy, antisemitism became disreputable in the US. In the decades following the Second World War, no one endorsed conspiracy theories of Jews plotting against non-Jews, except for some marginal white nationalist groups. These fringes moved closer to the center under the Trump administration. Even if Trump himself is not a white nationalist, he has a relationship with the white nationalist movement that is unprecedented in recent American political history. Antisemitism scholar Deborah Lipstadt observed that Trump's refusal to seriously address the antisemitic – and, I will add, racist – behaviors of his white nationalist supporters greatly impacted the stability of this alliance. Trump's silence on antisemitism and racism in the so-called alt-right camp affected the spread of anti-Soros conspiracy theories too.⁴²

While Soros was already a boogeyman to the eastern European far-right in the early 1990s, his name was not yet well-known in the US. When Soros finally turned his philanthropy to the United States in the late 1990s, he focused on changing public policies that struck him as irrational. Soros sought to steer US drug policy toward prevention and treatment, which disproportionately affected people of color, and gave money to promote needle exchange, which is proven to reduce AIDS. He advocated alternatives to prison incarceration, promoted the naturalization of legal immigrants, and advocated for their rights. Soros based his worldview on Popper's concept of an open society, where no one has a monopoly on the truth and there are free and fair discussions in which all viewpoints get aired. In the Popperian open society, there is hardly any room for ideological approaches. Soros did not identify as progressive or liberal. He even contributed to George H. W. Bush's 1988 run for president.

His "non-ideological" approach seems to have changed when the George W. Bush administration came along with its doctrine of preemptive war: "I don't like being so partisan, but I will advocate for a constructive U.S. role in the world." "Getting rid of Bush is the central focus of my life," Soros said about the

⁴⁰ Langer, "Liberal and Orthodox Jewish Responses," 680, 695.

⁴¹ Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 169–171.

⁴² Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Antisemitism: Here and Now* (New York, NY: Schocken Books), 47.

presidential race, calling the outcome “a matter of life and death.”⁴³ International relations scholar Michael Cox wrote that Soros’ anti-Bush engagement happened because he thought that Bush was putting the global system, which underpins world stability and US corporate profits, at risk.⁴⁴ In 2003, Soros became an initial donor of the Center for American Progress, a public policy research and advocacy organization with economic and social liberal viewpoints.

Since he came out against the GOP in the early 2000s – which David Callahan described as his “conversion to a hyperpartisan” – Soros has subsidized liberal causes and Democratic candidates for high office. According to the Center for Public Integrity, an American nonprofit investigative journalism organization, Soros contributed 32 million US dollars to various Democratic-aligned committees between 2004 and 2008. During Barack Obama’s 2012 reelection campaign, Soros donated over 5 million US dollars to pro-Obama and pro-Democratic PACs.⁴⁵ In 2016, Soros backed a pro-Hillary Clinton PAC with 7 million US dollars.⁴⁶ Soros has been compared to the Koch brothers, who control Koch Industries, the second-largest privately owned company in the country, and who are known for their donations to libertarian and GOP causes. Concerned about climate change, economic and racial injustices, Soros funds initiatives that infuriate many nationalists and populists.⁴⁷ In these circles, Soros’ philanthropy is often recast as fodder for outsized conspiracy theories, including claims that he masterminds specific worldwide plots or manipulates particular events to further his goals. While it is understandable to dislike Soros from a right-wing perspective, many of these conspiracy theories employ longstanding antisemitic canards, particularly the notion that rich and powerful Jews are working behind the scenes, plotting to control countries and manipulate global events.

In 2007, Bill O’Reilly was among the first American public figures to vilify Soros by accusing him in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election of secretly giving “millions to politicians who will do his bidding.” In his show on *Fox News*, the popular TV host said that “politicians running for office do what he tells them to do.” O’Reilly charged the billionaire businessman in his show

⁴³ David Callahan, *Fortunes of Change: The Rise of the Liberal Rich and the Remaking of America* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010), 146–148.

⁴⁴ Michael Cox, “Empire, Imperialism and the Bush Doctrine,” *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 4 (2004): 607.

⁴⁵ Alexandra Duszak, “Donor Profile: George Soros,” *The Center for Public Integrity*, May 19, 2014, <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/donor-profile-george-soros/>.

⁴⁶ Dave Levinthal, “Inside Hillary Clinton’s Big-Money Cavalry,” *The Center for Public Integrity*, April 13, 2016, <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/inside-hillary-clintons-big-money-cavalry/>.

⁴⁷ Whitfield, “The Persistence of the Protocols,” 420.

“The O’Reilly Factor” with trying to “buy” the upcoming election by donating to causes and organizations that O’Reilly called the “radical left.” He also claimed that “Soros has set up a complicated political operation designed to buy influence among some liberal politicians and smear people with whom he disagrees.” Furthermore, he stated that “John Edwards [a nominee for the Democratic presidential candidate] is taking orders from the Soros group right now. And other Democratic politicians may be as well.” O’Reilly added that “[i]n the past, big business has been accused of doing just that. Now it is the likes of George Soros: an extremist who wants open borders, a one world foreign policy, legalized drugs, euthanasia and on and on.”⁴⁸

Back in 2007, the American public was not yet aware of Soros. O’Reilly himself noted that “[t]he really frightening thing about all this is that most Americans have never even heard of George Soros.” Journalist Robert Mackey claimed that O’Reilly was the one who started the “plot against George Soros.”⁴⁹ As I showed before, Soros conspiracy theories had been around for decades before they appeared in the US. But Mackey is correct in the sense that O’Reilly holds significant responsibility for spreading Soros conspiracy theories in America. Alex Jones’ notorious far-right website *InfoWars* did not write about Soros before 2008, the white-supremacist monthly *American Renaissance* only published its first piece on Soros in 2011, and the major neo-Nazi portal *The Daily Stormer* wrote its first article on Soros in 2014. It is worth noting that while these antisemitic conspiracy theories were first spread in Europe by various far-right platforms like the weekly *Magyar Fórum*, it was the cable television channel *Fox News* that offered a platform for this in the United States. The influential conservative website *Newsmax* ran pieces on Soros as early as 2006, but I would not characterize *Newsmax* as far-right. Besides, that first piece did not use the same antisemitic canards regarding Soros as later articles did.⁵⁰

While Bill O’Reilly was one of the first to slander Soros for allegedly controlling the media and politics, he was far from the last. *Fox News* provided a platform for several other commentators to promote this conspiracy theory. Conservative media consultant Phil Kent said on O’Reilly’s show that “George Soros is really the Dr. Evil of the whole world of left-wing foundations. (. . .) He

⁴⁸ Bill O’Reilly, “Buying Political Power,” *Fox News*, April 24, 2007, <https://www.foxnews.com/story/buying-political-power>.

⁴⁹ Robert Mackey, “The Plot against George Soros Didn’t Start in Hungary. It Started on Fox News,” *The Intercept*, January 23, 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2019/01/23/plot-george-soros-didnt-start-hungary-started-fox-news/>.

⁵⁰ James H. Walsh, “George Soros: Open Society and Open Borders,” *Newsmax*, July 25, 2006, <https://www.newsmax.com/Pre-2008/George-SorosOpen-Society/2006/07/25/id/687006/>.

really hates this country. And he funds these things, as your chart points out, and open borders and even radical Islamic groups that defend suicide bombers. So this guy is all over the map.”⁵¹ In April 2018, one of the network’s new stars, Tucker Carlson, declared on air that “George Soros hates the United States.”⁵² Another new host, Laura Ingraham, claimed that Soros was behind protests against Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation to the Supreme Court, despite a credible allegation of sexual assault against the nominee.⁵³

In October 2018, *Fox News* seemed to recognize the antisemitic tropes behind these Soros conspiracy theories after an episode of “Lou Dobbs Tonight” ran. In the episode, Chris Farrell of the conservative activist group Judicial Watch suggested that the US State Department was “Soros-occupied.” Farrell also claimed in the show that Soros was behind a large caravan of migrants entering the United States. The next day, Gary Schreier, Senior Vice President for Programming at Fox Business Network, issued a statement that read: “We condemn the rhetoric by the guest on Lou Dobbs Tonight. This episode (. . .) has now been pulled from all future airings.” A spokesman went further and told reporters that *Fox Business* and *Fox News* would no longer book Farrell. Yet *Fox News* kept on inviting guests who spread antisemitic conspiracy theories even after this 2018 statement. Joseph diGenova, the former US Attorney for the District of Columbia and *Fox News* regular, claimed on the network in November 2019 that Soros “controls a very large part of the career foreign service of the United States State Department” and “also controls the activities of FBI agents overseas.”⁵⁴ Alt-right media channels like *Infowars* and *Breitbart* also promoted conspiracy theories about Soros controlling the world. According to the results of an electronic search, there are over 39,000 mentions of George Soros on *Breitbart* and 4,590 mentions on *Infowars*.⁵⁵

51 Phil Kent, “‘Factor Investigation’: George Soros,” *Fox News*, April 24, 2007, <https://www.foxnews.com/story/factor-investigation-george-soros>.

52 Tucker Carlson, “How the Obama State Dept. Funded Soros Group’s Activities,” *Fox News*, April 5, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRYDPzZMYIg>.

53 Laura Ingraham, “What Role is George Soros Playing in Anti-Kavanaugh Protests?,” *Fox News Insider*, September 26, 2018, <https://insider.foxnews.com/2018/09/26/what-role-george-soros-playing-anti-kavanaugh-protests-ingraham-angle-investigates>.

54 Jonathan Greenblatt, *Open Letter to Suzanne Scott*, November 18, 2019, <https://www.adl.org/media/13754/download>.

55 I performed an electronic search of these websites using Google on 25 April 2020. I used the keyword “Soros” for the search. It should be noted that these numbers probably include the readers’ comments too, not only the words contained in the articles published by the editors.

Donald Trump used antisemitic dog-whistle politics in his 2016 campaign's final ad. The ad featured Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and three Jews: Soros, Federal Reserve chair Janet Yellen, and Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein. During the ad, Trump's voice is heard saying: "The establishment has trillions of dollars at stake in this election for those who control the levers of power in Washington and for the global special interests. They partner with these people that don't have your good in mind."⁵⁶ As Deborah Lipstadt pointed out, "[t]he word 'Jew' did not have to appear in the ad for the insinuation that Clinton was an ally of a cabal of greedy global Jewish capitalists to register with white supremacists and nationalists."⁵⁷ Trump's signal also caught the attention of known antisemites. Andrew Anglin, editor of *The Daily Stormer*, noted that "Our Glorious Leader and ULTIMATE SAVIOR has gone full-wink-wink-wink to his most aggressive supporters," that is, to white supremacists.⁵⁸

Who is the Antichrist?

The Soros conspiracy theories also reproduce other antisemitic canards besides the ones about a Jewish world conspiracy, for example, the trope of the Jew laughing about non-Jews. A doctored image of President Obama being chummy with Soros is frequently shared on social media by individuals peddling various conspiracy theories about the billionaire investor, for example, by the filmmaker Dinesh D'Souza in 2017, who had violated campaign finance laws in 2014 and was pardoned by President Trump in 2018. As the fact-checking website *Snopes* pointed out, the original photograph was taken at a campaign rally on 28 January 2008 at the American University. It showed then-presidential candidate Barack Obama with Senator Ted Kennedy. At some point, Soros' laughing head was superimposed over Kennedy's to make it appear as if Obama were conspiring with the billionaire.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Donald Trump, "Donald Trump's Argument for America," YouTube video, 2:00, November 6, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vST61W4bGm8>.

⁵⁷ Lipstadt, *Antisemitism*, 50.

⁵⁸ Andrew Anglin, "Happening: Trump Retweets Two More White Genocide Accounts Back-to-Back," *The Daily Stormer*, January 25, 2016, <https://dailystormer.su/happening-trump-retweets-two-more-white-genocide-accounts-back-to-back/>.

⁵⁹ Dan Evon, "Is This Barack Obama Laughing with George Soros?" *Snopes*, August 25, 2017, <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/photograph-obama-soros-laughing/>.

The image of the “laughing Jew” dates back centuries. Historian Wiley Feinstein’s investigation shows that it was first introduced in the fourteenth century by the poet Dante Alighieri in his poem *The Divine Comedy*. Here, Dante addressed his Christian readership and wrote that the Jews amidst Christians would laugh at them. Jews are depicted in the poem as if they would make fun of Christians and be pleased by Jesus’ death.⁶⁰ Dante’s antisemitism seems to be rooted in Christian anti-Judaism, which asserts that the Jewish people as a whole were responsible for the death of Jesus, a belief that some Christians hold even today.⁶¹ Mobs used the antisemitic slur “Christ-killer” to incite violence against Jews. This belief, also known as Jewish deicide, justified the pogroms – the murder and persecution of Jews – during the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. A secularized version of this image became a recurring element in Nazi propaganda. Adolf Hitler himself used the component of the laughing Jew, for example, in his speech on the nineteenth anniversary of the so-called Beer Hall Putsch: “Those who still laugh now will perhaps no longer laugh a short time from now. This realization will spread beyond Europe throughout the entire world. International Jewry will be recognized in its full demonic peril.”⁶²

The laughing Jew is not the only antisemitic canard of Christian origin applied to Soros. Following the accusation of Jews being the killers of the Christian messiah, there was an associative connection in medieval Europe between the Jew and the Devil, who was depicted as limping and diseased. As a result of this association, Jews were prescribed devil-like physical characteristics, such as a hooked nose or cloven or flat feet. Portraying Jews as devil-like established the myth that the Devil and Jews were innately similar.⁶³ Many believed that the anti-Christ would be Jewish.⁶⁴

60 Wiley Feinstein, *The Civilization of the Holocaust in Italy: Poets, Artists, Saints, Anti-Semites* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 64–65.

61 Langer, “The Eternal George Soros,” 169; Lino Pertile, “Dante and the Shoah,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*, eds. Manuele Gagnolati, Elena Lombardi, and Francesca Southerden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 655; Jeremy Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

62 Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 196.

63 Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (London/New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 39.

64 Moshe Lazar, “The Lamb and the Scapegoat: The Dehumanization of Jews in Medieval Propaganda Imagery,” in *Anti-semitism in Times of Crisis*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1991) 46–47.

Soros conspiracy theories do not simply criticize the philanthropist but demonize him. Frank Gaffney, the founder of the Center for Security Policy, an anti-Muslim think-tank, asked if Soros was the anti-Christ or ‘just’ his right-hand man: “The decades-long record of this billionaire financier and philanthropist, however, is one of such malevolence and destruction that he must at a minimum be considered the anti-Christ’s right-hand man.”⁶⁵ Trump’s lawyer and former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani retweeted a post calling Soros the “anti-Christ.”⁶⁶ The tweet also suggested freezing Soros’ assets. Hollywood actor James Woods – who frequently espouses his political views on Twitter – tweeted an image of Soros as a puppet master with the caption “DANCE / My Bitches / Dance” and wrote that “[e]very problem our world has starts at Satan’s fingertips . . .”⁶⁷

The anti-Soros campaign of American nationalists runs entirely under these canards of a Jewish world conspiracy. The British-born American foreign affairs specialist Fiona Hill characterized these Soros conspiracy theories as “the new Protocols of the Elders of Zion.”⁶⁸ Stephen J. Whitfield hinted at this continuity, claiming that

If . . . one were looking to update the fantasy of a surreptitious Jewish stranglehold on the international economy, no candidate would fit better than the creator of the most adroit and prosperous hedge fund in the world, the canniest investor on the planet. More than anyone else, Soros can be held as inadvertently responsible for the persistence of the *Protocols*, or rather for the idea behind the *Protocols*, which is the sinister economic power of international Jewry.⁶⁹

In these attacks, the rumor of “Judeo-Bolshevism” plays a role as well. Blaming Soros for the destruction of Christian and “traditional” European identities very much follows the fabrication of “Judeo-Bolshevism,” according to which Jews

65 Frank Gaffney, “George Soros, the Anti-Christ, or Just His Right-Hand Man?,” *Center for Security Policy*, October 11, 2018, <https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2018/10/11/george-soros-the-anti-christ-or-just-his-right-hand-man/>.

66 Gabe Friedman, “Rudy Giuliani Brands George Soros the ‘Anti-Christ,’” *Forward*, October 8, 2018, <https://forward.com/fast-forward/411649/rudy-giuliani-brands-george-soros-the-anti-christ/>.

67 James Woods (@RealJamesWoods), “Every problem our world has starts at Satan’s fingertips . . .,” Twitter, April 20, 2020, 8:43 p.m., <https://twitter.com/realjameswoods/status/1252306881801883648>.

68 Zack Budryk, “Hill Says Soros Conspiracy Theories Are ‘New Protocols of the Elders of Zion,’” *The Hill*, November 21, 2019, <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/471558-hill-says-soros-conspiracy-theories-are-new-protocols-of-the-elders-of-zion>.

69 Whitfield, “The Persistence of the Protocols,” 417.

are essentially left-wing and intent on destroying Christian and traditional values. Adherents of this conspiracy theory claim that there is a Jewish-communist takeover of the Western world. After the 1917 Soviet revolution, Polish Jews were accused by Catholic nationalists in the country of sympathizing with the Communist revolution, hence the term “Żydokomuna.”⁷⁰ Historically, southern and midwest white Protestant agrarians in the US have often associated East Coast bankers with Jewry.⁷¹ There are also current examples of the canard of “Judeo-Bolshevism”: Hungary’s far-right Jobbik party organized joint protests against “Bolshevism and Zionism,” and the Greek far-right party Golden Dawn considers communism to be part of the “Zionist world conspiracy.”⁷² Paul Hanebrink’s 2018 book *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* is an excellent resource for this canard’s past and present. However, Hanebrink did not refer to the Soros conspiracy theories, even though they provide several examples for the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism too.⁷³

National Rifle Association Executive Vice-President Wayne LaPierre accused Soros – and two other philanthropists of Jewish origin, Michael Bloomberg and Tom Steyer – of planning a socialist takeover: “It’s more than obvious that this socialist wave is rapidly mounting, backed by nearly unlimited funding from socialist billionaires like George Soros, Michael Bloomberg and Tom Steyer.” He suggested that they want to turn the US “into an unrecognizable, socialist nation devoid of the basic freedoms that the founders enshrined in the Constitution.”⁷⁴ Former House Republican staffer and journalist Phil Brennan identified Soros as a “socialist billionaire” and claimed that they would spend their time “sitting in their privileged retreats, contemplating the glories of such heroes of socialism as Fidel Castro, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini and that great leader of Iraq’s socialist Ba’athist party Saddam Hussein.”⁷⁵ Speaking about the Democratic Party’s grassroots organization, conservative political commentator Rush Limbaugh said that “this effort is not new, and it is being funded here by George Soros and many others. . . . In every walk, every school, every church, the

70 Langer, “The Eternal George Soros,” 172–73.

71 Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 51–52.

72 Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, MA/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 2.

73 Ibid.; Langer, “The Eternal George Soros,” 173.

74 Wayne LaPierre, “Gun Rights Could Be Affected by Socialist Ideals,” *America’s 1st Freedom*, March 12, 2018, <https://www.americas1stfreedom.org/articles/2018/3/12/gun-rights-could-be-affected-by-socialist-ideals/>.

75 Phil Brennan, “The Era of the Cornered Rat,” *Newsmax*, December 2, 2003, <https://www.newsmax.com/pre-2008/the-era-the-cornered/2003/12/02/id/677636/>.

attack, the assault on religion in this country today has roots in communism!”⁷⁶ During the US national anthem protests initiated by former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, Limbaugh suggested that “the NFL players union [was] teaming up with George Soros to fund leftist advocacy groups.”⁷⁷

Dinesh D’Souza alleged Soros of being “a sponsor of domestic terrorism” for supposedly financing anti-fascist organizations.⁷⁸ No evidence whatsoever of this exists. Still, a petition submitted to the official website of the White House that demanded that the Department of Justice declare George Soros a terrorist and seize all of his organizations’ assets managed to collect over 138,000 signatures.⁷⁹ Trump also tweeted that Soros was financing the demonstrations against Kavanaugh’s appointment as a Supreme Court justice: “The very rude elevator screamers are paid professionals only looking to make Senators look bad. Don’t fall for it! Also, look at all of the professionally made identical signs. Paid for by Soros and others.”⁸⁰ Various far-right portals, such as *Breitbart* and *FrontPage*, backed this theory.⁸¹

Like the trope of Judeo-Bolshevism, the terms “internationalist” and “globalist” have been used for antisemitic dog-whistling purposes for decades. The notion of Jews as internationally beholden to some worldwide conspiracy, rather than serving their home countries as loyal subjects, was manifested in the previously mentioned *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or its “Americanized version,” Ford’s *The International Jew*. This concept was paired with the image of Jews controlling the global financial system. The phrases “international Jew”

76 Rush Limbaugh, “Fueled by Hatred and Russian Interference, Dems Quietly Winning Elections,” *RushLimbaugh.com*, February 14, 2018, <https://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2018/02/14/fueled-by-hatred-and-russian-interference-dems-quietly-winning-elections/>.

77 Rush Limbaugh, “Soros Behind NFL Protests,” *RushLimbaugh.com*, October 6, 2017, <https://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2017/10/06/soros-behind-nfl-protests/>.

78 Dinesh D’Souza (@DineshDSouza), “If #Antifa is a terror group then former Nazi collaborator George Soros should be investigated as a sponsor of domestic terrorism,” Twitter, August 24, 2017, 7:05 p.m., <https://twitter.com/dineshdsouza/status/900781098526851072>.

79 Whitfield, “The Persistence of the Protocols,” 418–419.

80 Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), “The very rude elevator screamers are paid professionals only looking to make Senators look bad. Don’t fall for it! Also, look at all of the professionally made identical signs. Paid for by Soros and others. These are not signs made in the basement from love! #Troublemakers,” Twitter, October 5, 2018, 3:03 p.m., <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1048196883464818688>.

81 Penny Starr, “Leftist Anti-Trump, Soros-Funded Groups Join Open Borders Protests,” *Breitbart*, June 27, 2018, <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2018/06/27/leftist-anti-trump-soros-funded-groups-join-open-borders-protests/>; Matthew Vadum, “Soros’s Women’s March of Hate,” *FrontPage*, January 23, 2017, <https://archives.frontpagemag.com/fpm/soross-womens-march-hate-matthew-vadum/>.

(*der internationale Jude*) and “international Jewry” (*das internationale Judentum*) became established parts of the Hitlerian and Nazi narratives too, and they have not yet disappeared even today.⁸² Nota bene: Jews have been depicted as communists and capitalists at the same time. That was also true for Hitler, who tarred the Jews as both rapacious capitalists and subversive communists. That the claims are contradictory does not matter since those who prefer conspiracy theories are not interested in logical reasoning anyway.⁸³

Soros is also labeled as a “globalist.” Libertarian author Michael S. Rozeff described Soros as “global, international, universal. This means unitary worldwide. It means anti-national and thus anti-American.” Soros’ dream “translates into world government, world laws, world rules, world taxes and a world military.”⁸⁴ Self-proclaimed investigative journalist Matthew Vadum wrote on *FrontPage* that “[p]eople like Soros regard nationalism as tribalism, jingoism, superpatriotism, or a combination of the three. Because he is an Esperanto-speaking, United Nations-loving internationalist, Soros hurls the word ‘nationalism’ as an epithet.”⁸⁵ Trump also used the antisemitic slur “globalist,” for example, to refer to his outgoing chief economic adviser, the Jewish business leader Gary Cohn: “He may be a globalist but I still like him.” Journalist Allison Kaplan Sommer has provided several other examples of the usage of “globalist” in Trump’s White House and asserted that this was the legacy of Trump’s former senior advisor Steve Bannon, who imported the term from the alt-right platform *Breitbart*. Bannon reportedly used the slur to slam both Cohn and Trump’s Jewish son-in-law and senior advisor Jared Kushner.⁸⁶

Republican House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy tweeted that Soros tried to buy the 2018 midterm elections. He accused two other Jewish donors, Michael Bloomberg and Tom Steyer, of doing the same: “We cannot allow Soros, Steyer and Bloomberg to BUY this election! Get out and vote Republican November 6th.

82 Burmistr, “Jüdische Internationale,” 165; Langer, “The Eternal George Soros,” 171.

83 Uscinski, *Conspiracy Theories*, 96.

84 Michael S. Rozeff, “George Soros: Socialist, Internationalist, Political Activist,” *LewRockwell.com*, November 27, 2019, <https://www.lewrockwell.com/lrc-blog/george-soros-socialist-internationalist-political-activist/>.

85 Matthew Vadum, “Soros Starts \$1 Billion Anti-American University,” *FrontPage*, February 11, 2020, <https://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/2020/02/soros-starts-1-billion-anti-american-university-matthew-vadum/>.

86 Allison Kaplan Sommer, “How Did the Term ‘Globalist’ Become an Anti-Semitic Slur? Blame Bannon,” *Haaretz*, March 13, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-how-did-the-term-globalist-became-an-anti-semitic-slur-blame-bannon-1.5895925>.

#MAGA.”⁸⁷ Congressman Matt Gaetz of Florida, a self-described “proud conservative,” inaccurately suggested that Soros was paying women and children to join the “caravan & storm the US border @ election time.” Gaetz was referring to the immigrants from Honduras and other central American countries who were fleeing from violence, poverty, and repression and who intended to reach the US in 2018.⁸⁸ Rush Limbaugh also promoted this theory.⁸⁹ This conspiracy theory is not only antisemitic but also racist since it works with the racist canard of a white genocide where immigrants of color overrun the US, which is imagined as white.⁹⁰ The fact that antisemitic Soros conspiracy theories often include tropes of racist and Islamophobic conspiracy theories also shows how interrelated these resentments are.⁹¹ Other forms of hatred intersect with antisemitism as well, such as misogyny. *Infowars* host Alex Jones claimed that Fiona Hill is a “globalist whore of Soros, a trafficker in evil.”⁹² There is a need for further research on the overlap between antisemitism and other forms of hatred exemplified by the Soros conspiracy theories.

Denying the Accusations

Of course, nationalists and populists reject the label of antisemitism. We can see that in the example of conservative political commentator and former *Fox News* host Glenn Beck, one of the most prominent Soros conspiracy theorists in the United States. On his show “The Glenn Beck Program” on *Fox News*, Beck devoted hour-long commentaries to Soros. The commentator sketched out on

87 Rachel Frazin, “McCarthy Says Tweet about Soros, Steyer and Bloomberg ‘Had Nothing to Do’ with Their Religion,” *The Hill*, February 13, 2019, <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/429896-mccarthy-says-tweet-about-prominent-jewish-donors-had-nothing-to-do-about>.

88 Matt Gaetz (@RepMattGaetz), “BREAKING: Footage in Honduras giving cash 2 women & children 2 join the caravan & storm the US border @ election time. Soros? US-backed NGOs? Time to investigate the source!,” Twitter, October 17, 2018, 8:36 p.m., <https://twitter.com/RepMattGaetz/status/1052629557826736129>.

89 Rush Limbaugh, “Why Do Democrats Think the Caravan Will Help Them,” *RushLimbaugh.com*, October 28, 2018, <https://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2018/10/18/why-do-democrats-think-the-caravan-will-help-them/>.

90 Sang Hea Kil, *Covering the Border War: How the News Media Creates Crime, Race, Nation, and the USA-Mexico Divide* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books), 160.

91 Langer, “The Eternal George Soros.”

92 Timothy Johnson, “Alex Jones Presses On with Roger Stone’s Smear Campaign against Fiona Hill,” *Media Matters for America*, November 26, 2019, <https://www.mediamatters.org/alex-jones/alex-jones-presses-roger-stones-smear-campaign-against-fiona-hill>.

both sides of a series of blackboards how Soros controlled the American political scene and called the philanthropist “a puppet master who holds the strings of the world in his hands.” The ADL’s Jonathan Greenblatt commented that “Glenn Beck promotes blatant antisemitic conspiracies. Depicting Jewish billionaire George Soros as a puppet master is antisemitism, plain and simple.”⁹³ Apparently, this was not so plain and simple for Beck. He claimed that his use of the “puppet master” trope was not based on Soros’ ethnicity, only his actions. In 2019, Beck released a clip to exonerate himself from the charges of antisemitism and present his evidence against Soros and his influence in the world today. In the clip, he included images depicting Steve Bannon and *The Godfather’s* Vito Corleone as puppet masters. He said that if their depiction as puppet masters is not antisemitic, the same should be true for Soros, even though neither Bannon nor the fictional character Corleone is Jewish. To avoid further complaints, Beck depicted Soros in the clip as the Godfather.⁹⁴

Beck’s attempt to differentiate did not seem to resonate with his fanbase. Among the almost 400 comments under this 2019 clip, the users made several explicitly antisemitic comments.⁹⁵ YouTube user rented tux wrote: “Lying jews. It’s been the same way throughout the ages.” User Ragnar Lothbrok commented that “at the end of the day something is up because since 250AD jews have been kicked out of 109 countries or territories. Don’t believe me? Look at this. What’s interesting is they only represent less than 2% of the population of the world. Somethings going on. Soros is just the tip of the iceberg.” User Paul Ferreira observed that of all these “spooky dudes” Beck “always” likes to talk about, “9 times out of 10 they seem to be jews . . . Why is that I’m just asking . . . Not trying to take over the word not trying to control every country they are in. The Nazi party came into power because of that very reason.” Another user named MyKL made the suggestion to “[c]all George Soros the Antichrist.” User Forrest Franks wrote that “Judaism is anti Christian, and Communist in nature. Anti Semitism is not real. It is a Communist Smear Tactic.” Looking at the comment section on YouTube under Beck’s video is a great way to illustrate how dog-whistle politics

⁹³ Jonathan Greenblatt (@JGreenblattADL), “Once again, Glenn Beck promotes blatant #antiSemitic conspiracies. Depicting Jewish billionaire George Soros as a puppet master is #antiSemitism, plain and simple,” Twitter, November 22, 2019, 6:36 p.m., <https://twitter.com/JGreenblattADL/status/1197931833209622529>.

⁹⁴ Glenn Beck, “Anti-Semitism is Real, but Investigating George Soros is not an Attack on his Ethnicity,” YouTube video, 16:22, December 4, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fd5em7n5GAK>.

⁹⁵ The comments (including spelling errors therein) have been reproduced as seen on YouTube on 29 April 2020.

works. Although Beck emphasizes that he is not attacking Soros because of his Jewishness, his criticism of the financier as a phantom string-puller appealed to the imaginations of antisemites online.

Despite Beck's rejection of the critique, he also made other comments that can be labeled as antisemitic. Beck falsely claimed that Soros, as a boy, helped to "send the Jews to the death camps" and repeated the unsubstantiated conspiracy theory that Soros caused the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which raised fears of a worldwide economic meltdown due to financial contagion. During a discussion on his radio show about Soros and a group of progressive rabbis who had spoken out against Beck's demonization of Soros, the radio host said that Reform rabbis are "generally political in nature. It's almost like radicalized Islam in a way . . . radicalized Islam is less about religion than it is about politics . . . When you look at the Reform Judaism, it is more about politics."⁹⁶

Those like Beck who are accused of reproducing antisemitic tropes often defend themselves with their support for the State of Israel.⁹⁷ In Beck's above-mentioned clip, he defended himself against the allegations by emphasizing his solidarity with Israel. Deborah Lipstadt noted that "[b]eing simultaneously antisemitic and pro-Israel seems to be possible." Lipstadt referred to white supremacist Richard Spencer, who depicted Israel as an example of the "ethno-state" he wanted to create in the United States, where non-whites, including Jews, would be ghettoized away from white people.⁹⁸ Steve Bannon stated that "I'm proud to stand with the state of Israel. That's why I'm proud to be a Christian Zionist. That is why I'm proud to be a partner of one of the greatest nations on earth and the foundation of the Judeo-Christian West." In the same speech, Bannon called Trump "the strongest supporter of Israel, since Ronald Reagan."⁹⁹ Sebastian Gorka, a Hungarian-American military analyst and former advisor to Trump, expressed his support for the antisemitic paramilitary group Hungarian Guard and is a member of another historic Hungarian far-right group that was aligned with the Nazis during the Second World War. Yet he denied accusations of his antisemitism by claiming that "America is the greatest nation created by man, and

⁹⁶ ADL, "Beck's Comments about Reform Judaism Demonstrate 'Bigoted Ignorance,'" *ADL*, February 23, 2011, <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-glenn-becks-comments-about-reform-judaism-demonstrate-bigoted-ignorance>.

⁹⁷ Langer, "The Eternal George Soros," 176–77.

⁹⁸ Lipstadt, *Antisemitism*, 212–213.

⁹⁹ Amanda House, "'I'm Proud To Be a Christian Zionist': Steve Bannon Gets Standing O From Leading Jewish Organization," *Breitbart*, November 13, 2017, <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2017/11/13/im-proud-to-be-a-christian-zionist-steve-bannon-gets-standing-o-from-leading-jewish-organization/>.

Israel is the greatest nation created by God.”¹⁰⁰ There are many other examples of ‘alliances’ between far-right antisemites and right-wing Israelis. For instance, in the European Parliament, members of the AfD, UKIP, and other nationalist and populist parties established the pro-settlement lobby group “Friends of Judea and Samaria in the European Parliament.”¹⁰¹

Dog-Whistle Politics Can Kill

In October 2018, a far-right terrorist killed eleven Jews in the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The congregation was a proud member of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) network, a Jewish alliance helping refugees since the late 1880s. The perpetrator, a 46-years-old white nationalist American man, entered the synagogue and opened fire on congregants while shouting, “all Jews must die.” Just minutes before he entered, he declared in a post on the far-right social media site *Gab* that “HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in.” An examination of the posts and reposts on the *Gab* account attributed to the terrorist suggest that he was a vehement antisemite. He believed in the common white supremacist conspiracy theory that Jews are engineering mass migration to Europe and the United States to destroy the white race.¹⁰² The Pittsburgh synagogue terrorist also posted that George Soros was controlling the masses and was behind the wave of Central American migration mentioned above.¹⁰³ The attack on the Tree of Life synagogue was the deadliest antisemitic attack ever in the US.¹⁰⁴

The Pittsburgh terrorist attack did not occur in a political vacuum. Antisemitic conspiracy theories in the United States today are prevalent, and they are getting wilder day by day. A recent ADL report found a nearly 60 percent increase in antisemitic incidents from 2016 to 2017 nationally. There is generally a

100 Elliot Resnick, “‘Israel is the Greatest Nation Created by G-d’: An Interview with Sebastian Gorka,” *JewishPress.com*, October 17, 2019, <https://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/interviews-and-profiles/israel-is-the-greatest-nation-created-by-g-d-an-interview-with-sebastian-gorka/2019/10/17/>.

101 Armin Langer, “Falsche Freunde,” *Die Zeit*, July 27, 2017.

102 ADL, “How Conspiracy Theories Can Kill.”

103 Tara Isabella Burton, “The Centuries-Old History of Jewish ‘Puppet Master’ Conspiracy Theories,” *Vox*, November 2, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/2/15946556/antisemitism-en-lightenment-george-soros-conspiracy-theory-globalist>.

104 Uscinski, *Conspiracy Theories*, 3.

sense that antisemites feel emboldened. The most notable example of this is the white supremacist march in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017, where attendees chanted that “Jews will not replace us.” Trump failed to condemn the rally’s participants, which empowered antisemites to express their views openly and put their ideas out into the mainstream. This affected the general Soros conspiracy theories that there are going through a second renaissance in the present-day United States.

As Stephen Whitfield has emphasized, the fact that Soros “has provoked antisemitism does not mean, of course, that his career or his causes should be shielded from legitimate criticism.”¹⁰⁵ But antisemitic conspiracy theories are not “legitimate criticism.” They fall into the category of hate speech. American journalist Spencer Ackerman warned that there had been a George Soros for every era of antisemitic panic.

[T]he attack on Soros follows classic anti-Semitic templates, grimly recurrent throughout western history, and some of the most powerful geopolitical figures in the world are pushing it. It’s fueled by Soros’s political activism against a revanchist right eager to view the world in zero-sum racial terms that is on the march across Europe, America and beyond. Other Jewish bogeymen may haunt the fever dreams of the vicious, but the scale and intensity of the attacks on Soros are unrivalled. They reveal what the global nationalist right believes is at stake in this present moment. We may one day look back on this era as the Soros Age of anti-Semitism.¹⁰⁶

What the Rothschilds were for antisemites of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Soros is for the antisemite of the early twenty-first century. In recent years, the alt-right movement’s online echo chambers have reverberated with conspiracy theories about Soros. They accuse him of attempting to perpetuate “white genocide” and of pushing his malevolent agenda. In a 2018 report that analyzed antisemitic speech on Twitter, the ADL found that Soros figured prominently in many antisemitic tweets. One noteworthy allegation claimed that Soros was responsible for the deadly “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville. Other tweets referred to his Jewish heritage in pejorative terms and claimed that he is trying to undermine ‘Western’ civilization.¹⁰⁷

105 Whitfield, “The Persistence of the Protocols,” 417.

106 Spencer Ackerman, “There’s Been a George Soros for Every Era of Anti-Semitic Panic,” *The Daily Beast*, October 28, 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/theres-been-a-george-soros-for-every-era-of-antisemitic-panic>.

107 ADL, “The Anti-Semitism Lurking Behind George Soros Conspiracy Theories,” *ADL*, October 11, 2018, <https://www.adl.org/blog/the-anti-semitism-lurking-behind-george-soros-conspiracy-theories>.

Conspiracy theories have an extraordinary power to motivate people to action. Under particular circumstances, such theories can motivate people to violence, especially if the conspiracy theories single out specific people or organizations as the villain(s).¹⁰⁸ Even the most far-fetched conspiracy theories can trigger a violent reaction by fanatical true believers. In 1996, for example, several UFO conspiracy theorists on Long Island tried to kill local Republican Party officials through a radiation poison plot because they were convinced the government had covered the existence of UFOs.¹⁰⁹

Hate speech – and its normalization – can very easily lead to hate crimes and violence against minorities, their allies, or people who are perceived as members of these groups.¹¹⁰ In July 2010, Byron Williams plotted to attack the San Francisco-based Tides Foundation, a public charity working to advance progressive policy in areas such as the environment, health care, labor issues, and minority rights. California Highway Patrol officers stopped Williams for erratic driving while he was on an Oakland freeway on the way to the Tides Foundation, and Williams engaged the officers in a shootout before surrendering to the authorities. Williams believed that Soros used Tides “for all kinds of nefarious activities.” He was influenced by anti-Soros conspiracy theories promoted by the likes of Alex Jones and Glenn Beck. As the NGO Media Matters for America pointed out, Williams touted Beck’s show, where Beck frequently weaved Soros and Tides into his conspiracy theories. He mentioned the foundation twice during the week before Williams took action. Beck spoke about Soros nine times on his program in June 2010 alone. In vilifying Soros, Beck claimed that Tides acts as a vehicle for Soros’ ruinous plans to enact an extremist left-wing agenda.¹¹¹

In October 2018, devoted Trump supporter Cesar Sayoc sent a pipe bomb to the home of George Soros in upstate New York. Sayoc was also responsible for pipe bombs sent to former presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, and the *CNN* bureau in New York. Luckily, the bombs were all intercepted and/or failed to explode.¹¹² As *Washington Post* contributor Talia Lavin wrote, “it’s no surprise that Soros would wind up as a target. He’s become the subject of escalating rhetoric on the right –

108 Langer, “Deep State, Child Sacrifices,” 28–29.

109 ADL, “How Conspiracy Theories Can Kill.”

110 Langer, “Deep State, Child Sacrifices,” 28–30.

111 Media Matters for America, “Like Byron Williams, Beck Frequently Obsessed about Tides and Soros,” *Media Matters for America*, October 8, 2010, <https://www.mediamatters.org/glenn-beck/byron-williams-beck-frequently-obsessed-about-tides-and-soros>.

112 Langer, “The Eternal George Soros,” 178.

including from President Trump – that posits Soros as a nefarious force, fomenting social dissent.”¹¹³ The prevalence of conspiracy theories about Soros, which paint him as larger than life, shrinks the public space where antisemitism is not acceptable. The role of mass and social media in spreading these antisemitic canards and radicalizing far-right adherents and terrorists is still insufficiently researched.

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Section 3: Identity Questions in the 21st Century

Steinar Aas

9 Nationalism, Populism, and Norwegian Historiography

Before the Norwegian History Days in 2008, the historian Knut Kjeldstadli from the University of Oslo was challenged by his colleagues in the Norwegian Historian Association,¹ who asked him to hold the lecture “How do we celebrate the nation state in a globalized world?”

The reason for this challenge had different motivations. Firstly, many intellectuals and academics had recently criticized the concepts of the nation and nationalism due to an unhealthy form of nationalism that could trigger conflicts and hate throughout the world. Many of these conflicts had been legitimized by historians. Secondly, the time was right for historians to strengthen the emphasis on global topics in connection with the development of globalism in general. Beneath the surface, there was an implicit judgment directed toward historians for concerning themselves with internal affairs within national borders instead of focusing on international relations between nation states or their cultural, economic, and political interconnectedness.²

The perspective of Kjeldstadli highlights another aspect about which Norwegian historians seem to be ambivalent, namely populism. This article will show how populism and nationalism have previously been linked. This link has materialized largely because of the methodological nationalism used among Norwegian historians, where the emphasis has been placed on ideals from the Norwegian Constitution of 1814, itself based on the US Declaration of Independence. Among the main principles, one of the most important is the paragraph stating that “all men are created equal.”³ In the new Norwegian Constitution, the “people” of Norway are given a heightened position in society. One can rightly speak about a new, more modern perspective on the bearer of the nation, with its connection to the first seeds of democracy, based on the relationship between the people and the nation. This article will try to illustrate the role of historians in the creation of the narrative concerning this relationship. It will also discuss how an ideological alliance between Norwegian

1 Knut Kjeldstadli, *Fortida er ikke det den engang var. En innføring i historiefaget* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1992), 57–76.

2 Hallvard Tjelmeland, Miriam Jensen Tveit and Steinar Aas, “Korleis feire ein nasjonalstat i ei globalisert verd?” *Rapport frå Norske historiedagar 2008*, Tromsø 19–22 June 2008, 5–6.

3 US National Archives, *The Bill of Rights*, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights>.

historians, the principles of the Norwegian Constitution, and the content of the ideals of Norwegian nationalism has been established. The connection between the constitution and the people and its relationship to populism is not always apparent. However, this article will examine Norwegian historiography and its implicit connection with democratic values and concepts of democracy, as well as the narrative of Norwegian historians.

The Poetics of Norwegian Historiography

The poetics of history has recently been a focal point for historians. In 2013, Jan Heiret, Teemu Ryymin, and Svein Atle Skålevåg published the first written historiography that focuses on how Norwegian historians have created narratives in history. They wanted to analyze how different texts regarding different topics within Norwegian history were composed. Their aim was to see how historians used stories and narratives to create meaning in historical texts.⁴

Heiret, Ryymin, and Skålevåg had, like Kjeldstadli, a profound interest in the different narratives in connection to Norwegian national history. Their motivation was to search for the discourse where the nation was a foundation for the greater national narratives among Norwegian historians in 19th- and 20th-century history writing. Every nation has a “history culture” that has formed its “master narrative.”⁵ Heiret, Ryymin, and Skålevåg found justification for this perspective from Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz in *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*,⁶ where the four authors covering the historiography of the Nordic countries – Peter Aronsson, Narve Fulsås, Pertti Haapala, and Bernard Eric Jensen – found a strong presence of a “national master narrative” in all Scandinavian countries.

The narrative of Norwegian 20th-century history is heavily based on the concept of what the socialist historian Berge Furre⁷ has characterized as “social democratic order” – the period between 1950 and 1980, where ideas of a welfare state, full employment, and a planned society were considered of common benefit for society. The central part of the narrative about a distinctive “social

⁴ Jan Heiret, Teemu Ryymin and Svein Atle Skålevåg, *Fortalt fortid: Norsk historieskrivning etter 1970* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2013), 8.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz, *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁷ Berge Furre, *Norsk historie 1905–1940* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1971).

democrat order” cementing the social, political, and cultural structure of Norway was the labor movement. The period coincided with a political situation where the Labor Party was the hegemonic political force in Norway, with support from 35% to 50% of the votes.⁸

This social democrat order took over from the previous period dominated by liberal democrat sentiments and ideas in the same kind of political, economic, and social development that existed in many other European countries in the 19th century. Central concepts were established within each field of this national development. Norwegian history narratives from the same period created a long-standing “national-liberal democrat interpretation” that was based on the interpretations of Ernst Sars, a member of Venstre (the “Left” Party, now the Liberal Party).⁹

For Sars, one of the idols in the contemporary political landscape was the “freeholder farmer” of medieval Norway, the farmer with an inherited right to his family land – “*Odelsrett*” (allodial rights). It was in the “freeholder farmer” that the 19th-century historian or politician should have sought the deep roots of the Norwegian political and cultural identity.¹⁰

The “freeholder farmer” with allodial rights had been the guarantor for the historical continuity of the nation, even during the Norwegian union under Denmark that lasted until 1814. The dissolution of this union and the establishment of a liberal Norwegian constitution in 1814 became a messianic resurrection of the allodial “freeholder farmer” of the medieval period. During the subsequent Swedish-Norwegian union, the role of the modern free farmer was to dissolve the union and bring Norway forward to national independence, which was consequently obtained in 1905.¹¹

However, old-school liberal historians such as Sars encountered serious methodological problems when dealing with the growth of the labor movement at the end of the 19th century. It did not fit into the common concept of the description of the development of the liberal bourgeoisie democracy because, during the mid-19th century, crofters, craftsmen, workers, townsmen, and women were all excluded from the national political community, which Sars and his fellow partisans held in high regard.¹² Suffrage was still limited to certain groups and based on property qualifications. However, social conflicts were increasing, as were social challenges, due to modernization processes that followed the escalating processes of industrialization and urbanization and the

⁸ *Ibid.*, 215, 217.

⁹ Kjeldstadli, *Fortida er ikke det den engang var*, 60.

¹⁰ Heiret, Ryymin and Skålevåg, *Fortalt fortid*, 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Jan Eivind Myhre, *Norsk historie 1814–1905* (Oslo: Samlaget, 2012), 243–245.

economic gap between the haves and the have-nots. The old social order, with adscription, tenant farming, and a small degree of social, economic, and demographic mobility, was challenged. The national unity was under threat, and the nostalgic story of the “freeholder farmers” did not appear to be true. Therefore, the history of the development of the nation seems to have needed new explanations, and new generations of historians were prepared to provide new narratives that accommodated the new situation.

Two of the most prominent pioneers were Edvard Bull Sr. (1881–1932) and Halvdan Koht (1873–1965). Kjeldstadli stresses that both intended to be “Marxist and built on an understanding of the historical materialism” in which “the economy, material conditions, and class struggle” were cornerstones in their syntheses and theories. Both Bull and Koht were labeled “Marxist historians.”¹³

So, by the interwar period, other historiographers had started to criticize the dominating liberal-democratic nationalism that was present during the 19th and the early part of the 20th century, and Norwegian historical culture “received strong competition from Marxist and historical materialism.” The new generation of “maverick Marxists” blended nationalism with class issues.¹⁴

Koht, in particular, went through a personal metamorphosis, both as a human and a historian. He was raised within a liberal democrat political ambience but later moved from the Norwegian “Left” Party (founded in 1884) to the Labor Party (founded in 1887). Koht’s personal political shift toward Marxism influenced his perspectives on and analysis of Norwegian society and its societal development.¹⁵ He aimed to create a union between the traditional “national approach” to historical development and a “class perspective.” He was sympathetic both to the old liberal democrat historians and to new ideas based on Marxist ideology.

Methodological Nationalism and the Age of the Nation State’s Formation

So, let us return to the historians’ challenge to Kjeldstadli in 2008. How did the senior historian answer it? Why was the nation as a concept and the national approach to history still important in a globalized world? The evaluation from

¹³ Kjeldstadli, *Fortida er ikke det den engang var*, 61–62.

¹⁴ William Hubbard, Jan Eivind Myhre, Trond Nordby, and Solvi Sogner, eds., *Making a Historical Culture: Historiography in Norway* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), 7–8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the international committee had implicitly concluded with a criticism of Norwegian historians. They were, to a great extent, marked by “methodological nationalism”¹⁶ and had been too eager to study the nation as an object and a frame in their historical research.¹⁷

Kjeldstadli was concerned with what “Norwegian” encapsulates, and his starting point was the question, “What do people consider as Norwegian?” To find answers to this question, he turned to a survey that had been undertaken in the Nordic countries several years earlier. Swedes, Danes, and Norwegians were asked for their view on what they considered the most specific national distinguishing mark for their country. The answers from the survey surprised Kjeldstadli, and they showed significant differences between the Nordic countries. Even though one-quarter of the respondents in all countries gave the same answer, Norwegians responded differently to the participants from other nations by stating that the most distinctive mark of the nation was its Parliament (Stortinget). As many as 38% of the respondents stated this.¹⁸ For Kjeldstadli, this indicated that Norwegians held “political democracy” as an example of the most distinctive sign of “Norwegianness.”

During the creation of the nation state in the late 19th century, the Constitution and Parliament played a significant role in understanding the independence of Norway. This is one reason why Norway celebrates its national day on 17 May, which is the date the constitution was signed by the first national assembly at Eidsvold in 1814.

There is no doubt that there has been a certain focus on this 1814 constitution among Norwegian historians. A prominent figure in Norwegian history, Arne Bergsgård, was one historian with this specific interest. After his death in 1954, he left behind a manuscript covering Norwegian history from 1814 to 1940. This manuscript, refined and published by his editors in 1958, was then designed to be a textbook used by Norwegian universities in the 1960s. The 1964 version of this book is the starting point in this chapter. The historian Anders Kirkhusmo (1932–) has characterized the textbook used by Norwegian post-war students as being marked by “17 May rhetoric.”¹⁹ According to Kirkhusmo, Bergsgård was influenced by nationalistic trends. These had been particularly strong before and after the Norwegian political and cultural struggle

¹⁶ Knut Kjeldstadli, *Sammensatte samfunn: Innvandring og inkludering* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2008), 59.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁹ Anders Kirkhusmo, “Arne Bergsgård,” *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, https://nbl.snl.no/Arne_Bergsgård.

for independence from Sweden in 1905. These were formative years in the life of Bergsgård, and he was supposed to have been strengthened in his sympathy for Norwegian independence and freedom, hence his understanding of the constitution as a tool in this struggle. He became a part of the language movement promoting the New Norwegian language – Nynorsk – as well as Venstre – a liberal-democratic nationalist party – who promoted a certain “Norwegianness” in political issues like education and popular culture. The rural population, especially the freedom-seeking liberal democrat farmers and their culture, was, for him, a cornerstone of the new nation state. The rise of the new Norwegian nationalist movement during the 19th century was one part of this narrative of national self-governance, and the other part was the strong national connection with the rise and development of Norwegian democracy.²⁰

This dual perspective from Bergsgård, where nationalism was related to fundamental democratic values, also implied a new view on representative government and the role of “the people.” The ideas from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s French philosophy of enlightenment played a central part in Bergsgård’s narrative about the national assembly in 1814. The enlightened elites gathering at Eidsvold in this hour of destiny were inspired by ideas from the Age of Enlightenment, such as the philosophy of Rousseau and Montesquieu. The principles behind the ideas of the sovereignty of the people as well as the principle of the division of power were known both from the US Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the French Constitution of 1791.²¹ The idea of a parliament with legislative power combined with an independent institution that included judicial and executive power stood firm among the nationalistic elites.²²

Modern ideas about fundamental values also stood firm; every human was born free and equal to God, and the aim of the societal organization was to protect the concepts of happiness and freedom for all. The state was meant as a tool for the people, not the other way around. This aspect was important in the history of Norway and laid the foundation for its further democratization and the inclusion of new marginalized groups in the later nation state. Hence, when the right to vote, at first, was connected to the ownership of property, this exclusivity was challenged by people who participated in society but did not own any property. Gradually, the universal idea of “equality to God” had to be expanded to cover the working class, women, and others without suffrage, not to mention ethnic minorities and indigenous people.²³

²⁰ Myhre, *Norsk historie*, 55–59.

²¹ Arne Bergsgård, *Norsk historie 1814–1880* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1964), 25.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

In Bergsgård's opinion, the Norwegian Constitution did not embody national uniqueness. On the contrary, it was clearly inspired by other constitutions, such as the American Constitution of 1787. Its kinship with the French and Polish constitutions of 1791, the Batavian Constitution of 1798, the Swedish Constitution of 1809, and the Spanish Constitution of 1812 was also obvious to Bergsgård.²⁴ All of these constitutions were used as background material and inspired the gathered men to form a constitution in Eidsvold during the spring of 1814 when the future of Danish rule over Norway was at stake. However, it was the French Constitution of 1791 that was the most prominent, and it laid the foundations for the Norwegian Constitution.²⁵ The most important difference in the Norwegian draft compared to the other constitutions was the strong demarcation between judicial and executive power. The Norwegian perspective on this matter was partly based on its experience with absolutism under Danish rule before 1814, and it now wanted to protect the people against such tendencies from the Swedish Crown under the new rule.²⁶

Bergsgård set an example for future historians regarding the composition of textbooks for undergraduate university studies in Norwegian history. He established a tradition with regard to university curriculums in Norwegian history, in which the role of political history was to be put at the forefront for years to come. With an emphasis on the constitution of 1814, the narrative of the 19th-century struggle for independence was based on a one-dimensional dichotomic conflict between Norway and Sweden as nations but with two antagonistic institutions – the Norwegian people were represented by their Parliament, and Sweden was represented by its king. In this dichotomy, the Norwegians' interests were to be taken care of by their Parliament, and the Parliament was to oppose Swedish oppression, represented by the Swedish Crown. To underline the French inspiration for the Norwegian Constitution, Bergsgård explained that it was a conscious decision by the Norwegians to choose, in the creation of the new Norwegian flag in 1821, the colors red, white, and blue – the same colors as in the French flag.²⁷ This foreign influence, along with the origins of and inspiration for Norwegian nationalism, has never been silenced, especially not in Bergsgård's version of Norwegian history. The ideas surrounding the French Revolution were a vital factor in Norway's struggle for independence. Even though Bergsgård established a narrative about a dichotomy between the Norwegians and the Swedes during the Norwegian struggle for independence, democracy, and self-governance, he was

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 91–92.

not blind to the internal tensions within the Norwegian nation, tensions that particularly emerged after the establishment of industry in the last two decades of the 19th century. There was indeed a growing class struggle; however, in the midst of this struggle, Bergsgård was not the most eager historian to examine it.

The editors of Bergsgård's textbook later replaced it with a new book written by three other historians from a new generation, born by the time Bergsgård had finished his manuscript on Norwegian history when he was at the height of his career. In the first half of the 1970s, this new generation of historians took over the series established by Bergsgård's publisher; by the mid-1980s, they had extended it and divided it into three volumes. The first volume covered 1814–1870 and was written by Tore Pryser (1945–). The second volume covered the decisive years of Norwegian history between 1870 and 1905 and was written by Jostein Nerbøvik (1938–2004). The third volume was written by Berge Furre (1937–2016) and covered the first years of Norway as an independent nation state between 1905 and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1940. Later, the series was supplemented by Magne Skodvin's (1915–2004) textbook about Norway during the Second World War.²⁸ As time went by, there were periods in modern history that had not been covered in previous textbooks, like the Second World War and the post-war period. These time spans were to be dealt with by other historians later, in line with the expansion of the post-war period.

Furre supplemented Bergsgård's work when his book was first published in 1972. While Bergsgård intended to cover the history of Norway between 17 May 1814 and June 1905, he lacked knowledge about particular 20th-century themes. Thus, Furre tried to present a new textbook that would replace the book by Bergsgård that covered the first phase of the 20th century. His ambition was to fulfill the program of Bull and Koht by, for instance, meticulously integrating the working class into the textbook. With this, undergraduate history students at the universities of Norway were introduced to the new classes of modern Norway. The liberal left historian Bergsgård and the socialist historian Furre thereby became, in a way, symbols for the national narratives of a class compromise presented to the universities' undergraduate students.

Gradually, and in line with the development of social history, the emphasis on Norwegian history changed focus during the 1970s and 1980s. Furre vitalized social and economic history by concluding that the connection between economic and social history and political development was a "central topic" in his new textbook. This materialist approach was not just any topic, Furre added. It was

²⁸ Magne Skodvin, *Krig og okkupasjon 1939–1945* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1990).

probably the central one.²⁹ When Norway became industrialized, industry became the prominent sector of the Norwegian economy, consequently making the working class the most dominant and numerous class of society. Because the establishment of new industries happened under the auspices of a capitalist sector, there arose antagonism between capitalists and paid workers. “Class struggle becomes a central theme,” Furre claimed.³⁰ The change in historical perspective was pronounced. Furthermore, the main political conflict in Norwegian society was the demarcation between the Labor Party and the non-socialist parties, and the political agenda was heavily influenced by this change.

This dichotomization of the ruling and the lower classes established the leitmotif in Furre’s textbook; consequently, it became a transient perspective. The materialistic approach in Norwegian history is unusual compared to other national history traditions. Gita Deneckere and Thomas Welskopp³¹ underline the point that the concept of “class” was a “potential threat to harmonizing tales” of the main topic, namely the “nation.” In their search for a master narrative, when it comes to dealing with “class” and the “nation” in European historiography, they find that there is a tendency to ignore class in national histories in Europe. National master narratives could ignore class, but class narratives are not able to ignore the nation.³² In the national narratives of Norwegian university textbooks, there seems to be a willingness to accept class as a useful concept in national history. Aronsson and colleagues³³ found that the pioneers of this change were Koht and Bull. The latter was inspired by the French historian Marc Bloch and the Austrian historian Alfons Dopsch. Consequently, he wanted to study “society” rather than the nation, while Koht aimed to integrate nation and class.³⁴

The social-historical turn of the 1970s had in fact already been started by Koht and Bull during the 1920s, but it excited the Norwegian historians and created a trend among the “Marxist-inspired generation” influenced by the French

29 Furre, *Norsk historie*, 9.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Gita Deneckere and Thomas Welskopp, “The ‘Nation’ and ‘Class’: European National Master-Narratives and Their Social ‘Order’,” in *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, eds. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 135.

32 *Ibid.*, 169.

33 Peter Aronsson, Narve Fulsås, Pertti Haapala and Bernard Eric Jensen, “Nordic National Histories,” in *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, eds. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 270.

34 *Ibid.*

Annales school of the 1970s.³⁵ This does not mean that they dealt with narrow political history, however. Instead, they saw historical development as part of a wider development, initiating cultural and social change as well. The American sociologist Robert Merton introduced the concept of “standing on the shoulders of giants” when describing the development of social science.³⁶ In Norwegian historiography, this tendency seems evident when the early 20th-century development of professional historians is studied. Before the 1950s, there was only one university in Norway – the University of Oslo – and most of its students were educated by Koht and Bull during the 1920s and 1930s. These students had a tendency either to choose the materialist approach or to oppose the Marxist-oriented Koht and Bull. However, in one way or another, they had to respond to the materialist theory and to Bull and Koht.³⁷

New Revisions of Bergsgård’s Textbook

As part of the revision of Bergsgård’s text and because of the need for an improved textbook, Bergsgård’s book for university students was replaced. Three historians, Tore Pryser, Berge Furre, and Jarle Nerbøvik, dealt with the period in Norwegian history that Bergsgård had previously covered. Pryser wrote about the period between 1814 and 1870,³⁸ while Nerbøvik covered the period between 1870 and 1905.³⁹ By 2000, Furre’s first textbook, covering the period between 1905 to 1940, had been transformed into a volume covering the whole period of Norwegian history from 1914 to 2000.⁴⁰

There was implicit criticism in this process. There were to be revisions, and there were a few reasons for this. Firstly, the main topic was the industrialization process of Norway – its growth and its fall. Both the industrialization in the first

35 Francis Sejersted, “Approaches to Modern Norwegian History,” in *Making a Historical Culture: Historiography in Norway*, eds. William Hubbard, Jan Eivind Myhre, Trond Nordby, and Solvi Sogner (Oslo: Scandinavian History Press, 1995), 166.

36 Robert K. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants: The Post-Italianate Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

37 Jan Thomas Kobberrød, *Sverre Steen: Sosialdemokratiets historieforteller* (Trondheim: Univ. Inst. for Historie og Klassiske Fag, 2004), 42–45.

38 Tore Pryser, *Norsk historie 1800–1870: Frå standssamfunn mot klassesamfunn* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1985).

39 Jarle Nerbøvik, *Norsk historie 1870–1905* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1973).

40 Berge Furre, *Norsk historie 800–2000*, vol. 6: *1914–2000: Industrisamfunnet – frå vokster-visse til framtidstvil* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1999).

half of the 20th century as well as the de-industrialization and structural rationalization of the industrial sector from the 1970s on were covered in the same textbook. The more specific periodization was formed by the most important characteristic cornerstones of the period, but for Furre, political history still had precedence.⁴¹ The main narrative in the analysis of the post-war period was formed by Furre's view on the "social democrat order" as a dominant descriptive concept when it came to the post-war period up to the 1970s. This epoch was distinguished by the conception of the welfare state, full employment, and the common consent of a planned society based on social democratic ideas. Furre⁴² explains how this "order" was established in the late 1930s; he also discusses its characteristics and why it developed into a state of crisis and dissolution. By 1981, the Labor Party had lost its hegemonic role as the ruling party, but just as seriously, the social democrat ideology had been challenged by new ideas promoting deregulation, privatization, and marked liberalism. Furre could now fully analyze both the social democrat order's rise and its fall, marked by the Conservative Party's formation of a minority government in 1981. By 2000, new political trends could be observed in Norway. These not only changed the political landscape of the country but also transformed its society on a broader scale.

The Connection Between Populism and Nationalism

At first sight, there seems to be no apparent connection between nationalism and populism in the study of the historiography of Norwegian history. However, there is. Firstly, there has been, as we saw in Bergsgård's book, an implicit idea about the people's influence in society as a universal good. The people were an important contributor to the development of democracy, which is also considered as a universal societal good. There are also inter-relations between the overall perspective of "the people" in the views of the development of Norwegian democracy and the use of "the people" in the concept of populism, as well as with the way Norwegian historians used "the people" as a concept to describe the foundation of the Norwegian nation state. Thus, there is, in fact, a connection between the three – democracy, people and populism, and populism and history

41 Ibid., 13.

42 Ibid.

writing – because the Constitution holds equal rights highly and because this idea is vital in the education of historians. The ideas in the Constitution, such as the idea of equal rights and the idea of “the people” as the fundamental basis of the nation through Parliament, show how important it is for historians to have some kind of positive approach toward the people as such. Thus, this populism is, in a way, a vital issue, not only in Norwegian politics but also as an underlying value in the education of history at universities. History has thereby been a resource mobilized for emancipatory purposes, as will be illustrated below.

When the Norwegian Parliament represents “Norwegians,” it represents the people. This is the implicit understanding of historians writing 19th-century Norwegian history. The core element of “populism” has always been “the people,” given its etymological root in Latin (*populus*). For one central interpreter of populism, the sociologist Rogers Brubaker, the acting parts of populist movements always act on behalf of “the people.”⁴³ This aspect is the central, defining point in populism. Using this definition, one can imagine the problems with drawing a boundary between democracy and populism. The vital demarcation line seems to be that populism tends to have an ambition of speaking and acting on behalf of the people as opposed to the elites.⁴⁴ In the Norwegian historiography or the national master narrative, the people were the Norwegians, while the elites were represented by the Swedish king or were loyal to him.

In the debates about populism, some writers like Cas Mudde have distinguished the elites from the masses by using two opposing characteristics, such as “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elites.”⁴⁵ For Mudde, the aim was to define populism as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”⁴⁶ The Swedish king and his supporters may indeed represent a “corrupt elite” if seen from the perspective of Norwegian historiography or the national master narrative.

Brubaker criticizes Mudde’s definition for being too thin and for not taking into consideration the vertical as well as the horizontal opposition between the people and the elites. In Brubaker’s view, there is both a horizontal antagonism emanating from the “masses” toward the Other as well as outside forces and a vertical antagonism emanating from the “people” toward the economic, political,

⁴³ Rogers Brubaker, “Populism and Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2020): <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12522>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 543.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 562.

and cultural elites in a hierarchical system.⁴⁷ When studying the historiography of the Norwegian independence movement of the 19th century, one can rightly claim that the vertical antagonism from the Norwegian Parliament, which represents the people of Norway, toward the Swedes, who are represented by their king, could be interpreted as a form of populism, as well as a nationalist independence movement. This would indeed depend on the perspective of the analysis. Seen from a Swedish perspective, one could claim that the Norwegian elites are populist, while from the perspective of the Norwegian elites, their efforts could be seen as nationalist as well as democratically oriented. However, if we follow Brubaker's definition of a horizontal antagonism, one can rightly claim that the Norwegian elites were populists in their use of "the people" in relation to the Swedish king when struggling for independence. They acted on behalf of the people, claiming to be acting on behalf of the nation's parliament. Nevertheless, the parliament was not a people's parliament. By the time of the introduction of parliamentarism in Norway in 1884, less than 10% of the population were eligible to vote in parliamentary elections; therefore, it is clearly an exaggeration to claim that Parliament represented the Norwegian people.⁴⁸

In Norwegian historiography, this fact does not seem to be voiced that obvious. Bergsgård, like most Norwegian historians, seems to hold an innate perception that the Parliament acted on behalf of the people in a just struggle for independence and freedom. However, this perspective implies a harmonious perspective of 19th-century Norwegian society. It was neither egalitarian nor democratic. The national elites did indeed act on behalf of the interests of the national elites, based on nationalistic sentiments, as it was a law of nature. They acted on behalf of both the people in opposing the foreign Swedish regime as well as the *embetsmannsstat* – the governing officials. At first, the dominant group of Members of Parliament promoting Norwegian interests was the *embetsmannsstat*. By the second half of the 19th century, it was a small elite of freeholding farmers, Bergsgård's favorites. Later, the representation of the people expanded, and new parts of the lower classes were included in the state formation process, such as the labor movement within trade unions and the Labor Party. They were considered to be builders of a solid foundation for a broad democracy, exemplified by the perspectives of the working classes that were included in the nation state.

⁴⁷ Brubaker, "Populism and Nationalism."

⁴⁸ Statistisk Sentralbyrå, "Stemmeberettigede ere de norske Borgere," *Statistisk Sentralbyrå*, December 2, 2010, https://www.ssb.no/valg/artikler-og-publikasjoner/_attachment/295978?_ts=15a651488e8.

This perspective of the formation of Norway underlines the point that the nation state has been integrational and successful because different groups have been included in the power structure of Norwegian society – first by the hegemonic role of the farmers, then by the subsequent integration of the working classes. The fact that nationalism contributed to bringing the nation together despite social, cultural, and economic differences seems to be the main perspective.

Nationalism and Assimilation of the Indigenous Population

Going back to Bergsgård's first textbook, which emphasized the creation of the Norwegian nation state, it is important to understand how it dealt with "otherness" (i.e., social or ethnic groups that were not represented by the new social movements). One example of a group who were othered is the ethnic minority of the Samis, whose history in Norwegian territory is equally long as that of the Norwegian population. How did they fit into the narrative of a successfully egalitarian and democratic nation state-building process in 19th- and 20th-century Norway?

There is no doubt that the Sami population was oppressed during the rise of the modern Norwegian nation state. However, the assimilation of the indigenous Sami people was rarely mentioned in Bergsgård's textbook covering the period between 1814 and 1940, when the first volume was published. Even though Norway had been through a heavy assimilation process in relation to ethnic minorities and Samis during Bergsgård's lifespan, he did not address the topic in his description and analyses of the making of the Norwegian nation state at all. This is a paradox, because he must have observed that the nation was experiencing its most extensive period of assimilation initiated by the people through parliamentary decisions. Later, historians such as Henry Minde called this time span and its assimilation process "Norwegianization."⁴⁹ Nevertheless, for Bergsgård, the Norwegianization process with regard to the Samis was not a topic, and there are several reasons for this. The main one is that Bergsgård was a Norwegian historian in the age of "nation state building," and his aim as a historian was to describe and analyze the rise and demarcation of

⁴⁹ See Henry Minde, ed. *Indigenous Peoples: Self-Determination, Knowledge, Indigeneity* (Delft: Eburon, 2008).

the nation state in this period in Norwegian history. Traditionally, people who were of Norwegian descent, including other groups or even indigenous people in Norway, had always been considered to be “Norwegian.”⁵⁰

Minde described the assimilation process of the indigenous Sami population by dividing it into clear periods with significant characteristics. The period from 1850–1870 was a “transitional phase” where the pressure on the Sami population was marked by an emerging Norwegianization. The intention of the Norwegian authorities was to make the ethnic minority linguistically and culturally similar to the majority population on the basis of an idea of cultural and racial Norwegianity. From 1870 to 1905, that process of Norwegianization was in its “consolidation phase,” and it became cemented. From 1905 to 1950, this Norwegianization went through a “culmination phase,” reaching its peak just before it ended. Bergsgård was no longer alive by the last phase of Norwegianization, namely the time between 1950 and 1980, which was the phase Minde characterized as its “termination phase,” ending the Norwegianization of the Sami population. The period after 1980 was characterized by a newly gained political, social, and cultural mobilization around Sami issues, and this was the start of a “revitalization” of Sami identity.⁵¹

In Norwegian history, there is a tendency to describe the period of nation state building by measuring the success of the integration of the lower classes. This is the success narrative of the Nordic countries when it comes to the integration of the masses into society. The masses became the new elites. The success of building the nation state was part of the “reconciliation” between different social groups, creating a “confidence-based society.” The Norwegian historian Finn Olstad⁵² recently wrote a textbook called *Den Store Forsoningen* (The Great Reconciliation), the perspective of which is based on the fact that today’s confidence-based society was formed by the events that took place during the period between 1905 and 1945.

However, the Norwegian nation state-building process with regard to nationalism has not been favorable for ethnic minorities and indigenous people, such as the Samis. The idea of a nation state built on the principle of all men being born equal was a mostly romanticized one. This seems clearer when one studies the assimilation process in relation to ethnic minorities and indigenous people. The mistake seems to be that the Norwegian elite seems to misinterpret

50 Arne Bergsgård, *Frå 17.mai til 9.april, Norsk historie 1814–1940* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1958).

51 Minde, Henry. “Assimilation of the Sami: Implementation and Consequences,” *Acta Borealia* 20, no. 2 (2003): 121–146.

52 Finn Olstad, *Den store forsoningen. Norsk historie 1905–1945* (Oslo: Dreyer, 2019), 8.

the idea that all men were born equal because they were not all born as Norwegians. The result was a cultural standardization process of Norwegianization.

When Berge Furre was about to write the new textbook to replace Bergsgård's book, he was aware of the shortcomings in the old book in its lack of information about the harsh Norwegianization process. As a newly employed professor in history at the country's northernmost university, the University of Tromsø, he questioned the lack of focus on the Samis in Norwegian history. However, in 1971, research on Sami history was still unknown among Norwegian historians. Consequently, he had to make up for the lack of Sami perspectives students were offered in his textbook. He complained that "there is almost nothing to build on," adding that "Norwegian historians" had probably been part of the official policy and "pushed aside" the themes regarding Sami history to the background.⁵³ Therefore, the only material he could build on was collected by the sociologist Per Otnes (1941–) in his book *Den samiske nasjon* (The Sami Nation).⁵⁴ Furre complained about this fact and urged other historians to make up for this defect in Norwegian historiography. As a consequence, Furre's book did not mention Norwegianization or the Sami population, nor did it focus on the Sami language or their social history or economy. How, then, did he move forward from this point to the revised version of the textbook that was published in 2000?

By 2000, the growth in research on Sami history, culture, and society had exploded. As Minde points out, the reason for this was the revitalization process that took off at the beginning of the 1980s. Furre had finally achieved his goal from the 1970s and could therefore begin to widen the perspective on Sami history substantially. He had many secondary sources to build on, and, in the textbook, "assimilation" and "Norwegianization" became familiar terms that illustrated Norwegian policy toward the Samis. Furre's book had seventeen entries in the index that were directly connected to Sami history.⁵⁵ The historian had no intention of letting the Norwegian nation state get away with the question of "Norwegianization." Later, due to the change in the Norwegian curriculum in relation to the Bologna Process, two new historians took over from Furre, covering 19th- and 20th-century Norwegian history in the textbook for Norwegian university students. The two professors who took over were Jan Eivind Myhre (University of Oslo) and Ola Svein Stugu (NTNU, Trondheim). Due to the changing curriculum, they decided to cover two periods with two different textbooks. Myhre took the period of 1814 to 1905 and the

53 Furre, *Norsk historie*, 10.

54 Per Otnes, *Den samiske nasjon* (Oslo: Pax, 1970).

55 Furre, *Norsk historie 800–2000*, 82, 399.

dissolution with Sweden, and Stugu covered the period from the dissolution up until today.

Myhre, who was to cover the “Norwegianization” process, emphasized the period as part of the different concepts of nationalism. The question about the entity of nationalism is, according to Myhre, a vital theme.⁵⁶ One chapter in his textbook is devoted to a reflection on how to become Norwegian and how to be a Norwegian, with a thorough discussion of the different competing nation-building projects, as well as the negative results of the Norwegianization process on ethnic groups, such as the Romani, the travelers, and the Samis. While Myhre describes the downsides of the nation state formation in relation to ethnic and religious groups, Stugu’s volume emphasizes the victorious struggle of the Samis during the 1970s and the subsequent period, in line with the periodization described earlier by Minde.⁵⁷ The nation-state narrative of Norway seems to have been changing since the first university textbooks started to address Sami history in the 1970s. In the latest decade, Norway’s multi-ethnic status was addressed in these history textbooks as well. The development of the narrative and the subjects studied by Norwegian historians, including by Furre in the 1970s and by Kjeldstadli, Myhre, and Stugu later, was part of the historiographical development of social history and the “cultural turn” after the 1970s. With this turn, historians tried to focus on “local history, women’s history, historical demography, and the history of ethnic minorities.”⁵⁸ The histories of marginalized groups like ethnic minorities and indigenous people like the Samis all found their way into the limelight.

Conclusion

Why has this study examined the formation of the Norwegian nation state and how Norwegian historians have treated the problem of how their narratives are directed at undergraduate students in Norwegian universities?

Firstly, the examples discussed illustrate how historians have been a part of the state formation process and tried to deal with conflicting themes, such as the attempts of marginalized groups to be given access to participate politically, socially, and culturally on equal terms with the traditionally hegemonic groups. Norwegian historians such as Furre, Kjeldstadli, Stugu, and Myhre have all taken

⁵⁶ Myhre, *Norsk historie*, 231–236.

⁵⁷ Ola Svein Stugu, *Norsk historie etter 1905* (Oslo: Samlaget, 2012), 278–281.

⁵⁸ Hubbard, Myhre, Nordby, and Sogner, *Making a Historical Culture*, 9.

the approach of Koht and Bull from the inter-war period further, aiming to broaden the perspectives of national history.

Secondly, by creating a populist approach to the narrative about the creation of the modern nation state, a more harmonic approach is found. This Hegelian perspective that examines the way to deal with tensions in society seems to have been adapted and used by Norwegian historians in order to illustrate how new knowledge about out-groups, minorities, or indigenous groups has been included in the narratives about the nation state. Olstad's perspective on the "great reconciliation" is a good example of this, where the nation state is a "confidence-based society" that has been founded on the historical path the nation has gone down during the period from 1814 until now. Like Hegel, who saw tension and antagonism in society as vital contributions to its development, Olstad and Norwegian historians seem to have been fascinated by the way the nation state has endeavored to include and integrate new groups in the state's formation.

However, the example given of the indigenous peoples, the Samis, illustrates the blindness that also existed among Norwegian historians. It shows that they were mostly concerned with class perspectives or social aspects of political participation, framing these as the most vital variables in the state-formation process. However, there seems to have been an openness toward other aspects involved in the development of democracy. One reason for this openness toward marginal groups in Norwegian society can probably be found in the ideas of the Constitution. If one states in the legislation that all men are created equal, it binds the nation to an obligation. This aspect of the people as a vital entity in the nation was highlighted both by Bergsgård and by Kjeldstadli, and the connection between the Constitution and the people has been central to the Norwegian collective consciousness. Thus, the Constitution has, as Kjeldstadli explained,⁵⁹ been a guiding star for both historians and politicians, as well as Norwegians, that is, "the people."

Bergsgård's emphasis on the constitution as a cornerstone for the development of Norwegian society was vital. It was stressed that, within the nation, "every man is born equal," and, based on this premise, its development was predestined to automatically be more democratic and egalitarian. The idea of "equality" forms the foundation of the nation and the idea of enlargement when it comes to the concept of the people constituting the nation.

Historians have been part of the constitution of the nation state, as has been illustrated in the example of Bergsgård, and by calling attention to the

⁵⁹ Kjeldstadli, *Sammensatte samfunn*.

principles of equality, historians have emphasized the importance of a principally egalitarian nation state. Thus, Bergsgård made his mark by stating that the principles were worth fighting for, again, laying the foundations for marginal groups or masses in the enlargement of the nation or for their inclusion in the nation state and their struggle to be integrated within the nation, as was seen in the example of the inclusion, not assimilation, of the indigenous Sami population.

This populist approach has been part of the quest for a broader nation with the people as a cornerstone of the nation state. A narrow version of nationalism has been detrimental to the nation and is not supported by the principles of the constitution. The constitutional history narrative has been central in the writing of history based on common democratic ideas delivered from the constitution based on equality. The nation is the people.

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Murat Iplikci

10 For the Sake of His Country: Henry Luce's Nationalist-Populist Crusade to Forge "The American Century"

Fighting in World War II (WWII) and finding itself in a two-polar post-war period changed American political, economic, and cultural dynamics severely. After only twenty-four years of "never again" shouts, the United States (U.S.) had found itself fighting in the old world once more after its decisive victory in World War I (WWI). This time, it set a rigid presence in world politics that none of the later administrations could ever retreat from. However, the American presence in global affairs dates back to long before the war. Merchants had sought business ventures and missionaries had reached unknown shores for God and Glory in the previous century.¹ In the late 19th century and early 20th century, state objectives never crossed paths with imperialism through hard power but supported American businesses' free access to the world's markets. The world was at war in 1914, and the Americans were "too proud to fight"² even when filled with anger and sorrow after an ocean liner, *Lusitania*, carrying over a hundred American civilians, was sunk by a German submarine. In the end, a secret diplomatic message from Germany to Mexico pledging American territories was revealed in January 1917, and this deceitful plan threatening U.S. territorial integrity convinced the Wilson administration to send U.S. troops to Europe to fight against Germany in 1918. Winning the war and being greeted with cheers in the old world gave President Woodrow Wilson, who was an ardent supporter of liberal democratic internationalism, a.k.a. Wilsonianism, a chance to promote American virtues to the world.³ However, his idealistic approach involving expanding democracy, free trade, and human rights was crushed by cunning Europeans and the isolationists in Congress. After being dragged into WWII after the Pearl Harbor bombing in 1941, the U.S. had to withdraw from its commitment to strict isolationism and reiterated the application of its foreign policy in an "American way."

1 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 100.

2 President Wilson came up with the phrase in a speech given on 10 May 1915 in the Philadelphia Convention Hall, only a couple of days after *Lusitania* had been torpedoed by a German U-boat.

3 Stanley Hoffman, "The Crisis of Liberal Internationalism," *Foreign Policy* 98 (1995): 159.

Unlike the isolationist orthodoxy of the 1920s and 1930s, many Americans rejected the idea that American virtues should be preserved only at home. These virtues always been considered a unique part of the American culture since the country's foundation. Some attributed it to democracy, while others related it to freedom and the expansion of Puritanism. Americanism became a revised version of "Manifest Destiny." In addition to spreading them inside the continent, U.S. administrations started to launch cautious political and economic internationalism in the early 20th century, especially during Theodore Roosevelt's, William Howard Taft's, and Woodrow Wilson's presidencies.⁴ Forgetting the core message in George Washington's "Farewell Address" of 1796, which evidently ruled out entangling with old-world politics and forming military alliances with Europeans, many voices underlined that the U.S. should stand up for its rights and the moral obligation to use its military and economic power, which would lead higher ideals of freedom and democracy around the world.⁵ The excitement of the expansionism of the early 20th century was replaced by the trauma of WWI. Reflections at home on the destruction caused the Americans to retreat from old-world entanglements for two decades. However, they were utterly excited about making a glorious return when they were called upon once more in the early 1940s. The internationalists, who had always believed in America's significant role, woke up to celebrate their coming of age. Furthermore, as long as their fierce campaigns and nationalistic articles showed up in public, they began to lead their society in the name of this blessed mission. Among them, there is one media patron whose dedication is worth examining.

Henry Luce was the co-founder of *Time* magazine, the founder of *Fortune* and *Life*, and an ardent supporter of promoting Americanism throughout his life. Publishing articles on a variety of topics, including politics, economics, and fashion, Luce constructed himself an editorial fortress.⁶ What started with *Time* in the 1920s, which quickly gained popularity and success, became Luce's media empire. Then, two other magazines were launched in the 1930s: *Fortune*,

⁴ For more information on this issue, see Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900–1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). Her narrative examines the expansion of Americanism, especially through business in the early 20th century, in detail.

⁵ Alan Brinkley, *The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 10.

⁶ Stephen J. Whitfield, "The American Century of Henry R. Luce," in *Americanism*, eds. Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 96.

a monthly journal intended to raise internationalist sentiments among the business community, and *Life*, a weekly image-based magazine that sought to bring the world to its readers through vivid photographs. The 1930s was not the best decade for the U.S., which faltered economically due to the Great Depression, which started in 1929. However, that decade was also labeled as a period of economic, social, and institutional recovery. The spread of consumer goods such as radios and refrigerators, brightly-lit settlements thanks to the broader use of electricity, the building of the great dams, skyscrapers, and bridges, the spread of both domestic and international commercial initiatives, and the growing popularity of Hollywood movies and national radio broadcasts helped Americans to reconstruct a sense of connectedness around the American virtues.⁷ These developments, as well as Luce's articles, were the main sources of the arousing and strengthening of the American spirit in the 1930s.⁸

Luce was a true patriot, even a passionate American nationalist, for his entire life. His magazines pumped out nationalistic articles, which had the common feature of supporting how and why the "American way" should best be shared around the world.⁹ These articles generally aimed to exhilarate proud Americans in the 1930s, being suited to the decade's nationalistic and populist dynamics. Therefore, when Luce released his groundbreaking article "The American Century" in 1941, he unleashed the populist-nationalist mindset he had constructed over the years. In this article, he briefly called on Americans, who had grown over the years, to step up and lead the world. Indeed, after WWII, the U.S. adapted to that role.¹⁰

This article will discuss the reasons and Luce's own motivations for constructing a nationalistic-populist approach. Growing up as a son of missionary parents in China who admired Theodore Roosevelt and his "Open Door Policy," Luce shaped his characteristic tendencies toward the American virtues' internationalism. In parallel with such feelings, Luce caught onto the idea of promoting Americanism to the world after it secured a significant victory in WWI. Watching the U.S. withdrawal from world affairs caused his spirit to despair, but it matured with the rise of the popularity of nationalism in the 1930s. This time as a media patron who looked ahead to expanding his business ventures overseas, he launched campaigns to Americanize the world with the tools he

7 For further information about the revival of Americanism in the 1930s, see James R. McGovern, *And a Time for Hope: Americans in the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001).

8 William Andrew Swanberg, *Luce and His Empire* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 5–12.

9 John K. Jessup, *The Ideas of Henry Luce* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 142–143.

10 Henry R. Luce, "The American Century," *Life*, February 17, 1941, 65.

owned. His nationalistic rhetoric peaked in the 1940s. As a man of ambitions, he did not hesitate to knock on any door or utilize any populist approach to fulfill them.

Luce's nationalism grew in his childhood, a growth that was reasonably related to the conditions and place where he was born. Being a son of American missionary parents in China, Luce had been raised as a good Christian and had total faith in the superiority of American values.¹¹ According to Alan Brinkley, Luce mostly absorbed his father's unshakable faith in American and Western culture's superiority. Therefore, he adopted the sense of sharing this culture with others, which should be an assignment for each dutiful American.¹² His father's ideals were also in parallel with the state politics under the Theodore Roosevelt administration. During the extended isolationist policy of the 19th century, many American merchants, ex-confederate soldiers, and missionaries spread all around the world for individualistic adventures. However, Roosevelt saw an opportunity to build an empire beyond the nation's North American borders by supporting Americans abroad with state institutions.¹³ Having become the Luce's family hero, Roosevelt launched an "Open Door Policy" to promote diplomatic initiatives to increase American economic activities overseas, specifically in China. According to this policy, while merchants would seek opportunities to carry their business abroad, missionaries would introduce American culture and Puritanism to the locals.¹⁴ Growing up with such ideals and policies in his boyhood, Luce turned into a fierce internationalist in his later years with proud nationalistic feelings.

The young Luce traveled to different parts of the world throughout his boyhood. He sailed to England in 1912, where he was amazed by the venerable British Empire, traveled across Europe, and saw the important capitals of great states and empires. He also dived into the deep hinterlands of Asia and saw its people living in poverty. All this allowed him to notice that the old empires of the past had completed their turns. They no longer promised anything to the world. While they crumbled one by one after WWI, Luce thought America needed to pave the way with a young empire to guide others.¹⁵ When the Great War broke out in Europe, he did not believe that the U.S. would intervene.

¹¹ Brinkley, *The Publisher*, 28.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Raymond A. Esthus, "The Changing Concept of the Open Door, 1899–1910," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 46, no. 3 (1959): 436–437.

¹⁴ Robert E. Herzstein, *Henry R. Luce, Time, and the American Crusade in Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1.

¹⁵ Swanberg, *Luce and His Empire*, 20–24.

Contrary to many American youngsters who had taken a deep sigh of relief after not going to war, Luce was disappointed about the U.S. missing a chance to intervene in world politics. In addition, the Great Powers, he stated, would never allow Americans to settle things in the old world but would instead pursue their own conflicts.¹⁶ His disappointment was replaced with excitement when the U.S. declared war on Germany in April 1917.

When the U.S. joined the war, Luce was attending Yale University. He and his friend Briton Hadden, who would later be Luce's partner as a co-founder of *Time*, launched a campaign among the students to support the war chest. Luce and Hadden convinced many students to buy war bonds and several others to join the armed forces. "Keep Yale together" became their motto, and Luce said, "This is how I serve my country here" while defining his mission.¹⁷ By the autumn of 1917, one-third of the students at Yale had left to be drafted for WWI. Luce and Hadden were proud to see their campaign's success, which turned the Yale campus into a military academy. Luce had proved that he was an influential pro-war supporter who was also good at converting others to his cause.¹⁸

In the post-war period, the failure of Wilsonian dreams devastated Luce once more. Despite being victors in the war, President Wilson's ideals to promote American democracy, once applauded by the Europeans, foundered after the peace negotiations. His virtuous project, the League of Nations, was first rejected by the isolationist Congress members of the U.S. and then fell apart with the subjugation of the Chinese territory of Manchuria by Japan in 1931. Seeing his country in retreat and his second home of China being invaded by Japan, Luce fell into despair after witnessing all his wars being lost.¹⁹ Additionally, hit by the Great Depression of 1929, America became more introverted throughout the 1930s. Luce believed that the Americans had missed the boat by rejecting an excellent opportunity to assume the leadership of the world in 1919.²⁰

After toppling Wilson's idealism and proposals for reconstruction following the war for a decade, nationalism became a helpful tool in the hands of discontented European states in the 1930s once again. Each reflection of this ideology varied in different states and according to different experiences; however, whether it appeared as a sub-branch of populism or fascism, neither denied the

¹⁶ John Kobler, *Luce: His Time, Life, and Fortune* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 36–37.

¹⁷ Brinkley, *The Publisher*, 58.

¹⁸ Isaiah Wilner, *The Man Time Forgot: A Tale of Genius, Betrayal, and the Creation of Time Magazine* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 41–43.

¹⁹ Whitfield, "The American Century of Henry R. Luce," 98.

²⁰ Luce, "The American Century," 64.

growth of nationalism.²¹ According to Luce's "The American Century," each approach aimed to achieve a form of internationalism to share its superior national values, culture, politics, and economic exploitation outside its borders. In such expansionist nationalism, the states' interests obligated an eventual clash, which was one reason for the outbreak of WWII. Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler made their way in politics through their nationalistic rhetoric about a better economy, national prestige, and an expansion of national interests.²² In the end, the Allies clashed with German and Italian nationalism to protect theirs, and Luce eventually considered the spread of the Axis influence in the world as a major threat to American values.²³

The extension of American influence had long been on his mind, not only to enable others to enjoy freedom and prosperity but also to Americanize them. These values of freedom and economic prosperity were identified with the U.S. and with what it represented, and they needed to have a favorable environment in which to grow. In searching for a suitable environment, that ideology would be challenged by another rival with the same motivations. If the 20th century had not been an American century, indeed, that century would have belonged to someone else. Therefore, in the age of nationalism, American institutional values would clash with others, or the capitalist economy would meet the same fate in its struggle against communism in the next decade as Wilsonian idealism had. Being aware of capitalism's requirement to expand, many internationalists from different occupations, such as the media patron Luce, the political advisor of the State Department Stanley Hornbeck, the Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, and Wall Street's influential investment banker James Forrestal, were on the same page in supporting U.S. institutions, especially from an economic perspective, which could not be abandoned.²⁴

Luce also saw an opportunity to sell American goods and invest capital in the world by promoting Americanization.²⁵ In the 1930s, American merchants and multinationals had already penetrated various world markets for more economic profit. As an internationally read magazine owner, Luce was one of them. The Americans obtained great deals to exploit host states' resources. In exchange, through lucrative agreements, the host states were able to improve

21 Alan Cassels, "Mussolini and German Nationalism, 1922–25," *The Journal of Modern History* 35, no. 2 (1963): 156.

22 Ibid.

23 Luce, "The American Century," 62.

24 Herzstein, *Henry R. Luce*, 180–181.

25 Whitfield, "The American Century of Henry R. Luce," 97.

their state revenues thanks to their partnership with efficient American industries and their technology. Furthermore, American construction companies, as well as the Bureau of Public Roads, signed contracts with developing countries to build better infrastructure, transportation networks, railroads, dams, and power plants in these regions.²⁶

The promotion of American business to different parts of the world obligated the spread of U.S. influence and the abandonment of economic isolationism. Selling American products allowed American engineering, science, medicine, movie studios, airlines, roads, and education to reach the people who would need them eventually. Internationalism with cross-cultural works was becoming a significant part of American policies, and the free-circulation mindset of the individuals concerned would soon have their share of that Americanization.²⁷ *Fortune* published many articles explaining the prerogatives of business. The free market was defined as an opportunity from which anyone could benefit. Phrases like “reward of a talent,” “guaranteed livelihood,” and “a nation’s devotion to liberty” were often repeated.²⁸

Economic liberalism with the support of private investments, as Luce understood it, had had roots in the American economy since the mid-19th century. Since then, individual merchants and overseas corporations have created a hospitable environment for their workers and national welfare. These industries had accordingly provided employees with rare benefits such as pension contributions, paid vacations, and high wages.²⁹ They were valuable to enhance national prestige. For the state, this meant a way to increase state revenues due to the taxes and foreign business income. As business was promoted with liberalism and internationalism until the 1930s, abandoning such an economic policy by cutting state support would cause more trouble. After all, foreign investment was not the only part of Luce’s mindset related to economic nationalism. It was also vital for the continuation of America’s economic stability. The Great Depression destructively affected liberal economies as well as the capitalist approach in the 1930s, which also paved the way for governmental/national institutions (industries, banks) to take over national economies and development plans in many states.³⁰ The recession of the capitalist economies in the

²⁶ Jessup, *The Ideas of Henry Luce*, 200.

²⁷ Luce, “The American Century,” 65.

²⁸ Whitfield, “The American Century of Henry R. Luce,” 93.

²⁹ Alfred D. Chandler, *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of American Industrial Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962), 46–72.

³⁰ Arthur Feiler, “Economic Nationalism,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 180 (1935): 206.

1930s hit the U.S. economy hard as well. The newly elected President, Franklin D. Roosevelt (hereafter FDR), decided to launch a restoration at home with the state's help, which became a reason why Luce became an opponent of Roosevelt from an early stage.

FDR and Luce's rivalry was unusual, given that one was not even the other's political opponent. Luce's internationalist Republicanism had been inherited from his parents, and the distant cousin of the new President, Theodore Roosevelt, was their family's hero thanks to his political interest in Americanization in China.³¹ In contrast to his cousin, FDR's political focus was on domestic and relief programs for American society, which had suffered since the Great Depression of 1929, and Luce criticized this economic and political introversion.³² Luce believed in a capitalist economy but never underestimated the state's role in promoting American business. He had met with American investors in China in his childhood and had witnessed how functional the dollar diplomacy practiced under both Roosevelt's and Taft's administrations had been. After becoming a businessman himself in the 1930s, Luce would eventually become best known for his passionate views on active political interventions, mainly focused on the role of the government in the economy.³³ Due to its introverted structure, he did not approve of FDR's New Deal. He evaluated it as a dismissive political approach toward business. By not prioritizing American business promotion overseas, the New Deal and its institutions aimed to create conservative and rigid business corporations to stabilize the domestic economy first. Luce viewed this idea from a collectivist perspective in that this new business type conflicted with private enterprises, which had been a vital part of American economic thought up to that point.³⁴

In addition to his dislike of the New Deal's economic policies, Luce had similar feelings toward the President, the authorizer of this policy, as well. FDR, Luce believed, enjoyed conducting arbitrary attacks on rival institutions, most notably in the business sector.³⁵ Throughout the 1930s, *Fortune* released many articles criticizing FDR for being an authoritarian leader; a couple of them even labeled him as a dictator. These harsh criticisms were directly related to FDR's indifferent, or hostile to some extent, attitude toward business elites like Luce.

31 James L. Baughman, *Henry R. Luce and the Rise of the American News Media* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 106.

32 Swanberg, *Luce and His Empire*, 106.

33 Eric F. Goldman, *The Crucial Decade and After: America, 1945–1960* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 116.

34 Luce, "The American Century," 62.

35 Jessup, *The Ideas of Henry Luce*, 219.

Furthermore, Luce and his business elite circle launched several campaigns and organizations that called on FDR to restore the confidence that private capitalism requires.³⁶ Many groups in society shared their commitment to the idea of the U.S. being the business leader of the world. They were not entirely hostile to either the government or FDR himself. Instead, they only held that introversive economic policies were difficult to sustain and that a healthy national economy could only be established by business circles working with the government and vice versa.³⁷

Luce's nationalism also projected a vision of the U.S. as the world's economic leader through active dollar diplomacy. Operating huge trade lines and promoting American free enterprises should be the ultimate goal for this century. In fact, such economic promotion was highly related to Luce's position as a businessman, whose initiatives were not only *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune* but also the ownership of other business ventures abroad. In 1938, U.S. firms covered 28.7% of the world's manufacturing output.³⁸ The war and the destruction afterward also strengthened the belief in the U.S.'s leading role in economic recovery, on which the Marshall Plan was accurately predicated.

In addition to the use of the power of attraction, Luce also believed that foreign aid, which he ardently supported in his magazines, had played a key role, especially for France and Britain, in winning the war.³⁹ Without American help, which considered as a substantial victory of internationalism over isolationism, Britain would have never survived. In those terms, in the post-war era, there were calls for the U.S. governmental institutions to step up. Western Europe was desperate for the U.S. to pull the strings on economic and political scenarios. Similar to states torn apart by WWII, developing countries would need American aid as well. Every dollar to be spent abroad would make a huge difference, both in terms of humanitarianism, in parallel with the Good Samaritan aspect, and the spread of Americanism.⁴⁰

What made Luce a populist on an economic scale was not his ambition to expand Americanism through diplomatic channels to the world but his business ventures and turnover in the international markets. Luce's magazines attracted considerable criticism in the 1930s in terms of articles' contents and the controversial figures who were selected to be presented. For example, an elegantly

³⁶ Wilner, *The Man Time Forgot*, 55–59.

³⁷ Brinkley, *The Publisher*, 188.

³⁸ Baughman, *Henry R. Luce*, 131.

³⁹ Robert T. Elson, *Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Enterprise, 1923–1941* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 381–385.

⁴⁰ Luce, "The American Century," 62.

dressed Al Capone was seen smiling on the front page of *Time* in 1930.⁴¹ The profiles of cover subjects were always sensational, and their backgrounds did not matter. In the magazine's first half-century, Joseph Stalin appeared on the cover twelve times, fascist leaders like Francisco Franco and Benito Mussolini eight each, and the rising star of the 1930s, Adolf Hitler, seven.⁴² As long as magazines were sold, Luce ignored the concerned voices.

In fact, Luce's motivations to found *Fortune* can be traced to his economic perspectives. He believed that many young businesspeople would be interested in finding a way to be involved in world markets full of opportunities. President Calvin Coolidge once stated that "the chief business of the American people is business." That motto was the guidance for many Americans, including Luce, and introducing opportunities, sharing success stories, and promoting enthusiasm for the corporate world and its leaders aimed to draw attention to the significance of the international economy.⁴³ Even years later, *Fortune* described itself as a magazine with a mission. That mission was to assist in the successful development of American business enterprises at home and abroad, including Luce's own enterprises.⁴⁴ In addition to the national magazines, the first overseas editions of *Time* and *Life* were published after 1945, at which point the U.S. had declared victory against its enemies. Luce believed that it was perfect timing for the U.S. to thrust itself forward. As the patron of the world's largest communications empire, Luce could be a dedicated agent of the spread of U.S. economic order, politics, and culture. With that achievement in mind, Luce founded *Time* and *Life International* because the U.S. was the only power in the world capable of restoring some of the continuities of civilization.⁴⁵

The post-war period was perfect for looking for opportunities to promote liberal corporatism and state support in foreign direct investment, directly favoring Luce's own business ventures abroad. He found an American model for the promotion of capital and the transfer of American technology to developing markets in Westinghouse Electric International. This initiative allowed him to build new factories in China and Mexico.⁴⁶ Economically, Americans would

41 Frederick S. Voss, *Faces of Time: 75 Years of Time Magazine Cover Portraits* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1998), 12–16.

42 *Ibid.*

43 Louis Galambos, *The Public Image of Big Business in America, 1880–1940: A Quantitative Study in Social Change* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 191.

44 Brinkley, *The Publisher*, 172.

45 Donald White, "The 'American Century' in World History," *Journal of World History* 3, no. 1 (1992): 112.

46 *Ibid.*, 109.

benefit from the business activities of these multinationals. Furthermore, it would be an excellent opportunity to sell American business culture and capitalism to others by training them with American standards. Luce's Westinghouse was not only an overseas venture but also invited Chinese and Mexican engineers and workers to experience the American working environment in East Pittsburgh.⁴⁷

Luce periodically underlined that his nationalism was not about occupation or exploitation.⁴⁸ On the other hand, he never denied his intentions to relate to the "American Century" with business ideals and commercial diplomacy either. Just as Luce's business mindset showed significant growth over the years, his nationalist economic ideas showed the same progress.⁴⁹ Along with expanding his business, he started with popular magazines and continued with foreign direct investments in China and Mexico. Luce never hesitated to do his best to preserve his profits. Furthermore, his perspective to promote American business to the world was indeed a patronizing one to some extent. Luce truly aimed to share American capitalism and the American business model with other states; however, others had nothing to offer to enrich this relationship besides their resources. He divided the Orient and the Occident, gave leadership thereover to the U.S., and assigned it with furnishing the rest of the world with American political, economic, ethical, and intellectual standards.⁵⁰ What Luce defined could be labeled as a new method of Westernization in the name of modernization. Reading between the lines, Luce was underlining the U.S. was a caregiver even while other states were struggling to get this caregiver's technology and products. Indeed, he did not say anything to imply that the U.S. or the West would fashion the future of humankind, but the U.S. had to open itself to the world for a better century,⁵¹ which sounded somehow patronizing.

Having matured with proud Americanism and become an international business owner, expecting Luce to be a pacifist and isolationist was impossible. Indeed, after the U.S. returned to isolationist policies in the 1920s until it joined WWII in 1941, Luce cautiously supported expansionist propaganda with the people, tools, prestige, and wealth that he owned.⁵² Many expansionists could find columns for their inspirational articles in Luce's magazines and use his wealth to fund their propaganda activities. Pleased with having others pursue the primary

47 Jessup, *The Ideas of Henry Luce*, 243.

48 Luce, "The American Century," 63.

49 Baughman, *Henry R. Luce*, 22.

50 Jessup, *The Ideas of Henry Luce*, 207.

51 *Ibid.*

52 Brinkley, *The Publisher*, 256.

campaigns, Luce generally preferred to stay in the background and watched both Republican isolationists and the cautious FDR administration's efforts to stay out of international economic and political affairs. In the 1930s, the President was not affected by the attacks on him. Instead, he was highly popular and at the peak of his popularity. Therefore, Luce knew that he would not embody public opinion, especially if he were to challenge a popular president's neutralist foreign policy. Even when the war broke out in 1939, the polls showed that the Americans wished to see Hitler defeated but not by their direct entanglement.⁵³

Still, Luce took to the stage and intensified his level of criticism after 1939. FDR believed that he should do anything to keep the U.S. out of war; however, remaining indifferent to the storm that covered the old world would soon be off the table. While maintaining neutrality in the first two years of war, the FDR administration had already provided materials, goods, and weapons to the Allies. On the other hand, Luce believed that the U.S. should do more than send goods and arms to the Allies to win the war; eventually, it would be dragged into the war whether it was ready for a fight or not.⁵⁴ Indeed, eleven months before the U.S. joined the war, Luce released his famous article, "The American Century." If a fight was that sure, the contributors to its victory should collect the spoils of war, according to Luce.⁵⁵ Two decades previously, Wilson had been trapped in the old world's politics in the rooms of Versailles and was unable to lead and guide the world as the real victor. Similarly, with his cagey attitude, FDR might make the same mistakes at the conclusion of this war. In any case, American political isolationism had to come to an end, Luce concluded, and it should claim its moral leadership.

As the Germans' brutality wiped out the Allies, Luce's propaganda to get involved in the war appeared more and more in his magazines. What started as supporting the amount of aid sent to the Allies to shorten the war turned into breaking the strictly isolationist perspective at home. According to a public survey published in *Fortune* in 1940, 72% of Americans believed that Hitler might try to conquer the world, including attacking the U.S. lands, and 58% thought that an armed intervention might eventually be necessary to defeat him.⁵⁶ In addition to these useful polls, *Time* and *Life* continued to present impressive portraits of bombed lands and dying children in Britain to touch Americans'

⁵³ Herzstein, *Henry R. Luce*, 4.

⁵⁴ Baughman, *Henry R. Luce*, 119.

⁵⁵ Luce, "The American Century," 65.

⁵⁶ Waldo H. Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 160.

spirits.⁵⁷ Ultimately, the faithful and sensitive Americans, upon witnessing Britain's drama, might agree on pursuing a glorious and honorable foreign policy.

While Luce's magazines were working on pumping Americanism to the public, Luce himself was quite busy with gathering and promoting nationalist elites to organize a group of "wise men" around him.⁵⁸ For that purpose, Luce personally took part in the foundation of the Council for Democracy, a committee of respected journalists, academics, and radio broadcasters, including C.D. Jackson, Raymond Gram Swing, Robert Sherwood, Leonard Lyons, Ernest Angell, and Carl Joachim Friedrich, to promote strong rhetoric against isolationism. The primary goal of that committee was to spread American virtues and democracy to the entire world. The U.S., by challenging the violence in Europe, should transmit its best virtues to the old world and save them from their misery.⁵⁹ Thanks mostly to Luce's financial support and prestige, anybody who believed in such virtues could reach the masses.

Luce had never been a political leader, but his political reputation always allowed him to benefit from working with energetic figures, especially with those who shared his internationalism dream. The war conditions brought him together with the Republican presidential nominee for 1940, Wendell Willkie, and with the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who also hoped to pull the U.S. into the war alongside the Allies. Committed to a close relationship with influential figures, Luce worked with Willkie closely throughout his campaign to defeat the isolationist FDR, and they exchanged letters and took photos together. Luce even hosted dinners in honor of Churchill both during and after the war years.⁶⁰ Having different motivations for the same cause, Luce's magazines were open to these politicians to make any statement about the U.S. and the war.⁶¹ Therefore, Luce welcomed Churchill's appointment as Prime Minister in May 1940, as this was an excellent opportunity for his nationalist dreams. Churchill was aware that if the Allies were to be victorious, it would be vital to convince the U.S. to join the war soon. In fact, one of the primary foreign policy goals he set as soon as he became Prime Minister was to drag the U.S. into the war.⁶² This policy would make Churchill a close associate of Luce in the coming days.

⁵⁷ Baughman, *Henry R. Luce*, 135.

⁵⁸ Cedric Larson, "The Council for Democracy," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1942): 284.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁶⁰ Warren Moscow, *Roosevelt & Willkie* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 56–60.

⁶¹ Indeed, Luce started "The American Century" by quoting Churchill.

⁶² Andrew Bacevich, "Life at the Dawn of the American Century," in *The Short American Century*, ed. Andrew Bacevich (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2012), 1.

Churchill authorized the establishment of the British Security Coordination (BSC) in New York to gather intelligence on enemy activities in the U.S. and launch campaigns to intensify the American citizens' pro-British stance. J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI, and FDR were in favor of these covert activities as they were known for their anti-Nazi stances. However, the task was a tough one to accomplish; the polls in the U.S. in early 1940 showed that nearly 80% of Americans were against joining the war in Europe, and the members of Congress shared that non-interventionist stance.⁶³ On this mission, British intelligence officers worked closely with pro-British American journalists and publishers, including Walter Lippmann, Raymond Gram Swing, Helen Rogers Reid, and Henry Luce himself, to feed the American public anti-Nazi news. These people were highly influential and popular among the American public; their magazines, newspapers, and statements reached millions, which made them perfect content manufacturers for the British campaign.⁶⁴

In addition to contradicting public opinion and a skeptical Congress, the above-mentioned Council for Democracy and Luce had to struggle against the isolationist media as well. The *Chicago Tribune* accused the Council of being under the control of foreigners. According to George Seldes, the founder of a newsletter called *In Fact*, Luce and his colleagues in the Council were trying to drag the nation into a military adventure with Britain.⁶⁵ Seldes' arguments were not unrealistic claims because the Council indeed worked closely with British intelligence in the 1940s. The BSC's plans were drawn up in its headquarters, and its agents were instructed to put them into effect. Luce, with his wealth, popular magazines, and non-governmental organizations, agreed to support all existing pro-British interventionist intellectuals and organizations to arrange conferences, give speeches, and deliver statements.⁶⁶ First, he became one of the main funders of the Fight for Freedom group. Then, he assumed a critical role in recruiting new individuals and organizations to the campaign. His dedicated work showed real progress in early 1941: the League of Human Rights, Freedom, and Democracy, the American Labor Committee to Aid British Labor, the Ring of Freedom, the American Defenders of Freedom, and several others aligned with the Council for Democracy and supported anti-isolationist ideologies with any tools and stages that they owned.⁶⁷ All vocalized the same message: the war in Europe is

⁶³ Swanberg, *Luce and His Empire*, 170–173.

⁶⁴ Larson, "The Council for Democracy," 284.

⁶⁵ George Seldes, *Witness to a Century: Encounters with the Noted, the Notorious, and the Three SOB's* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 43.

⁶⁶ Bacevich, "Life at the Dawn of the American Century," 4.

⁶⁷ Larson, "The Council for Democracy," 285.

dangerous, and Nazism will try to take over American virtues like democracy if it obtains a decisive victory against the Allies. Every day that the U.S. stayed out of war had already endangered indifference. Eventually, either the U.S. would join the war to defeat the Nazis, or war would be declared upon it.⁶⁸ In this case, it would be either the victory of Americanization or the opposite.

Even though Luce was a useful agent for British intelligence to involve the U.S. in the war, he was not pro-British. Although they were partners in crime, the agreement between the sides terminated with the war's end. The British soon found themselves in conflict with Luce and his global internationalist vision of the American Century. The U.S. had not saved the Allies for nothing; there was a price for Luce's ultimate ideology. Luce had worked diligently and spent millions to bring the U.S. into world politics once more to lead the rest. Therefore, by early 1943, he topped the list of enemies who endangered the domination of the British Empire.⁶⁹

On the other hand, the U.S.'s military capabilities in the early 1940s were highly questionable. The army lacked tanks, machine guns, ammunition, and men at arms. The total size of the U.S. army was half a million men, including the National Guard, which was very small compared to the European states' battalions.⁷⁰ In addition, most Americans favored neutralism and were not interested in taking on global responsibilities. The U.S. was thus quite unready for a global takeover. The question, thus, is what was Luce's "The American Century" about, and how did he construct it in the 1930s?

It was never a military takeover that had been on Luce's agenda but the expansion of American virtues. Then, in the 1930s, he naturally caught up with the rise of nationalism, one of the most prevalent thoughts of the decade, starting with his personal devotion to China's national struggle against Japan. He also admired other nationalist movements in Spain, Italy, and even Germany to some extent in the 1930s. But China had always held a special place in Luce's heart. Even after moving away from it, Luce continuously followed daily articles and general readings about China. He even commissioned articles to include discussions of China's economy, politics, and culture. In the 1930s, Luce's admiration for the nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek and his policies was moved to the columns of his articles and magazines as a sympathetic leader. Then, the Japanese invasion that occurred in 1931 was condemned in

68 Luce, "The American Century," 61–62.

69 Walter LaFeber, "Illusions of an American Century," in *The Short American Century*, ed. Andrew Bacevich (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2012), 166–167.

70 William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932–1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 306–307.

Time on several occasions.⁷¹ Along with campaigning for China, Luce also paid increasing attention to foreign affairs in Europe. In particular, he watched the rise of nationalism in Italy, Spain, and Germany in the 1930s closely. Albeit not as fiercely as for the Chinese case, Luce nonetheless showed sympathy toward the new Italian regime and approved of Mussolini's "active" foreign policy for a greater Italy. As a signature behavior of his admiration, Luce did not miss several chances to present Mussolini in *Time*'s pages in the 1930s.⁷²

The 1930s was the decade of nationalism and expansionism. Luce envied the states benefiting from such ideals while remaining disappointed with FDR's introversive policies. As an ardent nationalist, Luce shared the rising trend of the 1930s. In 1933, Europe's nationalistic regimes were gaining more popularity, and *Time* and *Fortune* used many issues to report news from these governments. The entire July 1934 issue of *Fortune* was devoted to a detailed study of the political, cultural, and economic experiments of the Italian model, which dissatisfied the President and his administration, who considered these articles as versions of Nazi propaganda.⁷³

Not surprisingly, Luce was good at getting along with other nationalists and was eager either to work with them in councils or to hire them for his magazines. Having an extreme right-wing ideology and being an ardent supporter of Mussolini and his policies, Laird Goldsborough became the foreign news editor of *Time* despite Briton Hadden's protests. Goldsborough was content with his new role and new boss, who was quite sympathetic to the nationalistic ideology.⁷⁴ Being free to carry pro-fascist news and interviews in his columns, he constructed a mutually beneficial relationship with Luce: one had the freedom to praise nationalism, while the other enjoyed a rise in the popularity of his magazine. Convinced by Goldsborough, Luce did not quarrel about carrying articles related to the achievements of Franco during the war or about putting him on the cover of *Time* for the 27 March 1939 issue.⁷⁵

71 The Japanese invasion of China was condemned several times in Luce's magazines. In addition, Luce's sensational movie series "The March of Time" also released short films about the conflict on different occasions, including 1 February 1935, 13 December 1935, 24 December 1936, and 10 September 1937. Michael H. Hunt, "East Asia in Henry Luce's 'American Century,'" *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 2 (1999): 326.

72 Steven P. Meyer and Jeffrey Steinberg, "Henry Luce's Empire of Fascism," *Executive Intelligence Review*, June 25, 2004.

73 Ted Morgan, *FDR: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 562.

74 Michael Augspurger, "Henry Luce, *Fortune*, and the Attraction of Italian Fascism," *American Studies* 41, no. 1 (2000): 115–116.

75 *Ibid.* An article was also published in that issue called "War in Spain: Chief of State." *Time* XXXIII, no. 13, March 27, 1939.

Like Mussolini, Hitler was also presented by Luce's magazines several times in the 1930s. Luce was never openly a supporter of Hitler; however, he enjoyed the latter's popularity and some of his fascist policies, such as discipline, duty, and sacrifice.⁷⁶ In those years, people loved to learn more about Hitler and Germany, which is why "Inside Nazi Germany," which was released in 1938, became one of the most successful and most watched of all of *Time's* films. It was called the first anti-Nazi movie of the age, and it showed pictures and videos from Nazi Germany. This politically controversial episode of *The March of Time* had incredible success; however, many theaters and film industries hesitated to show it due to fears of parading the appeal of Hitler.⁷⁷ With this sensational movie, Luce both conveyed a powerful message to the American public about the dangers of German fascism and grew his media empire. This movie was an early wake-up call for pacifists and isolationists to move toward a more aggressive policy to mobilize the nation in opposition to the rise of fascism and to promote America's vital leadership for the world.⁷⁸

The late 1930s may have been a perfect period in which to support Americanism; in fact, many pioneering formulations, slogans, and mottos were coined to praise American virtues and the American lifestyle in an avant-garde way. The "American Dream" not only promised economic progress to the believers after the Great Depression of 1929 but also a better pluralistic society.⁷⁹ Another gust that reinforced nationalistic feelings was the popular art of the 1930s. After its release in 1938, the song "God Bless America" dominated political conventions, while "Ballad for Americans" (1939) topped the charts. Norman Rockwell's *Four Freedoms* paintings had massive success when exhibited in different cities. The most significant part of this success was its attraction of over a million visitors, who bought nearly \$133 million in war bonds.⁸⁰ In June 1939, just before the start of WWII, Walter Lippmann called for a new "American Destiny" – a rallying

76 The managing editor of *Fortune*, Eric Hodgins, stated that Luce liked the purported aims of fascism. Swanberg also claims Luce was in favor of the dynamism, militarism, and anti-communist structure of fascism. Another *Fortune* writer, Dwight MacDonald, called Luce a hero-worshipper. See Eric Hodgins, *Trolley to the Moon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), Dwight MacDonald, "Time, Fortune, Life," *The Nation*, May 1, 1937, and Swanberg, *Luce and His Empire*, 70–71.

77 Raymond Fielding, "Mirror of Discontent: The *March of Time* and Its Politically Controversial Film Issues," *Western Political Quarterly* 12 (1959): 148.

78 *Ibid.*, 201.

79 James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1931), 415.

80 Martin Bauml Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 236–237; Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 113–114.

cry for a new empire. In brief, he urged that what “Rome was to the ancient world, what Great Britain has been to the modern world, America is to be to the world of tomorrow.”⁸¹

To popularize his Americanism, Luce joined the crusade with his trendy magazines. Founded in 1936 and the source of popular articles since then, *Life* achieved a sales record of 2.1 million copies per week in the early 1940s. *Time* had similar success. In addition to their selling capacity, both magazines allowed many mutual interactions with their readers, which peaked after the release of “The American Century.” In that week, Luce received nearly 5,000 letters from his readers, most of whom were in favor of his ideas. Additionally, Luce received supporting letters from different parts of the world, including Cuba, the Philippines, England, and France.⁸² As he gained a massive reputation with this sensational article, Luce distributed copies of it free of charge to newspapers, high schools, and universities.⁸³

“The American Century” indeed created a persuasive portrait for a nation to arise and attracted the American people to a future that might be experienced. Its success in producing a powerful middle-class image, conjuring exciting opportunities for the business elites, and creating a country with a voice in world politics caught the readers’ attention. However, similar to Luce’s other targets, his audience consisted of the majority but not all. Large elements of society were missing or neglected in the pages of *Life* if they were not members of this upper-middle-class privileged society who were unable to buy the “American Dream” that Luce was selling.⁸⁴

By supporting nationalistic expansionism, Luce made many political enemies as well. In the 1930s, he waged war against isolationist Republicans inside the party, like Robert Taft, who challenged the idea of the extension of American virtues by relating it to domination. However, Taft was losing his popularity while ambitious internationalist Republicans were on a good run.⁸⁵ Still, Luce’s support for liberals and progressives inside the party with his amassed wealth

81 David Oshinsky, “Flush with Success,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1996.

82 White, “The ‘American Century,’” 116.

83 Terry A. Cooney, *Balancing Acts: American Thought and Culture in the 1930s* (New York: Twayne, 1995), 174.

84 Several issues of Luce’s magazines (for example, the March 1937, May 1937, and August 1938 issues of *Fortune* and the 24 January 1938, 23 May 1938, and 23 October 1939 issues of *Life*) included news about the glamorous lives of New Yorkers, wealthy, well-known families like the Kennedys, the best cars and most expensive dresses to buy, as well as several stories about Italy, Germany, and the Japanese invasion of China. It can be seen that Luce was distant from the nationalistic regimes of Europe after late 1938.

85 Baughman, *Henry R. Luce*, 135.

and influence due to his role as a media patron was censured by other political isolationists and leftists. Luce's business rival, *The Nation*, attacked "The American Century" for touting Anglo-Saxon imperialism. Even his rhetoric was related to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in terms of being considered as a dangerous mixture of aggression and world domination.⁸⁶ The Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas also accused Luce of harboring imperial ambitions.⁸⁷ However, Luce denied all these accusations.⁸⁸ He saw no contradiction between asserting American leadership globally and extending this popular idea to millions of fellow Americans.

Naturally, the FDR administration also distanced itself from Luce's claims. According to Vice President Henry Wallace, Luce usually danced to different tunes in different periods.⁸⁹ Indeed, Luce was a controversial figure who used to admire Mussolini's type of nationalism back in the early 1930s. He presented Hitler on numerous occasions in his magazines and changed sides when WWII broke out. Apparently, both sides were fierce rivals. Luce, a Republican, did not miss any opportunity to attack the Democrat President and his policies. When Luce released "The American Century" and called for the U.S. to join the war, he knew that he was challenging FDR's policy to keep the U.S. out of the war. Despite the efforts of Churchill, who was also ardently trying to convince FDR to join the war, and Luce, the Roosevelt administration decided to provide any aid to the Allies for victory other than direct involvement. After Pearl Harbor and after the U.S. had entered the war, Wallace released his own article called "The Price of Free World Victory," which underlined that a new world order must be drawn up instead of a single state century being created. His disdain for his Americanism irritated Luce; he did not believe that promising more freedom and welfare to the world along Wallace's lines was any different to what he had underlined.⁹⁰ However, Wallace had always distanced himself from Luce's chauvinist tone, according to Wallace's biographer John Morton Blum, and he considered "The American Century" as another chauvinist editorial.⁹¹

86 Swanberg, *Luce and His Empire*, 182.

87 *Ibid.*

88 Elson, *Time Inc.*, 463.

89 See Henry A. Wallace's speech "The Century of the Common Man" delivered on 8 May 1942 at the Commodore Hotel in New York. Obviously, Wallace neither addressed Luce nor referenced "The American Century" in his speech; however, he clearly condemned nationalism's supporters and the nationalist leaders of Europe.

90 Elson, *Time Inc.*, 463.

91 John Morton Blum, *The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace, 1942–1946* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 25.

Therefore, in parallel with the increasing popularity of nationalism among Americans, Luce believed the 1940s were destined to be theirs. The U.S. would eventually join the war, defeat the adversary, and, as the most powerful nation in the world, should accept its duty and seize its opportunity wholeheartedly.⁹² In early 1941, Luce constructed his arguments and organized his entourage for his interventionist campaign. He sincerely believed that he would write a new sensational version of *The Federalist Papers* that would touch the Americans' spirits. He intended to entitle his paper "We Americans" but decided to replace it with "The American Century" at the eleventh hour.⁹³ His article was indeed sensational, and his reputation increased sky-high. Independently of the article's publication, American isolationism ended nearly nine months after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The romanticism of the past, the rise of Americanism in the 1930s, and growing protests against the Axis powers' dictators reached a zenith with Luce's "The American Century." Having long carried nationalistic ideas, Luce advocated the necessity of military involvement in WWII throughout his speeches. On the other hand, until his famous article, he was cautious about any further confrontation with these powers, as the U.S. had to fight alongside the Allies. When the war finally approached the American shores with Japanese bombs over Pearl Harbor, Luce's call in "The American Century" was answered. He had been pushing the buttons to wake Americans up for their noble duty, and after December 1941, his campaign intensified. *Life* started to print photographs of the various American societies and their reflections on saluting their heroes. The hunger to see news from the old world and read more about America's virtuous role against Nazi brutality enhanced Luce's and his magazines' popularity. These fiery articles also allowed Luce to promote the reshaping of American internationalism for world politics.⁹⁴

In the end, Luce only represented his nature, background, and occupation, but he reflected the popular movements of his era. Growing up among nationalistic figures matured his character in the first place. Then, Luce was able to visit different parts of the world and compare his beautiful country with other crumbling nations in his youth. Caught up in the nationalist heat of the 1910s, Luce, a young college student, supported the U.S. joining WWI. Campaigning hard exhilarated his Americanism, but the introversion of the post-war period broke him. In the 1930s, two things motivated him to support a new wave of

⁹² Luce, "The American Century," 63–64.

⁹³ Daniel Bell, "Henry Luce's Half-Century," *New Leader*, December 11, 1972, 14.

⁹⁴ T. J. Jackson Lears, "Pragmatic Realism versus the American Century," in *The Short American Century*, ed. Andrew Bacevich (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2012), 99.

Americanization: his capitalist mindset and the irrepressible rise of nationalism. Luce's magazines brought him a good deal of popularity and wealth in the 1930s. Understanding the power of populism, Luce's magazines aimed to provide what the masses demanded and also included propaganda articles to support American expansionism. In addition to these magazines, Luce also tried to expand other business ventures overseas, which were obliged to receive help from the state. He believed in the state's role in promoting dollar diplomacy to expand American business. However, FDR was distant from both the business elite and expansionist policies in the 1930s, making him a nemesis for Luce. Furthermore, Luce was sympathetic toward the nationalistic governments of Europe and China in the 1930s. Therefore, he supported any idea, article, and organization that shared a similar nationalistic ideology with him at home. Whoever defended American expansionism found a place in Luce's magazines, friendship, and inner circle. Along with notable academics, broadcasters, and columnists, Luce also supported FDR's opponents like Willkie. Luce and his friends also closely worked with Churchill and British intelligence to convince Americans to fight in WWII. All these experiences and approaches of the 1930s prepared him for calling his crusade for the sake of his country in 1941 in "The American Century."

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Jonah Roberson

11 Catholicism, Polish Victimhood, and Nationalist Histories in Partitioned and Contemporary Poland

Introduction

While Polish nationalist movements did not fully develop until the partitioned years, displays of national consciousness among the Polish elite began centuries earlier, and these displays were often based around Catholicism or victimhood and competition with other nations. Catholic nationalists tie Catholicism to the very origins of the nation. In the communist era, the Church held a 9-year program of celebrations ahead of the millennial anniversary of King Mieszko I's baptism in 966,¹ and this is only the first point where Catholicism and Polish nationalism become interwoven.

Following the death in 1138 of Bolesław III, who divided Poland among his sons, the nation was politically fragmented, with different factions making offers to foreign powers for aid.² This condition would persist through the 12th and 13th centuries. It was during this time that ideas leading to the conception of Poland as “The Christ of Nations” began to take root. Poles started a story about a bishop of Cracow, Stanisław of Szczepanów, who was executed in 1079 by King Bolesław II over a political disagreement. The bishop was said to have been dismembered, but his body later grew together, just as Poland was divided but would later grow back together.³ This imagery is, of course, extremely relevant to the later discussion of the partitioned years and the hope that Poland would be reborn as an independent state, and this also began the connection between the ideas of Polish victimhood and Catholicism as a force of resistance to oppression. This Catholic victimhood, combined with romantic conceptions of the nation pushed by figures like Joachim Lelewel (1786–1861) and Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), created an idea that the Polish nation would rise again, freeing itself and

¹ Madalena Meyer Resende, *Catholicism and Nationalism: Changing Nature of Party Politics* (London/New York: Routledge, 2016), 16.

² Konstantin Symmons-Symonolewicz, *National Consciousness in Poland: Origin and Evolution* (Meadville, PA: Maplewood Press, 1983), 12–13.

³ *Ibid.*, 13.

serving as a messianic figure to free other nations from oppression.⁴ Stanisław of Szczepanów was canonized in 1253, a year that marked a significant national awakening.⁵

That year, a group of Polish princes petitioned the Pope to ban any further annexation of Polish territory by the Holy Roman Empire and to pressure other Polish princes to give up foreign aid and rebuild the Polish kingdom.⁶ This demonstrates the nobility had a clear sense of loyalty and personal connection to the concept of the Polish nation.

The Polish Church also demonstrated a national consciousness around this time and started establishing itself as a defining aspect of Polish identity. Facing an influx of German immigrants and clerics, there was concern about these clerics not learning Polish, excluding Poles from their parishes and monasteries, and refusing to observe local church tax practices. Beginning in 1248, Germans were not to be ordained in Poland or made principals in cathedral or monastic schools, and the Archbishop of Gniezno, Jakub Świnka (d. 1314), ruled that introductory prayers, announcements, and final prayers would be delivered in Polish in all Polish churches. The Polish Church also required teachers to be fluent in Polish.⁷ So, by the 13th century, there was already a strong national consciousness among the nobility and clergy as well as a strong connection to the Polish language as part of the Polish national identity. The Polish language, of course, continued to be an important aspect of the Polish national identity and a significant preserving force during the partitioned years.

As a result of the series of wars called “The Deluge” and a weak republican government, Poland entered the 18th century in an enfeebled state that would eventually lead to the Partitions. Seeing the poor condition of the Commonwealth, a push for reform began among some of the nobility. Part of the result of this reform movement was the erosion of the “Sarmatian” ideology of the Polish nation in favor of a more inclusive view of the Polish nation, uniting the classes against foreign threats. The First Partition of 1772 provided the motivation to carry through with the reforms. Only one year later, the Commission for National Education was established and focused education on math, sciences, and subjects related to citizenship like history, geography, and economics.⁸

⁴ Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28.

⁵ Symmons-Symonolewicz, *National Consciousness in Poland*, 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

As part of the reform movement, a new constitution was adopted on 3 May 1791. This constitution extended full citizenship to townspeople, and peasants were granted protections against exploitation by landowners. This recognition of the urban population as citizens represented their official acceptance as members of the Polish nation. The idea of urban and rural commoners being part of the Polish nation had been on the rise, but this demonstrated their legal acceptance. The Polish diet also produced legislation for universal military service, which recognized all commoners as members of the Polish nation. However, the reform efforts came too late to stop the fall of the Commonwealth.⁹

While nationalist movements swept through Europe in the 19th century, Poland had no state to rally a nationalist movement around. From 1795 to 1918, there was no independent Polish state, yet Poland still had a nationalist movement and the formation of a strong national identity. In fact, the absence of a Polish state had a unique influence on the development of the Polish national identity. Without an independent state, Poles rallied around the Catholic Church, the idea of Polish victimhood at the hands of other European nations, and romantic histories of Polish greatness in previous ages, and these ideas continue to serve as key elements of contemporary Polish nationalist and populist politics.

Polish Victimhood and Catholic Resistance in the Partitioned Years

Following the Partitions, one of the ideas that Poles rallied around was a Slavophilic or Pan-Slavic idea of Poland working with or merging with Russia. Perhaps Poland could not be independent, but the Polish nation could cooperate with Russia while still maintaining its own identity. After the Congress of Vienna, Tsar Alexander I (1777–1825) created a new, semi-autonomous Kingdom of Poland, also known as the Congress Kingdom, under the control of Russia, further supplying Poles with the hope that Poland and Russia could cooperate. Alexander I was friends with the Polish statesman Prince Adam J. Czartoryski (1770–1861). In 1803, Alexander I appointed Czartoryski to be Commissioner of the District of Wilno, which comprised the territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. During his time in the position from 1803 to 1823, Czartoryski developed an excellent school system that improved Poland's cultural and intellectual life and encouraged hopes of Polish and Russian cooperation. Czartoryski firmly believed in

⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

Polish and Russian cooperation, wanting to reclaim all historically Polish lands and then create a kingdom in a dynastic union with Russia. However, this involved taking Prussia's partitioned lands, and Alexander I was also friends with the Prussian royal couple. This contributed to Czartoryski falling from favor in the 1820s.¹⁰

Even before Alexander I's death in 1825, Russian policy began to become more hostile toward the Congress Kingdom, with nationalist student groups being broken up out of fear of revolutionary conspiracies, increasing restrictions, and violations of the constitution of the Congress Kingdom from 1820–1825.¹¹ In 1820, Alexander I appointed his brother Konstantin Pavlovich (1779–1831) as viceroy of the Congress Kingdom. Konstantin threw out Polish military traditions and created a spy system in the Congress Kingdom, quickly making himself a symbol of Russian oppression.¹² With the death of Alexander I in 1825 and the decline of Czartoryski's power, the Pan-Slavic sect of Polish nationalism lost its champions and much of its hope for a Pan-Slavic union.

Under the rule of Tsar Nicholas I (1796–1855), Russia's policy regarding Poland continued its escalation of hostility. In November 1830, revolutionaries in the Congress Kingdom staged an uprising in response to Nicholas I attempting to dispatch the Polish army with Russian troops to suppress revolutions in France and Belgium.¹³ These revolutionaries created a list of grievances – including disrespect of the Congress Kingdom's constitution by the Tsar and Konstantin, excessive police activity, and the use of Poles against the revolutions in France and Belgium – which Nicholas I refused to discuss, demanding their unconditional surrender instead. The revolutionaries attempted and failed to assassinate Konstantin, who fled the Congress Kingdom after the attempt. The revolutionaries set up their own government, and around 200,000 Poles fought in the Polish army against Russia. The uprising was eventually quelled in 1831, and Nicholas I responded with harsh policies that would erode the Congress Kingdom's autonomy. After this, Poles cast off the idea of being collaborators with Russia and instead began viewing themselves as victims of an illegitimate regime.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48–50.

¹¹ Joan S. Skurnowicz, *Romantic Nationalism and Liberalism: Joachim Lelewel and the Polish National Idea*, East European Monographs 83 (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1981), 41 and 52–53.

¹² *Ibid.*, 52–53.

¹³ Symmons-Symonolewicz, *National Consciousness in Poland*, 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

Following the November Uprising of 1830, tens of thousands of Poles were forced to emigrate, and many were executed. Even more were exiled to Siberia. Russia began a “de-Polonizing” campaign in the territories that constituted the eastern borderlands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and stripped many noble families of their lands before deporting them.¹⁵ In 1839, the Russian Ministry of Education took over the Warsaw District, closing the University of Warsaw and taking many libraries, museum collections, and art collections to Russia. It also began Russification efforts in Poland, encouraging Eastern Orthodoxy over Catholicism and taking other measures to attack Polish nationalism.¹⁶

With the Polish state demolished and the Kingdom of Poland losing any shred of autonomy, the Catholic Church was the only institution within all partitioned areas that could preserve Polish culture, language, and traditions, and as a result, the non-Catholic partitioners, in particular Russia, attempted to weaken the Church’s presence in Poland.¹⁷ While Russia was trying to restrain the Church, Catholic churches and religious events became places of nationalist demonstration. In turn, Russian authorities violently raided and vandalized Catholic churches, hoping to discourage further displays of resistance. Catholic priests and monks actively participated in resistance activities, provoking both punishments for the individuals such as exile as well as punishments for the local parishes and the Polish Church as a whole. Russia continued its campaign against Polish Catholicism by dissolving dioceses, requiring church proceedings to be conducted in Russian, and banning public religious activities. However, the more Russia targeted the Church, the more the Church was solidified as a key element of Polish national identity and resistance.¹⁸

A second major uprising in January 1863 provoked even more Russian attacks on Polish culture. Many town names became Russified, and estates were taken from Polish nobles and given to tsarist officials. Other confiscated noble estates were inefficiently and slowly distributed until 1890 and failed to keep up with the demand for land, which was rising rapidly as the Polish population doubled in population in the second half of the 19th century.¹⁹ Polish emigration increased considerably over the next few decades as the surplus rural

15 M. B. B. Biskupski, *The History of Poland*, The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 25–26.

16 Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795–1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), 122.

17 Bartosz Napieralski, *Political Catholicism and Euroscepticism: The Deviant Case of Poland in Comparative Perspective* (London/New York: Routledge, 2018), 60.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Wandycz, *The Lands of Partitioned Poland*, 195 and 199–200.

population looked elsewhere to find work. Russia stopped using the name “the Kingdom of Poland” and began using the name “Vistula Land.”²⁰ The judiciary and schools were Russified, but Poles did not receive some of the advantages of Russian legal reforms. Following the emancipation of the serfs in 1863, Russia thought it could gain the support of the Polish peasantry and pit them against the Polish nobility, but despite this, Russian administrators dealt harshly with the peasantry, harming all attempts at fostering pro-Russian or Pan-Slavic ideals within it.²¹ The reactions to the January Uprising of 1863 continued to provoke resentment at Russia and kill Pan-Slavic sentiments in Poland, and while the defeated Polish populace feared more punishment from another uprising, many watched for an opportunity to gain independence and be free from harsh Russian rule.

These reactionary policies in response to the November Uprising of 1830 and the January Uprising of 1863 left significant impressions on important nationalist leaders in the late 19th century and the 20th century. The first chief of state of the Second Polish Republic, Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935), described his years at the Wilno gymnasium as the worst years of his life, even exceeding his years of exile, saying, “The masters there now were Tsarist schoolmasters, teachers, and trainers of youth who brought all their political passions to school with them, and whose system was to crush as much as possible the independence and personal dignity of the pupils,” and, “The feeling of oppression, the feeling of being a slave who can be crushed like a worm at any moment, weighed on my heart like a millstone.”²² This resentment resulting from years of oppressive treatment mixed with his nationalistic upbringing, which will be discussed later in this paper, would help fuel his revolutionary nationalist motivation.

The Polish historian and politician Roman Dmowski (1864–1939), a contemporary of Piłsudski who will be discussed in more depth later in the paper, theorized that submission to Russian influence was based on fear of the Russian authorities, so once the Russians were pushed out of parts of Poland during the First World War, their influence was immediately eliminated as Poles were free to practice their national identity without fear of punishment.²³ Dmowski believed that Russia had no hope of ever fully absorbing the Polish nation into its

²⁰ Ibid., 195.

²¹ Ibid., 196.

²² Józef Piłsudski, *Joseph Piłsudski: The Memories of a Polish Revolutionary and Soldier*, ed. Darsie Rutherford Gillie (New York: AMS Press, 1971), 12.

²³ Roman Dmowski, *Problems of Central and Eastern Europe* (London: privately printed, 1917), 65.

empire and so instead turned to attempting to destroy Polish civilization and political influence to aid the incorporation of the eastern territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth into the Russian Empire.²⁴

While some had hope that Poland could cooperate with Russia either as a semi-autonomous part of the Russian Empire or as an equal part of a Polish-Russian dynastic union immediately following the Partitions, the steady erosion of Polish autonomy and increased efforts to eliminate Polish cultural, political, and intellectual life, in particular targeting the Catholic Church, led to resentment of Russia and the decline of Pan-Slavic ideas in Poland. With the death of Pan-Slavism among many Poles, more placed their hopes in the idea of a new, independent, Catholic Polish state. By the time significant figures of the Polish independence movement like Piłsudski and Dmowski were born, Poles had abandoned the idea of Pan-Slavism, instead adopting a narrative of national victimhood and rallying around the Catholic Church. After throwing off the partitioners, the new Second Polish Republic enshrined the importance of Catholicism to Polish identity in its constitution, granting it a supreme position among all faiths.²⁵

Polish Catholicism's Transitions from Resistance to Authority

The Catholic Church continued to preserve Polish identity and resist outside rule during the communist era. With Marxism being opposed to religious belief, state authorities tried to weaken the Church and removed religious lessons from state schools. Various facilities, including schools and hospitals, were taken from the Church by the state. While the Church was still allowed to hold worship services, activities were restricted to churches and sanctuaries. Similar to attempts to restrict the Church in the partitioned era, these attacks on the Church ended up lending it more authority as a national symbol of resistance and rallied people around it. By the time the communist era ended, the Church was a symbol of Polishness and resistance to foreign oppression.²⁶

With Poland gaining independence, however, the Church had to discover a new place for itself in a Poland that was no longer under foreign rule. The

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁵ Napieralski, *Political Catholicism and Euroscepticism*, 61.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

Church used its popular support to gain special rights to religious education in public schools and the right to broadcast religious programs on public radio and television. Even with these early victories, the Church still lost some of its status without the presence of a crisis. While it attempted to rally support for Catholic parties in elections and influence government appointments, these attempts yielded few positive results, and the Church largely gave up on directly influencing politics. After the more direct political strategies of the 1990s, it moved more toward simply influencing party platforms.²⁷

However, there are still active Catholic organizations attempting to influence Polish politics directly such as Radio Maryja, a Catholic radio station focused primarily on religious programs such as transmitting masses, reciting prayers, spreading Catholic news, and playing religious music. Beyond its primary function, it also broadcasts an influential political program starring Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, the founder of the station.²⁸ Notably, the Catholic Church in Poland, particularly Father Rydzyk and Radio Maryja, have sometimes been at odds with the Pope on certain matters, and this was especially apparent with Poland's accession to the European Union. While Pope John Paul II supported Poland's accession and actively campaigned to rally support for accession among Polish Catholics, Radio Maryja aired populist rhetoric in fear that rich, powerful, elite states in the EU, particularly Germany, would use it to exploit Poland. Pope John Paul II also warned against the creation of Catholic parties and Church endorsements of political parties, yet Radio Maryja explicitly endorsed political parties against the Pope's wishes and continues doing so now.²⁹

Parties supported by Father Rydzyk and Radio Maryja generally gain surprising ground in the Polish government. In 1997, 30 politicians endorsed by Radio Maryja won seats in the legislature. In 2001, the station supported the fledgling League of Polish Families, resulting in it winning 38 seats in the legislature despite only having existed for four months at that time. As quickly as it helped the League rise, Radio Maryja contributed to its fall, switching its endorsement to the Law and Justice Party in 2005, aiding its rise to prominence to become part of a ruling coalition from 2006 to 2007. This is largely due to Radio Maryja having an especially active fanbase. Father Rydzyk's programs produce considerable mobilization. For example, 72 percent of Rydzyk's listeners voted in the 2011 parliamentary elections compared to the general turnout of 58 percent.³⁰ While the

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 63–66.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 79–81.

²⁹ Meyer Resende, *Catholicism and Nationalism*, 76.

³⁰ Napieralski, *Political Catholicism and Euroscepticism*, 81–84.

Church has decreased its overall political involvement, what activities it maintains clearly have a massive influence on the Polish government.

The influence of Catholicism on Polish identity and politics can be seen in the dominant party at the moment, the Law and Justice Party. Originally, the party focused on a platform of law and order and fighting corruption, but with endorsements from Radio Maryja and the absorption of many voters previously aligned with the League of Polish Families, it adopted more radical Catholic-nationalist policies to maintain the support of Father Rydzyk and Catholic nationalists. The Law and Justice Party actively pushes its Catholic values as part of its political identity. It attempts to take Catholic teaching and put it into national law: its social policy stands against abortion, euthanasia, and in vitro fertilization, and its economic policy opposes social exclusion and economic disparity. Its 2014 manifesto directly referenced papal encyclicals, and the party claims “the teachings of the Catholic Church, the Polish tradition and Polish patriotism join strongly together, creating the political identity of the nation.”³¹ In the Law and Justice Party and similar Catholic parties, Catholicism completed its transition from a force of nationalist resistance to a national authority.

Nationalist Histories in the Partitioned Era

Romantic historians and artists served a critical role in preserving the Polish national idea by providing a cultural canon around which the people could unite. The historical narratives of people like Joachim Lelewel provided a story of a strong culture and nation that could face hard times but never be erased, and artists from before and after the Partitions provided cultural touchstones for the nation to rally around and draw inspiration from.

Joachim Lelewel was a romantic historian and liberal activist. Joachim’s father, Karol Maurycy Lelewel (1748–1830), served Polish states in many positions, serving as Treasurer of the National Education Commission from 1772 to 1794, working in the Chamber of Deputies and the Directorate of Education in the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and serving as Councilor of State and on the Commission for Public Education in the Congress Kingdom.³² Karol Maurycy did not offer the same services to the partitioners, declining requests to serve the Prussian government after the Third Partition. Being involved in government and

³¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

³² Skurnowicz, *Romantic Nationalism*, 9–10.

education, Joachim's father associated with many reform-minded intellectuals. Being born in 1786 during the reform movement and growing up in a house so involved in national service, Joachim's upbringing clearly influenced his leanings toward liberal nationalism. After finishing boarding school, Lelewel was given the choice of studying at the German university in Königsberg or the University of Wilno.³³ Lelewel chose to attend the latter, saying, "I did not want to go to the German university. I was repulsed by the idea that I would involuntarily become Germanized."³⁴ This strong aversion to Germany and Europe west of Poland pervades much of his perspective and work. At the University of Wilno, Lelewel showed a willingness to question authoritative sources, and though his conclusions were often incorrect, his critical approach would lead to his future students and other people influenced by him later revealing that many of the sources accepted in Lelewel's time were invalid.

Lelewel also became involved in an intellectual and somewhat nationalist student organization called the Society for the Improvement of Youth in Learning, which would later be reorganized as the Society of Philomaths. This group valued the development of national sentiments with a focus on cultural roots and traditions. This cultural approach to nationalism was something around which Poles could rally at a time when there was not a national state. Lelewel would take this approach to nationalism and focus much of his research on what made Slavs and the Polish nation culturally unique compared to other nations. He generally attempted to discount foreign influences on Slavic and Polish development and searched for qualities of Slavs that contributed to the progressive perfection of humanity. Lelewel rather idealistically believed that history included a process leading toward the gradual perfection of humankind and that freedom and well-being encouraged humans to strive for perfection while oppression and adversity hindered their progression toward perfection.³⁵

Lelewel argued that Slavs and Scandinavians had a special inclination toward democracy, freedom, and public responsibility because they Christianized later than other parts of Europe, and Poles developed these attributes most fully of all.³⁶ He generally found the Church and Europe west of Poland to be a negative influence, even a source of corruption, on the Polish nation, which was presented as rather Edenic in its pre-Christianized condition. This desire to represent Poles as not only a great nation but one of the greatest nations in this way may

³³ Ibid., 10–14.

³⁴ Ignacy Chrzanowski, "Lelewel," in *Great Men and Women of Poland*, ed. Stephen P. Mizwa (New York: Macmillan, 1942), 184.

³⁵ Skurnowicz, *Romantic Nationalism*, 16–19 and 22–24.

³⁶ Ibid., 38 and 107.

seem a bit absurd in its idealism, but such a narrative can resonate with a people looking for a reason to hold on to their identity in hard times. Lelewel made use of traditions, folk tales, and fables in his research to help develop a unique impression of Poles separate from their western influences, although he sometimes expressed skepticism regarding the value of fables and other sources of this nature.³⁷ Creating a narrative about an Edenic Poland before Christianity's influence contributed to a greater narrative of Poland being better off without the influence of the partitioners and that Poland was destined to create a new nation-state due to the past greatness of their nation. Lelewel cited the reform movement and the Kościuszko Uprising to support the idea that the Polish nation was worthy of revival, saying that the reform movement and the rule of Stanisław II August (1764–1795) “revealed to the world that, approaching its fall, after a lengthy decline, it had regained the strength which was the prerequisite for its national revival,” and that with the Kościuszko Uprising, “in its very decline, it found the beginnings of its belated renaissance.”³⁸

After being involved in the uprising of 1830–1831 in Warsaw, Lelewel spent his life in exile in Paris and Brussels. He then spent much of his efforts writing for the diasporic Polish community and attempting to create sympathy for the Polish nation among non-Poles. The efforts of Lelewel and others like him helped keep the issue of Polish sovereignty alive in the global conversation so that when the opportunity arose, the powers of Europe would consider supporting the creation of an independent Polish state. Lelewel and other nationalist historians had significant influences on the revolutionaries who would create the Second Polish Republic. When writing about his childhood in the socialist review *Promien* in 1903, Józef Piłsudski said that his mother “made us acquainted with the works of our greatest poets, especially those which were forbidden, taught us Polish history, and bought none but Polish books.”³⁹ He was enchanted by the poet Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849), who, like Lelewel, had attended the University of Wilno, stating that he “was my first teacher of democratic principles.”⁴⁰ Clearly, Piłsudski was heavily inspired by the Polish romantic poets and historians. Piłsudski was raised on nationalist sources by nationalist parents from an early age, and given the important role he played in the creation of the Second Polish Republic, the influence of these sources cannot be disregarded when considering how Polish nationalism persisted through the partitioned years.

37 *Ibid.*, 22.

38 *Ibid.*, 110.

39 Piłsudski, *Joseph Piłsudski*, 11.

40 *Ibid.*

Notably, Piłsudski held far less contempt for other nations than Lelewel. While proud of his own nation, Piłsudski and the party he led, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), believed in cooperating with other nations, and their vision for Poland was multi-national rather than exclusively a “Poland for the Poles.”⁴¹ Piłsudski’s vision of the nation is closely related to Madalena Meyer Resende’s description of extroverted nationalism, which has little concern for the internal composition of the nation and focuses on its external relations with other nations and nation-states.⁴² Resende largely bases her analysis of nationalism in Poland around an extroverted versus introverted dichotomy, which, in the Second Republic period, can be seen in the dynamic between Piłsudski and his main political rival.

Roman Dmowski, another significant Polish nationalist politician in the late partitioned era and the Second Polish Republic, also used a somewhat idealized version of Polish history to support his nationalist beliefs. In 1917, Dmowski wrote *Problems of Central and Eastern Europe*, in which he argued, among other things, for the creation of a new Polish state following the then-ongoing First World War. In this book, he argues that Europe did not have equilibrium and that Germany was far too powerful, saying, “The German nation is facing the combined forces of all the greatest nations of the world and, after nearly three years of struggle, she is not yet defeated.”⁴³

Resende describes introverted nationalism as being defined by framing the nation as superior to others and seeing others as enemies, as well as by preserving congruence between national and state sovereignty.⁴⁴ In line with this description, Dmowski’s National Democrats believed that nations were and would always be in a state of conflict, and so their policy toward other nations was based on competition and distrust. Additionally, the National Democrats were far more concerned with maintaining national homogeneity with policies such as “The state . . . will always assimilate foreign tribes politically and culturally” and “aspire to create cultural unity,” leaving no room for other national groups, particularly Jews, who were seen as “undeniably a parasite on the social body of whatever country it inhabits.”⁴⁵ This sort of introverted nationalism creates perceived enemies that disadvantage the national in-group and create a defensive national identity, and a 2018 study found that such mindsets correlated significantly

⁴¹ Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate*, 172.

⁴² Meyer Resende, *Catholicism and Nationalism*, 7.

⁴³ Dmowski, *Problems of Central and Eastern Europe*, 6.

⁴⁴ Meyer Resende, *Catholicism and Nationalism*, 7–8.

⁴⁵ Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate*, 10.

with support for populist parties.⁴⁶ In this way, basing his platform around national conflict and Catholicism, Dmowski created the model for right-wing populism and nationalism.

For Dmowski, the key player disadvantaging Poland during the partitioned years was Germany. Dmowski claimed that Germany had a strong influence over all of central and eastern Europe. He claimed the Austro-Hungarian Empire was more than just an ally to the German Empire, instead being in a *de facto* union with the German Empire. He also believed that German influence over the Ottoman Empire, called Turkey by Dmowski, was so great that the Ottomans could not pursue a policy independent of the German Empire. This influence was not limited to Germany's allies, in Dmowski's opinion. In fact, he argued that Russia did not commit its full strength to fighting Germany due to the latter's influence over the Tsarist government, partly based on their cooperation in restricting the power of the Poles. He also feared that Russia's weakened state due to the revolution and the cost of the war would result in Germany taking control of the Baltic states, Poland, and Ukraine.⁴⁷

Dmowski argued against the idea of a peace that would restore pre-war boundaries as he believed it would maintain German dominance and set Germany up to make another attempt at complete domination with another war. Dmowski believed that the map of Europe had to be redrawn following the war and that the erasure of Poland that had thrown off the equilibrium in Europe be undone. He traced the origin of Germany's dominance in Europe to the Partitions of Poland. Dmowski rejected the opinion that the Partitions resulted from a weak and inefficient Polish government, pointing to the reforms the government made in its final years. He believed this narrative to be false, designed to be advantageous for those opposed to Poland. Dmowski instead proposed that the fall of Poland was a result of the schemes of Frederick the Great of Prussia (1712–1786) in eliminating the key rival of the German nation in Eastern Europe while Poland's allies were distracted by the revolution in France. Dmowski believed that Poland had been the primary force preventing German influence in eastern Europe throughout the Middle Ages and the modern era. For hundreds of years, Dmowski claimed, Poland had checked the power of Germany, and with the elimination of the Polish state, Europe's equilibrium was lost. Considering the version of Polish history with Poland serving as the protector of the East against Germany,

46 Marta Marchlewska, Aleksandra Cichočka, Orestis Panayiotou, Kevin Castellanos, and Jude Batayneh, "Populism as Identity Politics," *Social Psychological & Personality Science* 9, no. 2 (2018): 151–152.

47 Dmowski, *Problems of Central and Eastern Europe*, 7–12.

Dmowski argued that there needed to be a new Polish state to prevent German influence from returning to eastern Europe once again.⁴⁸

Looking at Dmowski's arguments, one can see that he creates a historical narrative where Poland served a role that was critical to peace and balance in Europe as a whole and denies the idea that the Partitions were partly a result of inadequacies and failures of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He romanticizes the Commonwealth, making it almost a hero of Europe that maintained balance and order on the continent. By nature of its geography and a desire to defend its lands, Poland did serve to limit German influence in eastern Europe, but it does not necessarily follow that Germany would dominate eastern Europe in Poland's absence. In the absence of Poland, Russia became Germany's new rival to the east. Dmowski characterized the partitioner of Germany as a primary antagonist in the struggle against Poland over nearly a millennium, but he did not think that Russia was anywhere near as consequential. He believed Poland was "superior in civilization to Russia."⁴⁹ Given Dmowski's condescending view of Russia and his desire to win independence for Poland, it is understandable that he would discount the importance of Russia to such a degree. According to the lessons of history, Dmowski believed, Europe needed Poland to rise again.

One can easily discount the importance of art and history upon national identity and nationalism. Military campaigns and struggles against oppression easily draw attention and seem like obvious sources of nationalist sentiments, but romantic histories created narratives of who the Polish nation was and what made it unique and important, while romantic artists provided symbols and cultural touchstones for people to rally around and feel proud of their culture. Romantic nationalists like Lelewel and Słowacki created narratives that the people of their time could use to unite themselves and inspired the narratives used by later Polish nationalists like Piłsudski and Dmowski. Reading the works of these major players of the Second Polish Republic demonstrates how the influence of romantic histories and art cannot be ignored when discussing the survival of Polish nationalism through the partitioned years.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 58–61 and 66–68.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

Nationalist Histories in Contemporary Polish Education

Just as Lelewel and Dmowski used nationalist histories to define an exceptional Polish national identity, the Law and Justice Party-led government continues to use nationalist histories as a tool for spreading Polish nationalist ideology. Dmowski claimed education was critical to nationalist interest, saying, “new generations must be prepared to build the power of the nation instead of supplying it with derelicts.”⁵⁰ Today, the Polish government aims to produce citizens focused on national traditions, a homogenous ethnic community, and an authoritarian-nationalist idea of order.⁵¹

In its education policy, the Law and Justice Party attempts to combat a historical narrative they call the “pedagogy of shame.”⁵² A member of the program board of the Institute of National Remembrance defined the “pedagogy of shame” as “a way of looking at history, which is dominant in the liberal environment. Its essence is to show primarily shameful themes in Polish history, such as the Polish-Jewish relations during World War II as seen through the prism of blackmailing or events such as the massacre in Jedwabne.”⁵³ Similar to how American nationalist histories overlook American atrocities such as the genocide of indigenous people and systemic racism, Polish nationalist histories wish to ignore issues like antisemitic violence and Polish collaboration with the Third Reich. Often, nationalist teachers would rather focus on ideas like the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth accepting exiled Jews from western Europe rather than the more problematic recent history of Polish antisemitism. One such example comes from a study in Upper Silesia where a teacher said,

The textbook should convey . . . that through the ages we had a state in which the Jews found a second home. They couldn't stand living with anti-Semites for centuries. . . . The Jews chose Poland as a second homeland . . . if there had not been the Holocaust, Poland would have still been their second homeland. As a teacher, I do not agree that we were anti-Semites. I think that the textbooks should show that neighborhood relations [Polish-Jewish] were exemplary.⁵⁴

50 Piotr Żuk, “Nation, National Remembrance, and Education – Polish Schools as Factories of Nationalism and Prejudice,” *Nationalities Papers* 46, no. 6 (2018): 1047.

51 *Ibid.*, 1046.

52 *Ibid.*, 1052.

53 *Ibid.*

54 Krzysztof Jaskulowski and Piotr Majewski, “Politics of Memory in Upper Silesian Schools: Between Polish Homogeneous Nationalism and Its Silesian Discontents,” *Memory Studies* 13, no. 1 (2020): 66.

Interestingly, this quote brings attention to a more convenient period of Jewish-Polish relations while quickly glossing over the details that complicate that narrative. By only briefly mentioning the Holocaust, the teacher attempts to promote the narrative that Jewish-Polish relations would be fine if the Nazis had not killed them, ignoring the fact that Poles actively participated in both the Holocaust with bullets and through the more organized Final Solution. Current Polish historical education attempts to minimize or ignore Polish crimes, focusing instead on Polish victimhood at the hands of other nations and the heroic struggle for Polish independence.⁵⁵

Polish nationalist education also pushes xenophobic ideas through the concepts of Polish ethnic homogeneity and Polish victimhood. While 98.2 percent of the population were born in Poland, the ethnic homogeneity narrative attempts to ignore the presence of the ethnic diversity among them as well as the other 1.8 percent of the population. For example, Upper Silesia has been controlled by German- and Czech-speaking polities for most of its existence and is more ethnically diverse than average, but Polish education pushes ignoring regional variation in favor of the homogenous narrative.⁵⁶

In addition to the ethnic homogeneity narrative, Polish nationalists push the idea that Poland should be compensated for a long history of Polish victimhood, claiming that other European states betrayed them or violently invaded them, leaving the aggressors better off than Poland. In another interview in the Silesian study, a teacher said, “I say that England abandoned us, Germany invaded . . . [the pupils] say: ‘Miss, but they are ruling the EU now.’”⁵⁷ Here, it is clear that both the teacher and the students have internalized the idea that other states undermined Polish interests for their own gain. In this narrative, Poland has always been the victim, never the aggressor, and should therefore be given more influence in European politics for its historical victimhood.

The Law and Justice Party has used these narratives to aid its opposition to foreign individuals and influence. The study of populism and identity politics mentioned earlier describes a condition that correlates with a populist belief called collective narcissism, which is described as having “an unrealistic belief in the greatness of the national group, which should increase in response to perceived in-group disadvantage.”⁵⁸ The study further described collective narcissism, saying it “extends the concept of individual narcissism to the group level of

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 66–67.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 62; Żuk, “Polish Schools as Factories of Nationalism,” 1051.

⁵⁷ Jaskulowski and Majewski, “Politics of Memory in Upper Silesian Schools,” 66.

⁵⁸ Marchlewska, Cichocka, Panayiotou, Castellanos, and Batayneh, “Populism as Identity Politics,” 151.

analysis. While individual narcissism predicts interpersonal aggressiveness, collective narcissism predicts negative inter-group attitudes, especially toward groups perceived as threatening.”⁵⁹ A nationalist education curriculum may encourage this tendency toward collective narcissism among students and attract them to populist politics. The Law and Justice Party has used this to oppose not only the acceptance of refugees but even liberal democracy, which some Poles view as a foreign import from the West.⁶⁰

These historical narratives in education have clearly produced results that have shaped the contemporary Polish national consciousness. Sixty-four percent of voters aged 18–29 voted for populist or extreme right-wing parties in the 2015 parliamentary elections, and 76 percent of Poles aged 18–24 oppose the acceptance of refugees, with the willingness to accept refugees largely increasing with age.⁶¹ The success of these right-wing narratives with young people can also be seen in the fallout of a right-wing march in Świnoujście on 4 October 2015. After this march, where participants yelled phrases like “Islamists will be hanged on trees instead of leaves,” a student was called a “refugee” and an “immigrant” before being beaten up at a local primary school.⁶² Polish nationalist education has clearly been successful in leading students to a far-right nationalist form of national consciousness and ideology.

Conclusion

The very ideas that allowed for the creation and preservation of a Polish national identity during the partitioned years continue to serve as key elements of contemporary Polish national identity. However, where these ideas were once used as methods of resistance and preventing the erasure of a people’s identity, they now serve to uphold a new authority and erase diverse identities in favor of a homogenous national image. The Law and Justice Party and its coalition have successfully used these powerful symbols in Polish history to indoctrinate the new generation with their nationalist and populist ideology, creating a Catholic-nationalist idea of Polishness that will be difficult to change going forward.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁶⁰ Ursula van Beek, *Democracy under Threat: A Crisis of Legitimacy?* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 101.

⁶¹ Żuk, “Polish Schools as Factories of Nationalism,” 1048–1049.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1048.

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Bjørn P. Müller-Bohn

12 Populist Politics and the Rise of the AfD in Germany

Introduction

The term “populism” is being used quite frequently in scientific, political, and media discourse. This is especially noteworthy considering the changes in the political landscape in most Western countries during the last two decades and is usually associated with figureheads of this new wave like Marine Le Pen and Donald Trump or parties like Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).¹ The popularity of the term “populism” can be partly attributed to its looseness, since it allows the user to easily wrap political statements and formations that encompass nation, people, and identity under its wing. That might be useful on a political platform where the aim is to win new voters or appease existing ones either by labeling someone a populist for appealing to people’s emotions or by wearing that label as a badge of honor for defending the “forgotten” against the “elites” in a democracy. But is it helpful when trying to scientifically analyze political formations in a society? Jan-Werner Müller, a political scientist and Professor at Princeton University, points out that terms like “democracy” and “freedom” are just as contested but need a theoretical framework nonetheless: “We need a critical theory about populism which is based on a theory about democracy, for if one speaks about populism, one cannot help but say something about democracy and liberalism.”² He sums up his theory in ten theses, which we will use to determine whether the AfD qualifies as a populist party or not. After that, we shall look at how the intellectual framework of the New Right in Germany came to be, how it has been evolving under the radar, and the manner in which it has been utilized by the AfD. Since an intellectual framework needs a foundation to be built upon, a closer examination of the processes that made the growth of right-wing populism in Germany possible will be required. With a foundation laid and a framework set, the house needs only to be built. A short summary of the events leading to the AfD’s conception will be presented, followed by the activities of the party in Germany’s parliaments. An assessment of the AfD’s current

1 On the AfD see Amman, Melanie. *Angst für Deutschland: Die Wahrheit über die AfD. Wo sie herkommt, wer sie führt, wohin sie steuert*. Munich: Droemer, 2018 and Benno Hafenegger et al., *AfD in Parlamenten* (Frankfurt am Main: Wochenschau Verlag, 2018).

2 Jan-Werner Müller, *Was ist Populismus? Ein Essay* (Berlin: Suhrkamp 2016), 13.

condition and its chances of doing well at the Bundestag election in 2021 will conclude this attempt to give the interested reader a rough overview of right-wing populism's current expression in Germany.

Populism in Ten Theses

First of all, some misunderstandings regarding the term “populism” must be addressed. A very widespread misconception is that you can recognize a populist or a populist party by looking at their voters, who are presumably lower-middle-class/petit-bourgeois members afraid of losing social status, putting their faith in populism instead of fighting their true enemy: capitalism. They lack the sociological tools to recognize the true threat, and as they are somewhat uneducated, they are naturally drawn to those who simplify complexity. They, in turn, are discredited for their simplicity by their opponents and are labeled “populists.” Their voters are only an emotionally driven rabble or people who are struggling to stay in touch with the times and wish to turn back the clock. All of this is misleading. The voters of populist parties are coming from all layers of society. It is often their assessment of society that makes them vote for a populist rather than their current socio-economic situation, and even if they all had lower-middle-class backgrounds, it would still be the content of the parties' policies and actions that matter. Populist parties are also usually fond of memorable slogans, but this does not necessarily differentiate them from other parties. Simplified rhetoric is not populism, nor does populism need to be extremist. In fact, as we will see, connecting populism with liberal notions like freedom and democracy makes for a much more compelling cocktail. So, with that in mind, let us investigate what makes something/someone populist.

Firstly, Müller argues that populists are anti-elite as well as anti-pluralistic. Their claim is always the same. Only “we” represent the “true” people; different distinctions are about morality, never only about left-wing or right-wing policies. Therefore, populism is not an extensive ideology like socialism, liberalism, or conservatism. Secondly, populism is the dark shadow of the representative democracy we are used to around the world. Democracy and representation are two different ideas, and while the populists are in opposition, they will point out that fact frequently. Thirdly, criticism of the false representatives of the minority then translates into fundamental criticisms of what we naturally consider democratic institutions. After all, if populists represent the “forgotten” majority, then something must be wrong with the institutions. Fourthly, since there is not a singular homogenous group with one will in an empirical sense, the populists

must use certain criteria to narrow down what being part of “the true people” involves. That group will then, in the fifth step, be pitted against existing institutions, and once the populists come to power (the sixth step), their rule will be in accordance with populism’s logic. Only they represent the “true people” and, because of this, any competition from within or without is pointless. In the seventh step, the separation of power will be weakened or removed, civil and media opposition will be dismissed as foreign interference and “fake news,” and the state and any welfare institutions will then be owned by and reserved for the “true people”. In his last three theses, Müller points out that liberals hypocritically tend to want populists to be expelled from politics in the name of morality and that they would be better served by discussing the facts and listening to the demands of the discontents. If our democracies have a representative nature and do not live up to how democracy was defined by Thucydides in ancient Athens, populism will always exist. For liberals, the answer to what nation one belongs to can be seen in one’s passport, which is often defined by how long someone has lived in a nation-state. This, in turn, means that liberals often struggle to respond convincingly to the moral indicators that populists use to define who belongs and who does not, as their own indicators are based on coincidences. Democratic parties should not leave the questions of belonging and of how to mend the shortcomings of a representative democracy to populists.

Is the AfD a Populist Party?

In this section, we will use Müller’s theses to determine if the AfD can be classified as a populist party. The term “populism” will be thought of as an ideal type in the Weberian sense, meaning an abstract hypothetical concept on which the conduct of social science depends and which is not formed from all the characteristics of any one case but from the essential features of a given phenomenon.³ I will aim to highlight where reality coincides with Müller’s theoretical considerations and where it does not.

The AfD was, from its birth onward, meant to engage in “ideology-free politics,” as co-founder Michael Heendorf put it. On 14 April 2013, the day of its establishment, its co-founder Bernd Lucke said: “We are neither left nor right. We

³ On Weber’s thoughts see Maurizio Bach, “Nationalpopulismus und Faschismus im historischen Vergleich: Zur Aktualität von Max Webers Herrschaftssoziologie,” *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 31 (2021): 81–100.

do not need an ideological guideline. We only need healthy common sense.” From the beginning, for the AfD, “common sense” meant emphasizing the need to regain national sovereignty as well as the right of self-determination of all “*Volk*” against the might of the centralized European bureaucracy.⁴ The term “*Volk*” is used specifically to determine the citizens of the respective nation-states as well as to draw a line of membership that is based upon origin and culture. To blame are the treaties of Schengen (1985), Maastricht (1992), and Lisbon (2007), which destroyed the *Volk*’s inviolable sovereignty and were created by the true authority: a group of self-serving “elites” who have the “*Altparteien*” (old parties) under their thumb. They are directly responsible for the last decades of aberration, as development has been limited to their power, status, and wealth.⁵

In his welcoming speech at the AfD’s tenth party convention, the party’s former leader Alexander Gauland exclaimed:

There is a power in Germany now that places the national interests of Germany above the Europe- and world-state fantasies of the Green-Black-Red Germany-abolishers and which does not understand European cooperation as surrendering one’s national sovereignty. When, according to an Allensbach poll, more than two-thirds of the elites consider us a serious danger to the country, they are referring to themselves; we, the party of the *Volk*, the party of the commoners, have done a lot of things right.⁶

In opposite to the ease one has when looking for anti-elitism and anti-pluralism, one is hard-pressed to find the AfD openly saying that they are the sole representative of the *Volk* when confronted by it, preferring to address themselves as the party of common sense. However, amongst themselves, they are more comfortable in claiming that title, as illustrated in Gauland’s welcoming speech. On the International Day of Democracy in 2020, AfD heavyweight Stephan Brandner expressed his wish for more direct democracy as well as his understanding of the current state of German democracy as such:

As the Alternative für Deutschland, we are the only ones who credibly represent democratic values: we don’t make policies for us, but for the people. . . . In order to win back the trust of the people in politics, which the *Altparteien* gambled away during the last

⁴ AfD, *Europawahlprogramm 2019*. https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2019/03/AfD_Europawahlprogramm_A5-hoch_web_150319.pdf.

⁵ Alexander Gauland, “Alexander Gauland: Die Zukunftsfähigkeit unseres Volkes zu sichern ist der Mittelpunkt unserer Arbeit,” *AfD*, November 30, 2019. <https://www.afd.de/alexander-gauland-die-zukunftsfahigkeit-unseres-volkes-zu-sichern-ist-der-mittelpunkt-unserer-arbeit/>.

⁶ “AfD-Parteitag in Braunschweig: Eröffnungsrede Alexander Gauland,” November 30, 2019. *ARD-Mediathek*, <https://tinyurl.com/2p9ycew4>.

decades, it is of utmost necessity to implement direct-democratic elements on all levels to put an end to the corruption of the parties!⁷

This statement is a clear example of reminding everyone that representation and democracy are different ideas. Brandner also stated that the media, through generous donations and compulsory levies, is being kept happy, naturally resulting in the coverage being steered in line with the government's course. Therefore, the AfD wishes to cancel every single interstate agreement on broadcasting (multilateral agreements regulating funding and the public-private balance in broadcasting in Germany) and replace it with a trimmed basic broadcast and a regional broadcast not financed by compulsory levies or commercials but by the big technology-firms.⁸ Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter would have to respect freedom of speech, and political parties would be prohibited from being affiliated with media enterprises. Political correctness is a result of the opinion cartel the *Altparteien* have created, and this leftist dominance throughout the media has resulted in the prohibition to think and speak freely. The PEGIDA movement – which, according to Werner Patzelt, has been the other side of the same coin to the AfD ever since the latter made migration its core theme and turned into the Pegida-Partei in 2015 – simply dubbed it “*Lügenpresse*” (fake news).⁹ For them, this “state propaganda” manipulates the facts, twists interviews and statements, especially of the movement, and purposely ignores the actual stories. This forgotten “majority” sees the media as a symbol of their oppression by the elites. In an interview with Deutschlandfunk, shortly after the election of Donald Trump as the new president of the United States of America, Gauland was asked if he could explain in what way the *Volk* has been “*entmündigt*” (legally incapacitated) in a parliamentary democracy, to which he replied:

7 Stephan Brandner, “Direkte Demokratie stärken – Vertrauen des Volkes zurückgewinnen!” *Presseportal*, September 15, 2020. <https://www.presseportal.de/pm/110332/4706857>.

8 For the parties overall demands see AfD, *Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 20. Deutschen Bundestag*. https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2021/06/20210611_AfD_Programm_2021.pdf.

9 Werner, J. Patzelt, “Pegida und AfD sind Fleisch vom selben Fleische,” *Hanns Seidel Stiftung*, August 30, 2018. <https://www.hss.de/news/detail/pegida-und-afd-sind-fleisch-vom-selben-fleische-news3566/>. Winfried Schenk, “Politikwissenschaftler Werner Patzelt: Pegida und AfD sind ‘dasselbe’ in ‘verschiedener Gestalt,’” *Menschen in Dresden*, February 25, 2016. <https://menschen-in-dresden.de/2016/02/25/politikwissenschaftler-werner-patzelt-pegida-und-afd-sind-dasselbe-in-verschiedener-gestalt/>. Patzelt also argued that the neglect of East-German demands and problems fueled the rise of the AfD in East Germany. Werner J. Patzelt, “Die Sorgen der Leute ernst nehmen!” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 40 (2015): 17–21.

That is very simple. Have we, as the *Volk*, been asked if we would like the mass immigration of one million Muslims? Did we ever get asked if we wanted a rescue of Greece, if we wanted to take on the responsibility for generations ourselves? We were never asked any of that. And now the *Volk* is starting to say, we don't want those policies.¹⁰

The criteria the AfD uses to narrow down the true people are thoroughly described in the party's election manifesto. Simply being born in Germany does not make one a German citizen; for that, one needs to have at least one German parent. A return to the principle of lineage must occur, and the requirements for its adoption at discretion should be raised considerably. That means that a migrant cannot demand naturalization but should earn it and feel pride in that achievement. This achievement can only be received by professing oneself to the cultural identity of Germany, which involves implementing the rules, traditions, and values of the host, as well as being an independent and qualified German-speaking enrichment to society. The base of that German society is the family consisting of a father, a mother, and children. Family provides a home, love, happiness, and security. It is instrumental as the main social system and in preserving that which makes us German: our cultural identity. Alternative models to the traditional family (homosexual marriage, single parenting, etc.), the disrespect toward life that leads to about 100,000 abortions yearly, and the indoctrination of the children regarding "climate hysteria" and "gender mania" are resulting in the loss of German identity, a demographic catastrophe leading to the import of foreign elements, the sexual disconcertedness of the young, and the dissolution of gender roles.

The political ideologies of the elites furthering this development in the form of the *Altparteien* are, in spirit, anti-German. Seeing itself as the sole party of the people, the AfD naturally wants to counteract this de-Germanization. Also, the money that is currently being spent on the utopian "save-the-world projects" of the left-green should be used to finance a dignified pension for the old and make Germany a pioneer in the sciences again. Before the youth grow up to become scientists or master craftsmen, they are pupils in an educational system where German traditions, history, and cultural assets should be taught, starting from elementary school. This, in turn, is meant to strengthen the love one has for one's home and the awareness of the importance of tradition. The German language is the glue that holds this all together, and it is thus of utmost importance to protect it from foreign languages in educational facilities. Politically correct gender studies, with their ideologically fueled attempts at misguided equality,

¹⁰ "Alexander Gauland zur US-Wahl," *Deutschlandfunk*, November 11, 2016. <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/alexander-gauland-zur-us-wahl-die-eliten-sind-dringend-100.html>.

are to receive no funding. The AfD does recognize Article 4 of the German Constitution: “Freedom of faith and of conscience and freedom to profess a religious or philosophical creed shall be inviolable. The undisturbed practice of religion shall be guaranteed.” However, the AfD also declares that Islam does not belong to Germany and that it poses a great danger to the German state, society, and values as more Muslims keep entering the country. This is supposedly the case because of Islam’s claim to be the one true religion, which then translates into wanting to replace the German rule of law with Sharia law. The Christian and Jewish Occident would be forever lost. According to the historian Michael Wildt, the religious boundary is, in truth, cultural, and it is meant to define who belongs to the German *Volk*. He emphasizes that the question of belonging is being answered by ethnical and cultural parameters as it cannot be justified constitutionally: “Those who are not of German descent (whatever that means), who do not live according to the German ‘Leitkultur’ (defining culture), who do not feel an obligation to the ‘Christian occident’ or are laying claim to the liberty of sexual self-determination, can not belong to the German Volk from the AfD’s point of view.”¹¹ As the AfD has yet to take over the state or any federal state, we are forced to make an assessment based upon the party’s plans and rhetoric in determining whether the AfD wishes to weaken the distribution of power and discredit civil opposition through moral justification. We have already considered the party’s view on the media and how the *Volk* are meant to take control of their state through direct democracy. Still, it is easy to forget that the term describes those who were separated for many decades: West Germans and East Germans. This is not a coincidence as the AfD sees itself as *the* party representing the neglected East Germans. Björn Höcke, the central figure of the new *völkisch* movement and state representative of the AfD in Thüringen, argued that actions have not been taken on behalf of the *Volk* since the start of German unification and that Helmut Kohl’s promise of “blooming landscapes” turned out, in retrospect, to be nothing but a reelection strategy as the East German industry was destroyed, millions of people were put out of work, the strong Deutsche Mark was abandoned in favor of the weak Euro, and the land was opened up and flooded by millions of immigrants.¹²

¹¹ Michael Wildt, *Volk, Volksgemeinschaft, AfD* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2017), 115.

¹² Björn Höcke, “Auch 30 Jahre nach der Wiedervereinigung ist Deutschland ein tief gespaltenes Land,” *Deutschland Kurier*, September 18, 2020. <https://www.deutschland-kurier.org/2020/09/auch-30-jahre-nach-der-wiedervereinigung-ist-deutschland-ein-tief-gespaltenes-land-der-zerstoerte-impuls/>. Also see Hajo Funke, *Die Höcke-AfD: Eine rechtsextreme Partei in der Zerreißprobe* (Hamburg: VSA, 2021), 35–47.

A glimpse at the established parties' typical reaction to the obvious attacks on their understanding of the rule of law could be seen in the aftermath of the November 2020 episode where two AfD delegates invited visitors into the Bundestag to deliberately interrupt the debate regarding the coronavirus vaccination law. They did so by insulting and harassing parliamentarians, which all parties considered to be an attack on democracy itself. The CSU's Alexander Dobrindt stated that the AfD was about to become the NPD (Germany's far-right National Democratic Party), as he deemed the AfD's purpose in that episode to normalize a new form of "dispute" in the Bundestag, a dissolution of the democratic workings from within, and a deepening of the rift in society. In sum, the established parties see the AfD as the parliamentary arm of right-wing extremism, hollowing out parliamentary democracy. A demand for full surveillance by the "Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz" (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution) was articulated, which has the potential to result in the total exclusion of the AfD. There was little discussion about the pleas the protesters expressed outside the Reichstag following the episode, as everyone exclusively focused on the AfD's actions. The liberals' tendency to mirror populists by excluding in the name of morality instead of discussing the issues at hand could be seen in this instance. By choosing expulsion instead of communication, the established do not even have to bother with discussing the worries and fears of the dissidents or with questioning their own way of thinking.

I conclude here that the AfD is a populist party if one uses Müller's ten theses to ascertain the party's nature, strengthened by sources that put the party's actions and communication into perspective. This can only be done by not dismissing its actions and communication simply as performance or rhetoric, since that would apply to most politicians, but by judging them based on populism's inner logic. It becomes clear that this logic is ingrained in the AfD as an anti-pluralistic, anti-parliamentary, anti-elite force in German politics that harshly rejects how the democratic institutions currently function and claims sole representation of the "Volk."

The Intellectual Framework of the New Right

It is impossible to talk about the intellectual framework of the New Right without mentioning Armin Mohler. His works are essential to the right's canon; he is frequently cited in their debates, and he was a teacher on a personal level for several prominent figures of the current movement before his death in 2003. His most notable achievement was *The Conservative Revolution in Germany*,

1918–1932,¹³ in which he attempted to create a school of thought based upon many different authors of the radical nationalism prevalent during that period while remaining careful to avoid any association with national socialism. The purpose of the “conservative revolution” was to enable a positive tradition for the German right, which would then be unburdened by national socialism, the Shoah, and the lost war. Shortly after the war, that task was difficult, but there is little that could not be explained away pseudoscientifically. The legend of the “conservative revolution” resisting the ahistorical and totally different national socialism struck a cord in rightist circles and academic ones as well due to the longing for absolution in post-war Germany. It also allowed a new start for the radical right, with the “master” Ernst Jünger, the “teacher” Carl Schmitt, and the “student” Armin Mohler leading the way out in front. The latter served as a link between the right of the Federal Republic of Germany and the radical nationalism of Weimar Germany. In 1962, for instance, he tried to persuade the CSU’s Minister of Defence, Franz Josef Strauß, to pursue an anti-American and anti-Soviet “German Gaullism” as a political consultant. More importantly, he helped raise the new generation of the New Right, including the founder of *Critición*, Caspar von Schrenck-Notzing. This magazine served as an important platform for that anti-liberal, anti-democratic form of conservatism that moved on the very edges of what can be done in a free democratic society. The most crucial achievement during the period 1970–1990 is the so-called “metapolitics,” where one beats their opposition defensively with their own weapons. Samuel Salzborn explains: “The political goal of the New Right can essentially be summarized in two headwords: the intellectualization of right-wing extremism through the formation of an intellectual metapolitics and the attainment of a cultural hegemony.”¹⁴ By depicting themselves as the victims of persecution, the New Right has taken on a defensive posture. By implementing the conservative-revolutionary habitus through platforms like *Junge Freiheit* and *Sezession*, the New Right has intellectualized right-wing extremism. By introducing their vocabulary in public, which then can translate into a significant presence on the streets, given the right circumstances, the New Right has attained cultural ground. The success of this strategy and the thoroughness of its implementation cannot be contested, as the movement against political correctness and LGBT rights, combined with the repercussions of the PEGIDA demonstrations and Thilo Sarrazin’s book *Germany Abolishes Itself*, have enabled the New

¹³ Armin Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932: Grundriss ihrer Weltanschauungen* (Stuttgart: Vorwerk, 1950).

¹⁴ Samuel Salzborn, “Heidegger für Halbgebildete: Identitäre Heimatideologie zwischen Fiktion und Propaganda,” *Wissen Schafft Demokratie* 3, no. 3 (2018): 161.

Right to establish a substantial foothold in the minds of many people. The concept of ethnopluralism is another important step toward making the worldview of the New Right digestible. For the identitarian movement, the concept involves “[a]ll ethnic groups and nations having the right to preserve their culture, their customs and traditions, and thereby their ethnocultural identity. . . . Time and again, the term ethnopluralism has wrongly been interpreted as a worldwide apartheid. . . . Ethnopluralism simply means: preserve, do not destroy; appreciate differences, do not level them out.”¹⁵ The consequences of what European racism and eugenic teachings led to still sit deep in the public memory, so the New Right had to revise their positions in that respect. The new concept appears to be an overwhelming improvement to the previous one at first glance, but as historian Volker Weiß points out, a closer look reveals the same faith in ethnic homogeneity, the ideological connection between *völkisch* nationalism and “*Lebensraum*” (living space), and an almost identical exclusion mechanism, only now in a modern form.¹⁶ Bluntly put, everyone will be fine if the whole world stays where they are.

The Groundwork for Right-Wing Populism’s Growth in Germany: Neoliberalism

The relation between economic globalization and democratic development is essential for our understanding of populism since we have established that populism and representative democracy go hand in hand. An authoritative form of capitalism is emerging supposedly generated an extensive loss of control, and thereby contributed to an emptying of democracy, allowing new authoritative temptations like governmental control politics as well as right-wing populism to grow. This new authoritative character comes from its absolute power to force its principles on individuals, on the modern social structure of society, and on democracy itself. Capitalism’s principle of the survival of the fittest is always pitted against the democratic principle of equality, but if it were to win this fight, then the market economy would turn into the market society and democracy would

¹⁵ Thilo Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen* (Munich: DVA, 2010), 393. On the neo-right interpretation of the term, see Identitäre Bewegung, “Was ist unter dem Begriff ‘Ethnopluralismus’ zu verstehen?” <https://www.identitaere-bewegung.de/faq/was-ist-unter-dem-begriff-ethnopluralismus-zu-verstehen/>.

¹⁶ Volker Weiß, *Die autoritäre Revolte: Die Neue Rechte und der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2017).

die. It is in its nature to eliminate alternative values and ways of conduct and to dictate the need to be flexible in an ever-changing world. This world's first phase of globalization, which saw the creation of sovereign nation-states and the development of democracy within the frame of a worldwide division of labor, changed in its second phase, where the dependency between the world economy and nation-states reversed. Economic players can now, because of the high degree of global interlinking, move beyond national boundaries, while nation-states are left with localized competition. This makes state intervention and strikes at those players difficult and less effective, and it also makes capital's power to deeply influence society and state politics very real. The post-war taming of capitalism with strong unions, worker movements, and a social democratic consensus has been mostly undone as the economic elites and state actors managed to make market-radical positions mainstream after 1989. The last two decades have been years of uncertainty as the economic and societal systems have shown how prone they are to structural crises. Those crises can be called "signal events" as they sink into the collective memory and get a lot of public attention. Processes that move slowly into the DNA of society and lead, for example, to widespread anomie, feelings of powerlessness, etc. usually go under the radar. They are, however, arguably more potent, as large portions of the population may feel unacknowledged, afraid, and disintegrated. That, in turn, may lead to anger that right-wing populists can mobilize. Those movements of hate were not created in a vacuum and did not happen overnight but are results of a long process of gradual suffering. Let us now examine the three most important signal events regarding the AfD, bearing this connection between authoritative capitalism and populism in mind.

Building the House: The Founding of the AfD

The deep insecurity of a large portion of the population reached its peak with the business-friendly labor-market reform "Hartz IV" (2003–2006), which aimed at making the receiving of welfare benefits harder and more uncomfortable, as well as at pushing the unemployed into jobs more quickly, regardless of how well they are paid. Christoph Butterwegge argues that this "law of fear"¹⁷ enabled capital to pressure and discipline both employed and unemployed workers, who now had to accept worse working conditions and wages. The "law of fear" made Germany into a "society of fear." The further it penetrates the center of society,

17 Christoph Butterwegge, "Gesetz der Angst," *Junge Welt*, January 18, 2019. <https://www.jungewelt.de/loginFailed.php?ref=/artikel/347408.gesetz-der-angst.html>.

the worse it gets, because the middle class simply has further to fall than the poorer working class. As the social climate gets colder in the neoliberal “*Konkurrenzgesellschaft*” (society of competition), more citizens long for the emotional warmth that right-wing populists promise to strengthen by rebuilding the “*Volks-gemeinschaft*” (national community) and the traditional family. It is also probable that the Hartz reforms shattered faith in politics fundamentally as they were made by a purportedly worker-friendly, social-democratic, progressive-liberalist, red-green coalition.

The financial crisis in 2008 that followed the crash of the US real estate market, caused by authoritarian capitalism and a banking system that had been deregulated through neoliberal politics, turned into a debt and monetary crisis. In October 2008, the Bundesregierung decided on a 500 billion euro bail-out in order to save the banks, which was followed by a recession that the export nation of Germany and the workers within it felt profoundly. The subsequent problems regarding Greece’s sovereign debt crisis ended with Germany, as an EU member, again having to play a huge role. The “small people” wondered what a crisis on the other side of the continent, ignited by bankers’ failed speculations in the housing market, had to do with them and why their tax money was being used to atone for the “elite’s” mistakes and the financial mismanagement of southern European countries. The AfD’s rise as a Euroskeptic party with the slogan “Courage for truth. We are not the world’s social welfare office!” summed up those sentiments, and, by mobilizing those voices, the newly-established party became a force to be reckoned with.

The “GroKo” (the “Grand Coalition” of the CDU and SPD) largely continues to blame the rise of the AfD and their own diminishing voter base on Merkel’s statement “*Wir schaffen das*” in 2015, despite implementing a very restrictive migration policy following the refugee crisis that did not result in the expected dissolution of the AfD, instead of taking responsibility for three divisive terms of economic, tax, and social policies. The anger with politics may be directed at Angela Merkel and the *Altparteien*, but not primarily because of resentment toward foreigners.

The phenomenon of migration at its current rate is tied closely to globalization. Never have so many people been on the move on this planet before. Hunger, poverty, underdevelopment, unemployment, pandemics, environmental catastrophes, civil wars, and religious conflicts are the driving factors for those people. The rich cities of the industrial countries are magnets for that torrent of desperation and hope.

Currently, the AfD seems to be the only party that is managing to give an answer to this question, which is also penetrating the public discourse. Their answer is that there is no chance of this as such diversity would lead to the

disintegration of the German and European culture, the marginalization of natives, infiltration by foreign cultures/religions (Islam especially) that would destabilize Germany's freedom and democracy, an astronomical bill that would have to be paid by the taxpayer, and the alienation of other European nations that do not wish to follow the course of "pseudo-morality." National sovereignty needs to be revived, the system of international humanitarian aid transformed, immigration turned into remigration, borders defended, social aid restricted, and the "*Willkommenskultur*" concluded.

Moving into the Neighborhood: The AfD in Parliament

The AfD first appeared in the Deutscher Bundestag in the year of 2017 and, as of the end of 2021, represents its voters in all Landesparlamenten (state parliaments), of which there are 16. Only the CDU and SPD are also spread this wide. Their presence is therefore felt and heard by many a district and commune parliament, as well as by the public, which by now has a reasonably good idea of the party's political agenda. During the last series of state elections (2016–2021), the AfD managed to strengthen its position in German politics by securing votes in every state after previously only meeting the 5% mark in 14 states. In the old federal states of Germany, the AfD failed to meet the 10% mark in Hamburg (5,3%), Schleswig-Holstein (5,9%), Bremen (6,1%), Niedersachsen (6,2%), Saarland (6,2%), Nordrhein-Westfalen (7,4%), Rheinland-Pfalz (8,3%), and Baden-Württemberg (9,7%), and it managed to meet it in Bayern (10,2%), Hessen (13,1%), and Berlin (14,2%). A north-south gap in votes is visible when comparing Bayern (10,2%) and Baden-Württemberg (9,7%) against Hamburg (5,3%) and Schleswig-Holstein (5,9%). The AfD succeeded in meeting the 20% mark in the new federal states of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (20,8%), Sachsen-Anhalt (20,8%), Thüringen (23,4%), Brandenburg (23,5%), and Sachsen (27,5%). This is consistent with the results of the elections for the 19th Bundestag on 24 September 2017, in which one could see almost identical figures in East Germany. The significance of this can hardly be doubted since the similarity of the East German votes during the state elections with those for the German Bundestag election suggests that the AfD has been able to secure the loyalty of a large voter base. This feat was repeated in the West German states to a certain degree. The last state elections in 2021 saw the AfD come to terms with a loss of voters of 2.3%. Four years earlier, in the 2017 federal elections, the AfD became the third-largest party in the Bundestag with 12,6% of the vote, which was a

7,9% improvement from the 18th Bundestag elections in 2013 and thereby became the first serious contender the CDU/CSU has ever had on its right side. But this would not have been the first time a party had exploited a theme that was getting huge public attention only to crumble into dust once the collective mind had moved on to other matters. The Pirate Party Germany was flying during the late 2000s and is less than a footnote now. Is this different? According to Butterwegge, there is little evidence to speak of that would indicate such a decline is imminent.¹⁸ The gap in representation on the right of the CDU/CSU has been there for a long time. “*Zuwanderung*” (immigration) is and will continue to be the core theme of the party, and although the AfD may still be in the process of finding its footing in areas the established parties have clear positions on, it is not a one-theme party. Political ideas have had since the Weimar era to define and redefine themselves, and as such, there is a rather broad ideological foundation on which the party can base its positions. The last elections have, as illustrated, shown the opposite of a decline: a solidification of the AfD as a force in Germany’s parliaments.

The Voters

So, who are the voters who helped the AfD rise and secure its position as an established force to be reckoned with in German politics? And what are their motives? Vote and motive research has shown that the AfD voter base is quite heterogenous both socially and politically. The Bundestag election of 2017 did showcase an impressive AfD voter-heist from the established parties. The CDU lost almost a million voters, the SPD close to 470,000, and Die Linke around 400,000. Including the 50,000 ex-FDP and 40,000 ex-Green voters (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) reveals a voter migration worth almost two million in the AfD’s favor. This means that those people were voting for a very wide range of political parties with opposing positions before changing sides. The voter base of the AfD comes mainly, unlike the party’s program, from the very center of society. It consists of workers (21%), the unemployed (22%), and people with a lower to middle level of education (16%), but also those regarded as “*Besserverdienende*” (people on a higher income). Men vote AfD more often than women, and this is especially the case for middle-aged men. The AfD’s staggering growth in East Germany can mainly be attributed to voters from industrial regions living in poorer neighborhoods and rural regions who have been

¹⁸ Ibid. Also see Christoph Butterwegge *Rechtspopulisten im Parlament* (Frankfurt am Main: Westend Verlag, 2018).

experiencing a socio-economic decline in their prospects for the future. In general, the AfD prospers in areas with a large unemployment rate, a negligible presence of foreigners, and a low concentration of the highly educated. The established parties also had to come to terms with the AfD being able to mobilize ca. 1,2 million non-voters who could not be convinced by their own messages.

The perceived threat of globalization undermining the national community leading to a climate of socio-economic uncertainty where one experiences being on the verge of descending down the social ladder is the predominant motive of the average AfD voter. Where is my safety net? How will I work in a world that is changing faster and faster? This couples well with the imagined dystopian idea of a future where people wake up one day to an unrecognizable nation where they no longer have a place due to the “*Willkommenskultur*” (welcoming culture – a positive attitude and acceptance toward foreigners and migrants), with too many foreign bodies having been accepted into the nation’s organism. This concern for one’s culture grows on the fertile ground of disappointment and distrust toward parliamentary democracy, its representatives, and the media, and when it blossoms, the results are misanthropy and a longing for a homogenous society with a clear national identity. International agreements, multinational corporations, and the processes of globalization are seen as threats to the economic sovereignty of the nation-state. National security is perceived to be in a weakened state with “open” borders and liberal immigration policies that have “invited” crime and especially Islamic terror into people’s homes. The transition from here to right-wing extremism is a short one, and perhaps it is therefore unsurprising that places where the NPD was dominant now vote AfD.

The Party

The AfD has been using Parliament to propose motions, set forth petitions, and draft legislation on behalf of the worried and pessimistic AfD voter. It is possible to divide these into several themes, but we will limit ourselves here to migration and domestic politics. The migration theme will be covered by looking at the communal workings of the AfD in Hessen.

The total number of proposed motions and petitions regarding refugees and migrants number around 100 in Hessen. About ten inquiries were dedicated to asking about the number of refugees and asylum seekers and their gender, age, origin, and religious affiliation. Of particular interest were lone traveling men and the young, their accommodation, and integrational measures like language courses. More than 30 proposed motions and petitions followed up on these with

questions regarding how much all this costs. The gist of these was that accommodation, nourishment, medical attention, schools, and the wages of those working with the refugees and asylum seekers do not pay for themselves. Why, then, do the federal state and the federal government not pay the commune's bill, or at least support the commune financially in this? Also, it was alleged that the transparency concerning the costs of having refugees and asylum seekers is inadequate, and consequently the citizens are being kept in the dark about what their hard-earned money is being spent on. This lack of transparency also applies regarding exactly who these new neighbors are. If criminal offenders who have stolen and used violence are living in the asylum center, or if there are rejected asylum seekers who are still getting social support, then the residents of the commune should be informed about this.

Nine proposed motions and petitions were about juvenile refugees. The AfD wished to know specifically how many boys and girls were being accommodated and what methods were being deployed in determining the juveniles' age. Doubts regarding the authenticity of their passports and the stated age were raised. In fact, as there have been incidents in several federal states where some refugees have faked their identities in order to increase their benefits and social services, the AfD has demanded an end to benefit fraud. Furthermore, on four occasions, the AfD proposed freezing the admission of refugees and the immediate deportation of illegal immigrants. Refugees from war-ravaged countries would return to their countries once the fighting has ceased but would be granted assistance in the meantime. It is worth delving deeper into this topic by taking a closer look at the motion "*Familiennachzug verhindern*" (Preventing family reunification) that was proposed by the AfD administrative district of Groß-Gerau in Hessen during a session on 15 May 2017.

Since the start of the asylum-seeking flood during the late summer of 2015, 3,586 "refugees" have entered the area of the district of Groß-Gerau [as of the end of 2016]; this year, the district authority expects, according to statements of the first district delegate Walter Astheimer, about another 1,000 asylum-seekers. The amount of those asylum-seekers who are recognized refugees is estimated to be just about 1,500. Those with that title have the right to the so-called family reunification . . . In the context of *Asylpakets II* (Asylum Package II) of March 2016, it was decided that those entitled to refuge after March 2018 do not have the right to demand family reunification. Due to the current strained living space situation, unrestrained family reunification after April 2018 would further aggravate the "refugee" situation. The district-faction of Alternative for Germany calls . . . to further extend the delay of family reunification beyond March 2018.¹⁹

¹⁹ AfD Groß-Gerau, "Antrag: Familiennachzug verhindern," May 15, 2017. <https://gg.afd-hessen.org/rede-zum-afd-antrag-familiennachzug-verhindern-video-kommentar/>.

Domestic politics is the second-biggest theme the AfD devotes its attention to after migration. In the first year after the Bundestag elections of 2017, the AfD managed to propose eight motions and set forth 41 petitions. The theme of migration is connected to the domestic politics theme because if the AfD's vision of an ethnically homogenous nation, an authoritarian-governed nation-state, and the "reformation" of the EU's immigration policies is to be realized, it needs to start domestically. The AfD's domestic initiatives can be arranged into three groups: the menace of the Islamic fundamentalist terror, the threat of crime by migrants in particular, and attempts to counter and discredit initiatives against right-wing extremism and racism. Of these, we will cover the first and the second. As previously mentioned, the looming threat due to globalization and neoliberal modernization is very real for a significant part of the population. The right manages to direct those fears and worries toward those who personify all that which changes too fast: the migrant. The migrant, in turn, is represented by the established parties who are agents of radical change and "*Völkervermischung*" (the intermixing of nations). Their agenda is to estrange the nation from its own culture and replace the void with cosmopolitanism. By definition, those who work toward this estrangement of the *Volk* are "*Volksverräter*" (traitors to the nation), and consequently, Parliament needs a thorough clean-up. The historically interested reader will recognize this type of political rhetoric and marking of enemies from the days of the Weimar Republic. The purpose is the same: to give a credible but also easy explanation of who is to blame for your troubles and to convince you to support the only party that seems to be willing to solve them.

This works because the worries and fears of the voters are based upon real events and currents in time. Islamic terror has been present in many people's lives following 9/11 in one way or another. Consider, for instance, the attack on the Christmas market in Berlin in 2016, where the radicalized Moroccan Anis Amri drove a semi-trailer truck straight toward the people present there.²⁰ Eleven people died and 45 were injured, of whom 30 were severely injured. The truck belonged to a Polish citizen, who was found dead on the vehicle's front passenger seat by the police. The next day (20 December), the Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the attack and called Amri a soldier of their state. It is not clear whether the IS orchestrated this assault or not, but we can be certain

²⁰ Kai Biermann et al., "Was wir über den Anschlag in Berlin wissen," *Die Zeit*, December 19, 2016. <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2016-12/berlin-breitscheidplatz-ge-daechtniskirche-weihnachtsmarkt>.

that it was meant to undermine the citizens' sense of security and teach them to fear the "true" disciples of Islam.

The most significant example of a crime committed by foreigners in public memory happened on New Year's Eve in Cologne in 2015.²¹ Around 1,000 men and women peacefully celebrating the occasion became victims of various crimes inside the city's train station and the square around it. Threats, humiliations, and robberies were carried out against those present, but worst of all was the sexual abuse, which in some cases led to rape, to which more than 600 women were subjected. The subsequent investigation discovered that the suspected perpetrators mostly came from Algeria and Morocco. The police force, who are supposed to guarantee the security of those who participate in public events, were hopelessly outnumbered that night and failed in their task. In response to those terrible events and the criticism that ensued, the federal state government of Nordrhein-Westfalen passed the 15-Point-Package. It promised more surveillance and more personnel to avoid similar occurrences in the future, a central refuge for the victims of the New Year's Eve incident, and faster legal proceedings and criminal prosecution. The measures were certainly meant to demonstrate the state government's capacity to act, but since the damage had already been done, it seemed to be a case of "*Schadensbegrenzung*" (damage limitation). Damage, in this case, is understood as a significant shift in public opinion regarding the government's migration policy, and the AfD used the events to prove that they have been right about refugees all along.

This criticism also manifested itself in the AfD's draft legislation "Schutz der Bevölkerung vor ausländischen Gefährdern" (Protection of the public from potentially dangerous foreigners). The draft proposes an obligation for all migrants with a deportation order to report in. The authorities should also have the option to jail foreigners who pose a serious risk to domestic security or the lives of third parties until their deportation has been completed. The thoughts conglomerated into this draft are based upon the notion that foreigners with a deportation order do not have any reason to remain obedient to the law and are therefore more prone to violence. Which authority determines who those potentially dangerous foreigners are and how they decide this remains vague. The draft legislation was unsurprisingly deemed unconstitutional, but it gives valuable insights into what might materialize if right-wing populists were to come to power.

21 "Silvesternacht 2015 in Köln," *Land.NRW*, May 25, 2016. <https://www.land.nrw/de/silvesternacht-koeln-landesregierung-traegt-konsequent-zur-transparenten-aufarbeitung-der-ereignisse>.

Expanding the Property Line? The AfD before the Bundestag elections of 2021

The AfD has become the strongest opposition party in Germany with 89 mandates in the Bundestag, more than 35,000 members, almost 6,9 million votes at the last Bundestag election, and representation in every federal state parliament. In other words, we have seen that the AfD is doing quite well for itself. Nobody expects the AfD to simply disappear, but whether the party can repeat its successes remains to be seen. We will now take a closer look at what strategies are winning the right-wing populists' support and what is currently hampering further growth.

Four AfD state associations have been placed under suspicion by the “Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz” (BfV, Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution). The AfD factions in the East German states of Brandenburg, Thüringen, Sachsen-Anhalt, and Sachsen are suspected of being unconstitutional and have therefore been placed under surveillance.²² The BfV sorts such cases into three categories. Firstly, it inspects whether there are enough grounds to justify surveillance. The next stage is the suspicion of unconstitutionality, in which case the BfV is permitted to surveil the group/individual. Lastly, once there is no longer any doubt of an extremist endeavor, the BfV classifies the group/individual as an “assured extremist endeavor.” In this case, the mentioned state factions of the AfD are in stage 2; the AfD, after being briefly in stage 2, is now only being inspected (stage 1); and the right-wing extremist wing of the AfD that has now supposedly been dissolved was classified as an “assured right-wing extremist endeavor” (stage 3). In response to all the negative attention the AfD received, the campaign “Gemeinsam für das Grundgesetz” (United for the Constitution) was launched to renew the public's faith in the AfD being devoted to the constitution. The attempt to distract from the BfV's observation was not met with any enthusiasm internally or externally. The coronavirus pandemic dominated the public discourse, and the inner power struggle between those who were trying to stop the AfD's further radicalization and those who embraced it kept escalating. Jörg Meuthen, the first of the two chairmen of the party, sacrificed one of the figureheads of the extremist right wing of the AfD – Andreas Kalbitz – in order to avoid the BfV's judgment. As Meuthen himself is economically liberal but socio-politically conservative and therefore part of the

²² “AfD unter Beobachtung – kostet das Wählerstimmen?” *MDR*, March 4, 2021. <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/deutschland/politik/afd-verdachtsfall-verfassungsschutz-wahlen-100.html>; Christoph Kehlbach and Frank Bräutigam, “Unter Beobachtung – was heißt das?” *ARD – Tagesschau*, March 3, 2021. <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/faq-afd-101.html>.

moderates, he was worried about the AfD losing its bourgeois appeal, so he acted and won a pyrrhic victory. The AfD's current top parliamentary candidates, Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel, and its parliamentary leader Alexander Gauland are aware of how important the radical positions of Björn Höcke and Andreas Kalbitz are to the voters in East Germany. Their positions are hence to preserve the party at all costs in order to reach the AfD's entire voter potential, since a split between the moderate right-wing populists and the radical right-wing populists would result in neither part doing well, thereby ruining the AfD brand. Conciliatory tones could be heard in public from all parties involved. The radicals around Höcke were out for revenge, though, and brought up the huge donation irregularities surrounding the federal state election in Baden-Württemberg in 2016, where Meuthen ran, in order to undermine his already shaky position even more and to avoid him becoming their candidate once more. In this, they succeeded, which in turn meant a further diminishing of the moderate Meuthen's influence, and further conflict with Gauland resulted in Meuthen quitting the party after the elections in 2021. Interestingly, the voter base of the AfD only showed their annoyance at their representatives' dispute and would rather have seen them cease their bickering. The AfD will probably not lose any votes in East Germany but may struggle in West Germany if the BfV decides to surveil the party. The anger toward the system in the east, due to voters feeling that they have not received what was promised, would ensure they see the actions of the BfV as just another play by the system. The West German voters, however, are more concerned about appearing "*bürgerlich-konservativ*" (bourgeois-conservative). Therefore, many would not be willing to place themselves outside the democratic playing field. Luckily for the AfD, that scenario was temporarily avoided, especially since close to two-thirds of its voters come from the West despite the high percentage successes of its East German followers in their respective federal states. The AfD has, as we know, expanded by using opportune events to express Eurocriticism in the aftermath of the financial crisis and the refugee crisis, as those events helped the party to accentuate the shortcomings and powerlessness of the ruling parties. The environmental crisis is now being used by the AfD to position itself as the only party not being a victim of the so-called "climate hysteria" created by the red-green zeitgeist. The party speaks of the "hypothesis of man-made climate change" but does not deny that Earth is warming. Instead, the sun is blamed, which marks the party's position as that of the climate skeptics. Positions such as these are having less trouble reaching the public, as the rise of social media is better suited to the provocative nature of the AfD than to the established parties. Nonetheless, once the discourse moved onto the pandemic, the AfD lost support in the polls as all attention was directed toward those in charge of countering the coronavirus. The radicals who usually support the party were left to their own devices, and the AfD seemed torn between supporting those "*Querdenker*"

demonstrations against the “corona dictatorship” or leaving the ruling parties to handle the pandemic. After a while, however, the AfD managed to position itself as the champion of individual rights and the rule of law that fights against the attempts of the surveillance state to force masks, vaccines, and the nationwide Corona-Warn-App upon its citizens. The insecurity that came with the pandemic is very fertile ground for populism to grow upon, and the party has at last been able to connect the pandemic to familiar themes like Eurocriticism, the open borders that come with globalization, and the fear of losing one’s job to the circumstances a foreign virus created. The AfD is therefore in good shape to take advantage of the pandemic in the run-up to the Bundestag elections in 2021.

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Britt Leake

13 The Positive Role of Islam in Indian History and Nehru's *The Discovery of India*

In August 1942, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) returned to prison for the ninth and final time, beginning a nearly three-year stay at Ahmednagar jail, during which he was largely cut off from the convulsions that were shaking India and the entire world. Yet prison was not without its benefits. Prison, for instance, gave him time to reflect and indulge in his passion for gardening. Above all, however, it was an opportunity for him to read and write away from the hectic chaos of the Indian independence movement or, later, of leading the world's largest democracy. During his time as India's prime minister – a post he would hold from the time of independence in 1947 until his death in 1964 – he would remark, only half-jokingly, that he wished that he were still dispatched to jail to read and write more.¹ Supplied with books by friends and family, he read an eclectic combination of literature, history, and philosophy in prison. He read Plato, Henry David Thoreau, Marcel Proust, Henri Bergson, Friedrich Nietzsche, and the 19th-century Hindu reformer Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), as well as works on Indian history, including Edward Thompson's *The Making of the Indian Princes*, *The Cambridge History of India*, and Henry Elliot's *The History of India*, a translated collection of medieval Persian accounts of Indian history.² Prevented from taking part in Indian politics in the present, Nehru pondered India's past as well as its future and drew from his readings to consider the meaning of India's past. The product of his reflections on India during his time at Ahmednagar was his third and final book, *The Discovery of India*. In it, Nehru grappled with a basic question: What is India? And what defines it as a nation?

Many dismissed the idea that an Indian nation had ever existed. "India," Winston Churchill once sarcastically remarked, is simply "a geographical term. It is no more a united nation than the Equator."³ British imperialists found in

1 Sunil Khilnani, "Introduction," in Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2010), xix.

2 Ibid., xxi-ii. In particular, Bergson's *Creative Evolution* had a profound impact on Nehru's view of history, leading him to view creative cultural syncretism as the defining characteristic of Indian history.

3 Winston Churchill, *India: Speeches and an Introduction* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1931), 136.

this view a useful excuse for continuing their rule over the subcontinent, and they saw the Raj as the only glue holding the lands of the Indian subcontinent together. By seeking to “discover” the Indian nation and define it, Nehru was attempting to put together a historical narrative of Indian history to undergird the idea of a cohesive Indian nation – a nation that was to be soon represented by an independent Indian state. Hence, although *The Discovery of India* does not advance any specific political program for India, it is nonetheless a fundamentally political work. If nations are fundamentally imagined political communities, as the historian Benedict Anderson has persuasively argued, Nehru’s goal in writing *The Discovery of India* becomes clear. Out of the immense ethnic and religious diversity of the Indian subcontinent, Nehru sought to imagine a united Indian nation into being.⁴

This attempt to imagine an Indian nation did not mean papering over differences among Indians, be they cultural, religious, or linguistic. Indeed, it was its diverse mosaic of peoples and influences that defined India for Nehru. The India imagined by Nehru in *The Discovery of India* is characterized by a syncretic culture of tolerance and openness that embraced a variety of influences – peoples, cultures, languages, and faiths – that on the surface appear to be vastly different. The treatment of one particular part of this syncretic culture, Islam and India’s Muslim minority more generally,⁵ stands out among the writings of other Hindu figures in the Indian nationalist movement. Throughout *The Discovery of India*, Nehru sought to emphasize that Islam is (or at least became) an authentically Indian religion, even if it emerged outside the Indian subcontinent. He also tried to underline the positive influence that Islam exercised on India and the myriad ways Muslims have contributed to India throughout the centuries. At the same time, he also attempted to portray problematic Muslim figures in Indian history as not representing the true, fundamentally tolerant spirit of Islam. Nehru’s vision of India’s past was particularly novel because of his argument that Islam is inherently democratic and tolerant and that it had become an inextricable part of Indian culture through the intellectual, artistic, and cultural currents it created or revitalized.

⁴ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016).

⁵ At the time of the 1901 British Indian census – which included contemporary India as well as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Burma – Hindus made up 70% of the population, while Muslims made up roughly 20%. After the partition of the Indian subcontinent and the creation of Pakistan in 1947, Hindus made up 85%, while India’s Muslim minority dwindled to 10%. Today, those figures are roughly 80% and 15%, respectively.

Nehru's vision of the relationship between India and Islam provided a subtle but firm rebuke to Muslim separatists as well as Hindu nationalists who argued that Muslims had no place in a Hindu-majority India. Nehru's attempt to emphasize the critical role Muslims have in the Indian nation was an attempt to build a non-exclusivist Indian nationalism that would permit Indians to reconcile overlapping identities. Nehru's goal was to allow Indians to be peaceably Hindu or Muslim while maintaining a common attachment to an Indian nation open and generous enough to encompass them all. At a time when populist Hindu nationalist forces seek to undo Indian secularism and reduce Indian Muslims to second-class citizens in their own country, it is worth looking back at the project that Nehru undertook in *The Discovery of India*. Narendra Modi, India's Hindu nationalist prime minister, likely loathes Nehru more than any other figure in contemporary Indian history precisely because he showed that nationalism does not have to be of the resentment-driven exclusionary Hindu nationalist variety. Modi has gone out of his way to diminish Nehru and tarnish his reputation since becoming prime minister in a way that he has not used to target any other historical Indian political figure.⁶ It is not difficult to understand why Modi finds Nehru so threatening. Rather than letting the Hindu nationalist right monopolize Indian nationalism, Nehru sought to claim Indian nationalism for the secular left, creating a narrative built around tolerance and pluralism that, in his view, reflected the true meaning of India's past.

⁶ For example, he has diminished Nehru's role in India's democratic consolidation, saying before Parliament that "India did not become a democracy just because of Nehru, as Congress would have us believe" (7 February 2018). Moreover, he has blamed Nehru – a champion of Hindu-Muslim coexistence – for the partition of India and the ensuing violence inflicted on Hindus fleeing Pakistan, saying in another speech before Parliament that "because of someone's [i.e., Nehru's] ambition to become prime minister, a line was drawn over India and the country was divided. After partition, the way Hindus, Sikhs, and other minorities were persecuted, oppressed, and coerced in Pakistan cannot even be imagined" (6 February 2020). Besides this oblique reference, he explicitly mentioned Nehru by name twenty-one times in the same speech, which was ostensibly meant to present the government's budget for the year. Analysts have noted Modi's fixation on Nehru, with one writing that "in the same way that Trump seems bent on undoing Barack Obama's signature achievements, Modi seems obsessed with Nehru." Meena Ahamed, "Modi is Pretending to be Gandhi's Heir. He's the Exact Opposite," *Washington Post*, February 21, 2020.

The Historical Context of *The Discovery of India*

As Nehru sat in his cell in Ahmednagar jail, his vision of India seemed to become an increasingly remote and distant dream. In the years leading up to the Second World War, the two-nation theory – the idea that Hindus and Muslims constitute two separate and distinct nations and should have separate states in the Indian subcontinent – grew in popularity. Led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), the All-India Muslim League, a party claiming to represent the interests of Indian Muslims that had grown to become the leading opposition force to Nehru’s Indian National Congress (INC), increasingly agitated for the partition of India and the creation of an independent state for South Asian Muslims called Pakistan.⁷ By the end of 1942, Nehru and most of the Congress leadership were in prison for their role in the Quit India movement that demanded an immediate British withdrawal from India. Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), the *de facto* leader of the INC and an extremely close mentor and friend of Nehru, had started the Quit India movement in August 1942 by calling for non-violent resistance to British rule after the failure of British attempts to secure Indian support for the Allied war effort. The Muslim League, which supported the British, used the absence of major Congress leaders to build its strength, and it managed to form governments in Bengal and the Northwest Frontier Province in April 1943.⁸ During a 1944 meeting between Gandhi and Jinnah, Gandhi promised a plebiscite for Muslims on remaining in India. This proposal simultaneously made Jinnah appear to be the legitimate representative of Indian Muslims and weakened more moderate figures in the Muslim League who might have been more amenable to a one-state solution.⁹

Yet the challenge to Nehru’s vision of India did not only come from Muslims agitating for independence but also from Hindus as well. Even within the INC, a nominally secular party for all Indians, certain figures, such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920), had called for uniting different sects of Hindus “into a mighty Hindu nation” and said that such “ought to be the ambition of every Hindu.”¹⁰ He lamented the loss of unity when India was a “self-contained country” during Vedic (i.e., pre-Islamic) times and called for the restoration of the

7 Alex Von Tunzelmann, *Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire* (New York: Picador, 2007), 249.

8 Christophe Jaffrelot, *Le syndrome pakistanais* (Paris: Fayard, 2013), 43.

9 Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi: The Years That Changed the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 711.

10 Bal Gangadhar Tilak, “Yearning for a Hindu Nation,” in *Indian Nationalism: The Essential Writings*, ed. S. Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Aleph, 2017), 48.

“unity” of the Vedic era.¹¹ Outside the INC, Hindu nationalist groups such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) adopted similar ideas and explicitly directed them against Muslims. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966), a member of the RSS whose formulation of *Hindutva* (Hinduness) became the ideological foundation of the Hindu right in India, argued that those whose holy land was outside India (i.e., Muslims and Christians) were possible fifth columns and could not be trusted to put the interests of India first because of their supposed foreign allegiances.¹² The RSS has also been involved in anti-Muslim militancy since its inception, attempting to spark conflicts between Hindus and Muslims throughout the Indian subcontinent.¹³ Another prominent RSS leader, M.S. Golwalkar (1906–1973), declared that to remain in India, non-Hindus “must either adopt Hindu culture and language, must learn and respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion . . . in other words they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country, wholly subjugated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizen’s rights.”¹⁴ (These Hindu nationalists, it should be noted, are the ideological ancestors of today’s governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its right-wing populist prime minister, Narendra Modi.) It was against this backdrop of growing Muslim separatism and Hindu majoritarianism that Nehru wrote *The Discovery of India*.

Nehru’s goal in writing *The Discovery of India* was to give the nascent Indian nation a sense of its identity. Nehru viewed the rise of nationalism in India as a healthy development because he saw in it a powerful force that would give Indians “a sense of common living and common purpose” and would encourage them to help bring an end to the Raj.¹⁵ Yet *The Discovery of India* took an approach to nationalism that is noticeably different from many other contemporary nationalist works both in India and elsewhere in the world.

Nehru realized that forging a sense of national identity that included the diverse myriad of groups residing in the Indian subcontinent would be extremely difficult. Nevertheless, he saw that doing so was necessary to protect India’s rich cultural tapestry from being torn apart by factionalism. Sunil Khilnani points out that among works of modern nationalism, “*The Discovery of India* is unusual in its refusal of exclusivist habits of mind, whether territorial

11 Ibid.

12 Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 2.

13 Ibid., 73.

14 M.S. Golwalkar, *We, or Our Nation Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan, 1947), 55–56.

15 Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2010), 44.

or cultural, as well as in its sustained cool reflective tone.”¹⁶ The question for Nehru was not one of purifying India but rather of how to unite “utterly different groups in one social system, each group co-operating with the whole and yet retaining its own freedom to live its own life and develop itself.”¹⁷ He dwelled on the nations of Europe, with its nationalist ideologies that excluded those who did not fall within the linguistic and ethnic majority of a country, and the United States, with its severe racial inequality, as examples for India to avoid. Nehru was aware of the exclusionary precedents set by previous nationalist movements, and his determination to harness the unifying power of nationalism while minimizing its potential to divide is manifest throughout *The Discovery of India*. To break with exclusivist visions of the Indian nation, Nehru sought to create a narrative of the cultural syncretism and synthesis that, for him, defined India’s past. He claimed that while “a dream of unity has occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilization,” this unity was never a form of standardization imposed from above but instead was characterized by the tolerance and encouragement of different beliefs.¹⁸

Given the rapid rise of Hindu and Muslim nationalism as he was writing in prison, Nehru almost assuredly felt an extra degree of urgency in his project. Indeed, reading *The Discovery of India*, one can sense how deeply Nehru felt about the unity of India, which he described as not merely an abstract “intellectual conception” but rather as “an emotional experience which overpowered me.”¹⁹ Despite India’s often dizzying diversity, he felt that “everywhere there was that tremendous impress of oneness, which had held all of us together for ages past, whatever political fate or misfortune had befallen us.”²⁰ His passion is particularly visible in one of the most famous passages in *The Discovery of India*, in which Nehru described India as

some ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously. All of these existed in our conscious or subconscious selves, though we may not have been aware of them, and they had gone to build up the complex and mysterious personality of India.²¹

¹⁶ Khilnani, “Introduction,” xxi.

¹⁷ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 270.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

For Nehru, India was thus one, as reflected by the single palimpsest, and yet it simultaneously bore the traces of successive layers of external influences and internal changes over the course of thousands of years. For Nehru, India was defined by its ability to absorb new influences and undergo transformations while remaining fundamentally the same nation.

In an example of the lack of exclusivism that Khilnani mentions, Nehru embraced the layers of change and external influences that had shaped India through the ages, rejecting all notions of racial, ethnic, or religious purity. Nehru believed that this process of continuous mixing was particularly relevant in the case of India, and he discussed at length the successive waves of peoples – Aryans, Dravidians, Turks, Semites,²² and Mongols – who migrated to India and found a home there.²³ Nowhere was this absorption of outside influences and cultural synthesis more relevant than it was in Nehru’s treatment of the role of Islam and Muslims in Indian history.

The Positive Impact of Islam and Muslims on India

Discussing the Muslim conquests of northern India while almost assuredly also thinking about India under the British, Nehru wrote in *The Discovery of India* that “a foreign conquest, with all its evils, has one advantage: it widens the mental horizon of the people and compels them to look out of their shells. They realize that the world is a much bigger and more variegated place than they had imagined.”²⁴ Nehru extolled the “brilliant culture” of the first Arab Muslim conquerors and praised “their vast energy from the dynamic and revolutionary character of their Prophet and his message of human brotherhood.”²⁵ Even nearly a decade earlier in *Glimpses of World History*, Nehru had praised Islam for its “flavor of democracy and equality” and for “put[ting] an end to many old abuses.”²⁶ The radical change Islam brought to India was “vitality and an

²² Nehru references Jews a couple of times in passing but does not really discuss them in depth. He makes far more references to Arabs and dedicates several pages to them, so I have to presume he is largely (but not exclusively) talking about Arabs. The term “Semite” used here is Nehru’s wording on the page cited below (see note 23), not my own choice.

²³ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 278.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 242–243.

²⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2004), 168.

impulse for progress in a society which was becoming wholly unprogressive.”²⁷ Reflecting on the decline of India before the Muslim conquest of North India, Nehru remarked that Indian civilization had decayed from the inside long before the arrival of Islam and that India needed a new stimulus to awaken it from its lethargy. Islam provided that stimulus by “unbinding the fetters of the intellect and releasing fresh energy” into Indian society.²⁸

One of the key ways in which Nehru argued that Islam improved India was by calling into question the inequalities and injustices embedded in Hinduism. Islam made apparent the deep inequalities of Hindu society, such as the petrified caste system and untouchability. Islam, Nehru noted, with its message of the brotherhood and equality of all believers, was particularly attractive to Hindus who were the victims of the injustices and humiliations of the caste system. Islam’s egalitarian spirit logically led to a massive wave of conversions, especially in lower castes. Nehru underscored, however, that a fair number of individuals from upper castes also converted, either because of genuine faith or because of more material, pragmatic concerns.^{29,30}

In any case, Nehru observed, “from this ideological impact grew up various movements aiming at a religious synthesis.”³¹ Throughout India, the collision of Hinduism and Islam created a new intellectual ferment in India, as the country reacted to and absorbed ideas brought by Muslims to the subcontinent. This transformation pushed India in a more progressive direction, creating a hospitable environment for the emergence of religious reformers who were proponents of religious synthesis and condemned the injustices of the caste system. Nehru listed some of India’s greatest social and religious reformers and free-thinkers who embodied the synthesis of Islamic and Hindu ideas, including Ramanand (~1300–1380 to ~1400–1475), Kabir (1398–1448 or 1440–1518), and Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the founder of Sikhism. Even more crucially, instead of only influencing their co-religionists, “the influence of these reformers went

27 Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 242.

28 *Ibid.*, 284.

29 *Ibid.*, 286.

30 There is extremely little data, however, because most of these conversions took place long before this kind of data was being collected. While precise figures for these conversions are not available, the details that we do have are telling. An 1872 British census of Bengal – the only region outside of the western flank of the Indian subcontinent to have a Muslim majority – reported that 70.4% of Bengali Muslims came from formerly non-Muslim families that had converted to Islam. Of that 70.4%, 70% were formerly lower-caste Hindus, compared to only 30% for upper-caste Hindus and Buddhists. MD Shah Noorur Rahaman, “Islam and its early introduction in Bengal,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 56 (1995): 433.

31 Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 286.

far beyond the limits of the particular sects that grew up after them,” leading to an exchange of ideas that served to highlight shortcomings in the religious practices of each community.³² All of India’s religions, including Islam, felt the impact of this synthesis which moderated and reformed them. Observing the reciprocal nature of the intellectual exchange between religions, Nehru noted that at the same time that the monotheism of Islam influenced Hinduism, the pantheism of Hinduism influenced the practice of Islam in South Asia, especially because most Indian Muslims converted from Hinduism. In particular, Hinduism’s devotional and mystic traditions paved the way for the rapid spread of Sufism and Islamic mysticism throughout the subcontinent.³³

Presenting a contrasting image to that of the intolerant Muslim zealot ruler peddled by Hindu nationalists, Nehru sought to emphasize in *The Discovery of India* the degree to which this cultural synthesis took place because of the support of Muslim rulers. This cultural synthesis did not just take place in one Muslim state but was a broader trend over the course of several centuries. Citing one of many examples, Nehru mentioned the Jaunpur Sultanate, which became a cultural and artistic center whose rulers encouraged the development of Hindustani, with its blend of Perso-Arabic and Sanskrit words, as well as attempts to bring Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs closer together. In Kashmir, a Muslim monarch, Zain-ul-Abidin (1395–1470), was famous for his tolerance of Hindus and his interest in preserving Sanskrit texts and the pre-Islamic Hindu culture of the region.³⁴ Yet of the various Muslim rulers who promoted this cultural synthesis, Nehru reserved his greatest praise for the man he referred to as the father of Indian nationalism, the Mughal emperor Akbar (1542–1605).

Akbar incarnated the spirit of India for Nehru more than almost any other figure discussed in *The Discovery of India*. As Nehru wrote, “in him the old dream of a united India again took shape, united not only politically in one state but organically fused into one people.”³⁵ Akbar not only respected other religions but went as far as marrying a Rajput princess, and thus his son and successor, Jehangir (1569–1627), was ethnically half-Rajput. Jehangir also married a Rajput princess, and thus his son, Shah Jahan (1592–1666), was ethnically more Rajput than Turco-Mongol. For Nehru, this practice of intermarriage in the Mughal Empire underscored the extent to which the Mughals shed their foreignness and integrated into the fabric of Indian society.³⁶ Indeed, the power of the Mughals

32 Ibid., 262.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 279.

36 Ibid.

depended on close cooperation with the Hindu Rajputs. The cooperation between them not only involved governmental affairs but also seeped into art and culture. The Mughal elite became increasingly Indian over time while the Rajputs absorbed influences from Persian culture brought by the Mughals, thus continuing the blending and fusion of Hindu and Islamic cultures.³⁷ The result of Akbar's policy of toleration and synthesis was, in Nehru's eyes, an unqualified success, "for he created a sense of oneness among the diverse elements of north and central India," realizing that dream of unity in diversity that was at the core of Nehru's reading of India's history.³⁸

Akbar's reign also saw an intellectual renaissance that was defined by the toleration of different beliefs and the encouragement of debate and synthesis. Nehru described Akbar's court as "a meeting place for men of all faiths and all who had some new idea or new invention," even when doing so irritated the conservative Muslim establishment, the *'ulama*. In a sign of just how committed he was to blending Hindu and Islamic ideas, he attempted to found a new religion, the Din-i Ilahi, which borrowed heavily from Islam and Hinduism but also included elements taken from Jainism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. Because of his balanced, fair, and open rule, Nehru claimed, Akbar was equally popular among Hindus and Muslims, and his policies favored the deepening of a common, syncretic culture shared by both groups. It was thus during his reign that the Mughals, a foreign Muslim dynasty, "became firmly established as India's own."³⁹ Writing in *Glimpses of World History*, Nehru went so far as to say that because of his commitment to creating a united India out of its immense diversity, Akbar could even be considered the father of Indian nationalism – a version of nationalism built around tolerance and an amalgamation of different cultural influences. At a moment when religion was the central fault line in Indian society, "Akbar deliberately placed the ideal of a common Indian nationhood above the claims of separatist religion."⁴⁰ While Akbar was certainly not a democrat (Nehru once called him "the very essence of authoritarianism"), Nehru found in him a useful figure in whom he could anchor his eclectic, democratic, pluralistic nationalism in India's past.⁴¹ His reign embodied the reasons for which Nehru thought that Islam and Muslims had enriched Indian society and had become an integral part of an indivisible Indian nation.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 291.

³⁹ Ibid., 280.

⁴⁰ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, 356–357.

⁴¹ Ibid., 361.

Even should Hindus and Muslims want to separate from each other, the eclectic culture that was born of the interaction between them was impossible to disaggregate because of India's tendency to create indelible unity out of diverse influences, a tendency illustrated by Nehru's palimpsest metaphor. Nehru noted that those who came to India with religions born outside of the Indian subcontinent integrated quickly, and within a few generations, their families were culturally distinctively Indian.⁴² He also observed that Christians and Muslims who had arrived in India adjusted to Indian culture and became Indian without converting to a religion born in India.⁴³ Thus, in this tacit but firm rebuke of Hindu nationalist ideas, Nehru argued that cultural markers of Indianness – which are not the same as adherence to a Dharmic religion – are what matters in determining whether one is Indian, not where one's ancestors or one's religion came from. Furthermore, compounding this problem for Hindu nationalists, the vast majority of Indian Muslims were descendants of local converts from Hinduism. These Muslims never ceased being Indian simply because they had changed their religion, as their culture, language, and worldview largely remained the same.⁴⁴ Due to the conversion of many Hindus to Islam and the continuous interaction between Hindus and Muslims, both religious groups “developed numerous common traits, habits, ways of living and artistic tastes . . . in music, painting, architecture, food, clothes, and common traditions.”⁴⁵ Far away from the battles of the elites, Muslims and Hindus “lived together peacefully as one people,” speaking the same languages, sharing the same culture, attending each other's festivals, and dealing with the same economic challenges.⁴⁶ Thus, according to Nehru, the abstract notion that Hindus and Muslims are two peoples, as claimed both by Hindu and Muslim ideologues, is not borne out by the religious and cultural synthesis visible in the lives of ordinary Indians. Nehru shared this vision with other defenders of a pluralistic India, such as the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941).⁴⁷

One of the most visible products of the interaction between Islamic civilization and pre-Islamic Indian civilization is Indo-Islamic architecture, which blended Indian and Persian influences, producing some of India's most beautiful buildings and monuments in cities such as Delhi and Agra. The most notable example of Indo-Islamic architecture, for Nehru, was the Taj Mahal, which,

⁴² Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 55.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 289, 55.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 242.

quoting the French historian René Grousset, he praised as “the soul of Iran incarnate in the body of India.”⁴⁸ Indeed, the arrival of Islam gave new impetus to Indian art and architecture, revitalizing them and freeing them from the rigid, decadent, overly elaborate styles of the past.⁴⁹ Developing this idea further in *Glimpses of World History*, Nehru wrote that old Hindu art, which had grown “decadent and morbid,” gave way to a new, fresh Indo-Islamic artistic style “full of energy and vitality.”⁵⁰ This Indo-Islamic style was incarnated by new elegant structures “combining the old Indian ideals in architecture with a new simplicity and a nobility of line.” It also contrasted with what Nehru deemed to be “the decadent, over-elaborate and heavily ornamented” buildings and temples constructed before the arrival of Islam.⁵¹ A magnificent blend of Hindu and Islamic, simple and ornate, Indo-Islamic architecture embodied for Nehru the interaction of Islam and Hinduism at its most fruitful.

The revitalization of Indian culture did not take place just in the realms of architecture and visual arts. A broader movement toward synthesis took place throughout Indian society in clothing, cuisine, and music, where the meeting of Hindu and Islamic civilizations produced new musical forms and styles.⁵² It is important to note that there is no discussion of Islamic civilization supplanting Hindu civilization in *The Discovery of India*. Instead, Nehru focused on the blending and amalgamation of different cultural traditions to create something new and forward-looking while still maintaining a sense of continuity with the past.

Although Nehru did not dwell extensively on the topic in *The Discovery of India*, language is another key element through which we can see how Nehru envisioned this process of cultural synthesis. The arrival of Muslim rulers, and the introduction of Persian as the official language of government, led to the growing use of Perso-Arabic words in Indian languages, which facilitated the development of the modern colloquial languages of North India.⁵³ Indeed, the development of contemporary colloquial languages was “perhaps the most significant indication of the growing absorption of the foreign element in India.”⁵⁴ India’s languages, however, despite the new Islamic influence, maintained their core Indianness that connected them to the past. Nehru noted that

48 Ibid., 152.

49 Ibid., 279.

50 Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, 242.

51 Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 286.

52 Ibid., 260.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., 262.

even the most Islamic Indian language, Urdu, with its modified Arabic script and heavy lexical borrowings from Arabic and Persian, belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family like almost all other North Indian languages, and its vocabulary “probably contains 80 per cent words derived from Sanskrit.” Even then, he noted that it is quite often challenging to determine whether a word in Urdu or Hindi comes from Persian or Sanskrit, as both languages are closely related and share common root words, underscoring the historical links between Iran and India that existed long before the advent of Islam.⁵⁵

Under Muslim rule, and especially under the Mughals, Nehru described a literary renaissance in northern India during which Hindus wrote countless works in Persian while Muslim scholars attempted to translate Sanskrit texts into Persian and wrote books and poetry in Hindi.⁵⁶ Among the Muslim writers in Hindi, Nehru singled out Amir Khusrau (1253–1325), an ethnic Turk whose family had integrated into the culture of North India over the course of two or three generations and who was proficient in both Persian and Sanskrit, as well as the social reformer Kabir.⁵⁷

Addressing the controversy over whether Hindi and Urdu constitute one language or two, Nehru came down firmly on the side of both being “one language with two literary forms and two scripts.”⁵⁸ Noting that there is no gap between colloquial Hindi and Urdu and that the only differences appear at the literary level, he made the case, which is accurate from a purely linguistic perspective, that the differences between Hindi and Urdu are fundamentally differences in higher registers used by elites who seek to ground their works either in India’s Islamic or Hindu heritage, whereas there is no distinction between the two in the daily lives of most Indians. He praised efforts to resist the separation of Hindi and Urdu (and, symbolically, of Indian Hindus and Muslims) through attempts to develop a common, standardized Hindustani, which reflected “a common language understood all over India” by average Indians rather than an arcane register only used by a small community of religious zealots and literati.⁵⁹ In language, art, architecture, literature, and music, Nehru sought to underline India’s tendency to absorb different influences – especially from the Islamic world – and produce from them a vibrant, eclectic culture. He thus urged Hindus and Muslims to acknowledge and embrace their rich, shared cultural past instead of tearing it apart.

55 *Ibid.*, 174.

56 *Ibid.*, 290.

57 *Ibid.*, 262–263.

58 *Ibid.*, 176.

59 *Ibid.*

Did Islam Come to India by the Sword?

One of the notions spread by Hindu nationalists that Nehru wanted to combat was the idea that Islam had been a violent and destructive force in India since the very moment of its arrival. Islam, Nehru pointedly noted, arrived through Arab traders centuries before it came as a military and political force to India. Long before Mahmud of Ghazni's destructive invasions (1001–1027), missionaries came and mosques were built because, in keeping with India's tradition of cultural syncretism, "it was the old tradition of India to be tolerant to all faiths and forms of worship."⁶⁰ The first problems began when Mahmud of Ghazni (971–1030) invaded northwestern India in campaigns of wanton violence, disrupting the process through which Islam had come peacefully to India over more than three hundred years and had blended seamlessly into the fabric of Indian society without conflict.⁶¹ During one of his campaigns, Mahmud destroyed the Somnath temple in Gujarat, an act that would form a lasting part of the Hindu nationalist narrative of Islam's malignant impact on India. Nevertheless, Nehru emphasized that the actions of Mahmud should not and cannot be taken as representative of Islam or Muslims as a whole. As Nehru wrote, "Mahmud was far more a warrior than a man of faith and like many other conquerors he used and exploited the name of religion for his conquests. India was to him just a place from which he could carry off treasure and material to his homeland."⁶² The non-religious nature of Mahmud's campaigns of plunder was further underscored for Nehru by the fact that he recruited Indians into his army, and one of his leading generals, Tilak, was an Indian Hindu. Tilak then helped Mahmud lead campaigns against Muslims in Central Asia.⁶³ Mahmud was thus not a religious fanatic attempting to kill non-Muslims, but rather an amoral warlord.

The misconception that Mahmud or later conquerors like Alauddin Khilji (1296–1316) represented Islam is something that Nehru had earlier directly refuted in his *Glimpses of World History*, saying that "while Islam brought an element of progress to India, the Muslim Afghans brought an element of barbarism," and Indians should be careful not to confuse the two.⁶⁴ For Nehru, it is wrong to impute the actions of individuals to entire religions. Even if religion was used as a pretext,

⁶⁰ Ibid., 244.

⁶¹ Ibid., 253.

⁶² Ibid., 251.

⁶³ Ibid., 251.

⁶⁴ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, 247.

the true causes of violence were always political and social.⁶⁵ The Turks and Afghans who invaded India were, for Nehru, “fierce and merciless” warriors long before their conversion to Islam and knew only one way of maintaining control of conquered territory: terror.⁶⁶ Irreparable damage had nevertheless been done, for once Islam arrived in the form of a violent invading army, it produced a backlash and a sense of bitterness that sowed the seeds of mistrust and animosity between Hindus and Muslims in later years.⁶⁷ Yet, in time, even violent foreign conquerors were absorbed into India’s culture of syncretism.⁶⁸ It was through this process of cultural synthesis that Islam and Muslims became interwoven in the tapestry of Indian society, enriching it and revitalizing it at a time when Indian civilization seemed to have lost its way.

If Akbar was the paragon of the spirit of Hindu-Muslim synthesis, his great-grandson Aurangzeb (1618–1707) – for whom Nehru seems to have had nothing but utter contempt – was its antithesis. Because of Aurangzeb’s actions, Nehru believed, Akbar’s spirit of unity was ultimately fleeting, and his descendant’s bigotry destroyed much of the progress and goodwill built under his rule. Aurangzeb, Nehru sardonically remarked, “far from understanding the present, failed even to appreciate the immediate past.” Unlike Akbar, he was a bigoted zealot with no appreciation for art or literature. After the tolerant reigns of Akbar and the two subsequent Mughal emperors, Aurangzeb “tried to put back the clock, and in this attempt stopped it and broke it up.”⁶⁹ His rule spelled disaster for the Mughals, who were successful, Nehru claimed, only when they placed a common sense of Indianness and unity among Hindus and Muslims above sectarian politics. When Aurangzeb began to tear apart the unity between Hindus and Muslims and started acting more as a Muslim than an Indian ruler, the Mughal Empire began to fall apart. As Akbar’s tolerance and synthesis gave way to narrow-minded fanaticism, nationalist movements among non-Muslims rose to challenge the Mughal state.⁷⁰ The chaos that ensued enfeebled Indian unity both at a political level and at a deeper level, as animosity between religious groups began to re-emerge in the face of oppression.

Nehru faulted Aurangzeb for needlessly reimposing the *jizya* tax on non-Muslims abolished by Akbar and for alienating the Rajputs upon whom Akbar’s state had depended. Aurangzeb also managed to provoke the ire of the Sikhs

65 Ibid., 242.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., 179.

68 Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 258.

69 Ibid., 286.

70 Ibid.

and the Marathas, who rebelled against Mughal oppression.⁷¹ The disintegration of Indian unity and the Mughal Empire caused by Aurangzeb left India “weak and helpless” in the face of the British, who, “almost unnoticed by others . . . helping one rival against another,” managed to gain a foothold in India that proved irreversible. By the time Indians realized that the British had played them off against each other, it was already too late.⁷² Implicit in this account of the colonization of India and the disintegration of the Mughal Empire that happened two centuries prior is a lesson that remained just as relevant when Nehru was writing *The Discovery of India* in the 1940s: religious factionalism would weaken Indians and strengthen the British, while only a feeling of “common living and common purpose” could lead India to freedom.⁷³

Islam’s Place in India’s Past and Present

Nehru took issue with the traditional divisions in both Hindu and Muslim nationalist readings of history, as well as those in works of history published by colonial historians. As Romila Thapar notes, “the Hindutva version of history is . . . largely a revival of nineteenth-century colonial history,” which divided Indian history into three distinct eras: the classical Hindu period, the Muslim period, and the British period. In the Hindu nationalist reading of history, she writes, “the Hindu period is regarded as the golden age, the Muslim period the dark age of tyranny and oppression, and there is relative neutrality about the colonial period,” whereas, in the Muslim version, Indian history before Islam is a period of darkness and the era of Muslim rule is a golden age of prosperity.⁷⁴ In both cases, these neat divisions allow for a simplistic reading of history emphasizing a near-Manichaean battle between Hindus and Muslims that became a fundamental part of the divisive religious nationalisms that sought to tear India apart.⁷⁵

By objecting to the notion that the Muslim presence in India ever amounted to a foreign occupation, Nehru upset that narrative of India’s past. He claimed that “this division is neither intelligent nor correct; it is deceptive and gives a

⁷¹ Ibid., 293.

⁷² Ibid., 299–300.

⁷³ Ibid., 44.

⁷⁴ Romila Thapar, “Secularism, History, Contemporary Politics,” in *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, eds. Anuradha Dingawaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 194.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

wrong perspective,” especially as it makes the Muslims and the British both seem to be foreign occupying powers of a land that is fundamentally Hindu at its core. While that characterization may be true of the British, the Muslims were certainly not a foreign power in the eyes of Nehru – they continued India’s tradition of absorbing and synthesizing peoples, cultures, and ideas. The Muslim invaders, like all their predecessors, such as the Aryans, “became absorbed into India and part of her life. Their dynasties became Indian dynasties and there was a great deal of racial fusion by intermarriage. A deliberate effort was made, apart from a few exceptions, not to interfere with the ways and customs of the people. They looked to India as their home country and had no other affiliations.”⁷⁶ Because the Muslims, unlike the British, integrated into Indian society and became Indian, all while making their distinctive contribution to it, India remained an independent country throughout the centuries of Muslim rule.⁷⁷ Islam’s arrival in India did not cause a break with India’s pre-Islamic past. Rather, it was just one more addition to the culture of a country that was already defined by its synthesis of different cultures.

Even more than being simply one influence among many, Islam was, for Nehru, a force of civilizational renewal in India. With its message of human brotherhood and its democratic spirit, it pointed out the evils of the caste system and helped make an increasingly stagnant, inward-looking society open and progressive. The era of fruitful interaction between Hinduism and Islam embodied by figures such as Akbar, Kabir, and Guru Nanak left a powerful legacy that gives Nehruvian secular democracy a sense of continuity with the past. One of the leading defenders of Nehru’s vision of India today, the Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, writes about the importance for Nehru’s democratic Indian state of “Akbar’s sponsorship and support for dialogues between adherents of different faiths. . . . In the deliberative conception of democracy, the role of open discussion, with or without sponsorship by the state, has a clear relevance.”⁷⁸ Additionally, with his firm stance in favor of religious tolerance and pluralism, Sen notes, Akbar “laid the formal foundations of a secular legal structure and of religious neutrality of the state.”⁷⁹ If Hindu nationalists attempt to reach into the past to demonstrate why Hindus and Muslims can never peacefully coexist, the goal of Nehru and Sen is quite the opposite: to show how

⁷⁶ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 254.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2006), 16.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

tolerance, pluralism, open debate, and cultural synthesis are fundamental parts of India's past and that Islam and Muslims contributed immensely to that heritage.

Nehru also claims that Islam led to a cultural renaissance characterized by flourishing languages, music, art, and architecture in India. The idea of an Islamic contribution to Indian culture and society is an idea that has been carried forward by other defenders of a secular, democratic, plural India, such as Sen. Surveying the same cultural legacy of Hindu-Muslim interaction, Sen notes that it is difficult to avoid "seeing the contributions of constructive efforts that have defied the alleged barriers of religious communities" in literature, music, food, and architecture.⁸⁰

In *The Discovery of India*, Nehru managed to create a unique vision of the relationship between religion, culture, and power. It was neither a vision that placed the individual above all else, dismissing the role that cultural and religious identities play in ordinary life or believing that religious divisions could be made to disappear from society, nor was it one that characterized religious groups as hermetic and immutable monoliths moving through time. This last option, that of an irreconcilable and complete separation of religious groups, could lead to two outcomes, both of which Nehru wanted to avoid: either the creation of a state to protect minority interests while affirming the fundamental differences between Hindus and Muslims that made them incompatible, or a form of illiberal majoritarian democracy in which a Hindu majority would remake India according to its vision of what Hindu civilization had been before it was rendered impure by foreign Muslim influence. As Khilnani notes, for Nehru, "India was a society neither of liberal individuals nor of exclusive communities or nationalities, but of interconnected differences," of an unbreakable unity in all its diversity, and it was this belief that India belonged just as much to Muslims as it did Hindus that guided him throughout his political life.⁸¹ It is perhaps for this reason that Nehru writes in *The Discovery of India* that although the INC "wanted unity . . . and took it for granted . . . it saw no reason why the richness and variety of India's cultural life should be regimented after a single pattern."⁸²

It is also important to consider how extraordinary Nehru's vision was for his time. If multiculturalism is today a growing (if contested) norm around the world, in Nehru's age, as the last multi-ethnic empires crumbled and ethnically homogenous nation-states emerged from their blood-soaked ashes, his vision of a plural national identity that embraced people across religious and ethnic

⁸⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁸¹ Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (Gurgaon: Penguin, 2012), 172.

⁸² Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 422–423.

lines was almost unheard of. Neither European history nor any other history had given Nehru a model from which to build a pluralistic democratic state. Almost all existing democratic states at that time were tied to exclusive religious or cultural identities that would have been disastrous for his efforts to build an inclusive Indian patriotism.⁸³ Because he knew what destruction exclusive nationalism had wrought in Europe, Nehru fashioned his model of an inclusive, democratic nationalism founded on a narrative of Indian history that emphasized cultural synthesis, especially between Muslims and Hindus, as a common theme throughout India's past. As Khilnani notes, unlike previous works on Indian history, *The Discovery of India* presents Indian history neither "as a meaningless dust-storm nor as a glorified Hindu pageant," but rather as a past "moved by a logic of accommodation and acceptance."⁸⁴

Based on the narrative of the fruitful interaction between Islam and Hinduism presented throughout *The Discovery of India*, Nehru writes that the protection of the rights of all religious, linguistic, and cultural groups in a democratic, egalitarian independent India was never a question for him. He emphasizes that these were not ideas emerging entirely from Europe, because "the whole history of India was witness of the toleration and even encouragement of minorities and of different racial groups. . . . So we did not have to go abroad for ideas of religious and cultural toleration; *these were inherent in Indian life.*"⁸⁵ For Muslims worried about their place in an independent, Hindu-majority India in an age of increasing majoritarian politics, Nehru's assertion that they all belonged to one Indian nation was an attempt to soothe their anxieties. For right-wing Hindus who claimed that Islam and Muslims were an unwelcome, corrupting influence on India, Nehru replied that not only was their account of Hindu-Muslim relations over the centuries simplistic, but it was also simply wrong. Muslims had made immense contributions to Indian culture and had become an integral part of the fabric of Indian society. To assert that they were still somehow foreigners who needed to accept the supremacy of Hindu civilization was not only discriminatory, but the justification for that assertion was also belied by Indian history. In essence, by giving Hindus and Muslims a vision of a shared past of cultural synthesis and harmony, he was also implicitly urging them to imagine a common future together as one people.

⁸³ Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, 171–172.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁸⁵ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 420.

Conclusion

Like all imagined communities, Nehru's India contains plenty of exaggeration, and he molded history by emphasizing certain elements and downplaying others to serve his interests. Yet, unlike so many other nations imagined into existence by other nationalist writers, both in India and in other countries, the nation Nehru imagined into existence is not defined by a hermetically sealed essence that can be traced back until the nation disappears into the mists of time. Nehru's India is simultaneously constant and yet continuously evolving with the influences that shaped it. It is inherently united, but its unity is not homogeneity. Furthermore, if Nehru recognized differences between Hindus and Muslims, he did not seek solely to protect them from each other while affirming their inherent differences. Instead, he tried to imagine a common past of fruitful interaction between Hinduism and Islam without which the mosaic of Indian civilization would not be nearly as rich and beautiful, a past built on what Khilnani calls "interconnected differences."⁸⁶ It is this seemingly contradictory formula, according to which India's unity is its diversity and the unchanging essence of Indian culture is incessant change and synthesis, that allowed Nehru to make an impassioned plea for tolerance and harmony. It also helped him remind Indians that what they had in common was far greater than that which divided them and that the boundaries between them were never fixed and impermeable but rather fluid and open.

Although partition took place in 1947 despite Nehru's best efforts to avert it, his years as prime minister demonstrated his commitment to making Muslims see that they were full-fledged citizens of India, and Nehru succeeded to a very large extent. Despite all its potential religious and ethnic fault lines, India has managed to sustain democracy while avoiding further fragmentation, and India today boasts a Muslim population nearly as large as that of Pakistan. The success of India's democracy – which is unprecedented for a country of such religious and ethnic diversity – testifies to the strength of the inclusive Nehruvian nationalism on which it was built, even if it has since come under increasing strain. In an age when exclusionary nationalism is again ascendant in India and much of the world, it is essential to reflect on how Nehru imagined a nation into being that celebrated diversity instead of disdaining it, laying the foundation for the greatest democratic experiment ever undertaken in human history.

⁸⁶ Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, 172.

The Discovery of India was received quite favorably at the time of its release, and it remains ubiquitous in Indian bookstores and continues to be printed to this day. *The Discovery of India's* greatest influence, however, might be through *Bharat Ek Khoj*, a serialized television adaptation produced in the late 1980s. In a society with a relatively small reading public, *Bharat Ek Khoj* has brought Nehru's ideas to Indian homes since its release in 1988, giving Nehru's ideas a broader reach than would be possible just with books. Curiously, *Bharat Ek Khoj* has not appeared on Indian public television since Narendra Modi came to power in 2014. The last re-run took place in late 2013 to commemorate the anniversary of Nehru's death, just a year before Modi took office. This absence has occurred despite Indian public television re-running many other popular serials from the 1980s, particularly during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic.⁸⁷ The attempt to reduce the visibility of *Bharat Ek Khoj* is just one of many ways in which Modi and the BJP have sought to obscure Nehru's ideas and his contribution to contemporary Indian history. The BJP government has sought to purge references to Nehru from history textbooks,⁸⁸ omitted him from history exhibits on the Indian independence movement, and even proposed transforming his own museum – the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi – into a museum honoring all of India's prime ministers.⁸⁹ The BJP's efforts have been part of a larger attempt to rewrite Indian history and change public perceptions of the country's past to justify the current government's anti-Muslim stance.⁹⁰

These actions show that the BJP, like Nehru, realizes the power of narratives of the past to justify political agendas in the present. The ultimate success of Modi's Hindu nationalist populism will depend on how well he can rally ordinary Indians to his versions of Indian history and Indian identity. This task, of course, is complicated by a rival Indian nationalism, one that runs through every page of *The Discovery of India*. The ideas Nehru articulated in *The Discovery of India* represent a grave threat to Hindu nationalists' attempts to rewrite Indian history into a simple narrative of Muslim aggression and Hindu victimhood, a fact that the BJP has tacitly acknowledged by taking *Bharat Ek Khoj* off the air.

87 Prakash Bhandari, "When Will Prasar Bharti Allow Telecast of 'Bharat Ek Khoj'?", *National Herald* (New Delhi), May 10, 2020.

88 Christophe Jaffrelot, *L'Inde de Modi: national-populisme et démocratie ethnique* (Paris: Fayard, 2019), 178.

89 Sushil Aaron, "The Nehru India Cannot Forget," *The Wire*, November 14, 2020.

90 See Jaffrelot, *L'Inde de Modi*, especially 174–179.

In contrast to the distaste for nationalism among many on the left today, Nehru realized not only that nationalism was “inevitable” and “one of the most powerful urges to move a people,” but that it did not always have to feed the flames of hatred and division.⁹¹ By imagining an Indian national community built around cultural syncretism, Nehru showed that nationalism can be built on – and foster – inclusion and diversity. At a time when the BJP has taken to calling opponents of its Hindu nationalist agenda “anti-national,” *The Discovery of India* reminds us that there is nothing “anti-national” about arguing for tolerance and pluralism in India, especially regarding India’s Muslim minority. Indeed, from Nehru’s perspective, it would be difficult to imagine a higher form of Indian nationalism than protecting the rich tapestry of India’s diverse and pluralistic culture from the forces that are trying to rip it apart.

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⁹¹ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 44.

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14 Contributors

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