

(Postmodern) Populism as a trope for contested glocality

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Abstract:

The chapter addresses the latest political frisson to engage students of globalization and of contentious politics the world over; the spectre or promise of populism. Populism affords some purchase on an axial feature of this globalized world - the imbrication or antithesis of local and global, of difference and sameness – and gives it an intriguing twist. My argument will be that what I call *postmodern populism* holds up a mirror to current politics and the present phase of globalization; and what that shows is both unedifying – since it depicts easy solutions to perceived troubles – and in some respects more palatable, because it conjures images of a less curated, popular and engaged politics, both within, and heedless of, borders.

Introduction: *provenance*

In what follows, I tackle a troubling facet of the current phase of global constitution; one that offers a gloss on the tensions between secular convergence and the potential for disruption. It focuses on the ways in which the assumptions framing globalization - especially “market globalization” (Steger, 2015) - and knowledge about the global, are being reworked under crisis conditions. The discussion is couched in terms familiar to global scholars: those of global convergence and its discontents, hybridity, syncretism (with the latter two concepts implying cultural amalgamation) and, of course,

glocalization, the manner in which local and global are articulated (Roudometof, 2016).

For many commentators globalization implies secular integration. But that has always been too simple a description of a non-linear and often contradictory process; one that is increasingly de-centered (Nederveen Pieterse, 2018). Above all globalization is a multidimensional process moving to different impulses that inflect economic life, culture and, of course, politics.

Here, I privilege the latest political frisson to (re)engage students of globalization and of contentious politics the world over; the spectre or promise of populism. Populism affords some purchase on an axial feature of this globalized world - the imbrication or antithesis of local and global, of difference and sameness – and gives it a piquant twist. While generally anti-globalist in its “thin” ideology (Mudde, 2004, 2015; Inglehart and Norris, 2016, 2017) populism is also at odds with more politically congenial manifestations of anti, or alter-globalization. This makes it an uneasy bedfellow for much resistance to neoliberal globalization, even allowing for different shades of populist thinking.

My argument will be that what I call *postmodern populism* holds up a mirror to current politics and the present phase of globalization, and what that shows is both unedifying and

palatable. Unedifying because it offers what many see as false solutions to perceived troubles; more palatable, because it conjures images of a less curated, popular and engaged politics, both within, and heedless of, borders (Piccone, 1995; Moffitt, 2017; McKnight, 2018). The latter motif does not eclipse the former as a description of postmodern populism, but introduces some ambiguity when judging its merits as a disruptive and possibly transformative politics. The prefix *postmodern* is appropriate because it speaks to the reinvention of populism in the global, digital age.

To reiterate, on the face of it, populism is the antithesis of globalization. Its most reported feature is the evocation of militant and pristine difference vested in “the people” - the virtuous people. The people are enjoined to resist destruction of the particular, the local and the idiosyncratic by remote and uncaring (global) elites, indifferent economic forces, and a host of malign, or opportunistic, others. In a notable paradox, populists always appeal to “the people” as an inclusive subject, but are selective about conferring membership; favouring those with “authentic” claims to a particular birthright. There is rarely a universal populism, or even a claim for it. And yet, as Niall Ferguson notes, “populists are nearly always part of a global phenomenon” and their appeal to the sense of powerlessness and injustice felt by “the people”, is an enduring theme (2016).

Populism looks to co-opt the voice of the forgotten “ordinary” citizen and, in many cases, disports as the only begetter of genuine patriotism and authentic democracy (Zakaria, 2016). As Donald Trump wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* (April 14, 2016) “(t)he only antidote to decades of ruinous rule by a small handful of elites is a bold infusion of popular will”. Norbert Hofer, who mounted an “Austria first” presidential campaign in 2016, berated his opponent “(y)ou have the *haute volée* (high society) behind you; I have the people with me”. In the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, elected president in 2016, fulminated against the failures of what he termed “elite democracy”. His revolt against it and his brand of strongman leadership finds echoes around the world (Heydarian, 2017).

In the social sciences, the antinomy of sameness and difference is a driver of all social change and, more to the point here, it is at the heart of the emerging field of global studies. In that pantheon, but probably more generally, the antinomy comprises a historical and spatial dialectic in which the vernacular engages (absorbs, resists, accommodates, succumbs to) more encompassing structures and processes to produce, or just intimate, new forms of glocality (Roudometof, 2106). When discussing populism as the medium through which local and global collide, the politics that results often displays visceral qualities.

In many respects the vision of a combustible politics is at odds with much current theorizing on the ways in which local and global interact. The interaction of local subjects with global processes is a clear example of the fluidity and complexity of global-modern lifestyles. But for the most part this complexity is seen as negotiable, quite unlike the condition that affronts many locals who complain of being “left behind” by globalization. For those feeling abandoned, being neither local nor global, caught between somewhere and everywhere, has a disturbing resonance. Such tensions are at the heart of what David Goodhart calls the current “populist revolt” (2016). In Arjun Appadurai’s “geographies of anger” post 9-11 there is a visceral fear of strangers when they alight in the guise of terrorists, illegal immigrants, (some) refugees and many categories of mobile labour (2006).

The empirical worth of any binary is always open to question, regardless of its heuristic value, and sameness-difference is no exception. For the most part critical global studies cleaves to the view that in the engagement between sameness and difference, global and local, there can be no determined or determinate outcome. And unless you embrace *hyperglobalist* precepts - in which case globalization is always convergent, homogenizing and resolute - this may be a no-brainer, since the world is full of paradox.

The sense of what constitutes the global conjures disparate visions of an autonomous cultural field, perhaps a global culture, a “self-evident” global scale, as Saskia Sassen has it (2006, 7). Rather more inchoately, it suggests the articulation of local cultural traditions and practices with global norms and scripts. In the latter scenario, it is the manner of their articulation that is compelling when examining the implications of the current spate of populism for different signifiers of globalization (open borders, market ideology and practice, multiculturalism, cosmopolitan tenets, and so on).

Local and global:

Roland Robertson claims that globalization brings locales closer together materially and ideationally through various spatio-temporal transformations (1994). In this process localities “cease to be things in themselves”, just as the very *idea* of locality gets reproduced and valorized globally (1994, 38). Clearly, one of the possible downsides of this approach is that it might simply reproduce the binary it rejects. Here, the global appears as a homogenizing force that will eliminate, or at least threaten, local difference. In turn this utopian/dystopian prospect is countered by the obdurate nature of the local and, of course, because of its valorization. The local, however construed, is where implied global homogeneity gets articulated with the vernacular, both actual and metaphorical.

Tellingly, theorists of glocalization refute the assumption that globalization processes always endanger the local. Rather, they argue that “glocalization both highlights how local cultures may critically adapt or resist ‘global’ phenomena, and reveal the way in which the very creation of localities is a standard component of globalization. There is now a universal normalization of ‘locality’, in the sense that ‘local’ cultures are assumed to “arise constantly and particularize themselves vis-a-vis other specific cultures” (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2006, 134). As I have noted, this process is often viewed as a benign accommodation. But with populism we are often enjoined to think of it as a maverick strain or a pathological variant of localism.

In most strains of populism, globalization, however construed, is debilitating, even demonic. The point here is not whether any such ascription is accurate, but to point up the political consequences of treating all strands of globalization in this way. For in populist rhetoric, accommodating global forces, possibly through hybridization, always appears, or can be portrayed as, a betrayal of the people or a loss of culture. Such roils make for a turbulent – and for some regressive - politics, as the Brexit process and the success of anti-immigrant platforms around Europe in 2017-2018 demonstrate.

Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson employ a categorical scheme comprising four categories of cultural glocalization. In

the social science of globalization categorical nuances are useful, though where populism is concerned, only up to a point. Because, valuable as they are for delineating types of glocalization, it is not clear that any of them could entertain populism as a categorical variant of local-global relations. Its focus on local autonomy, even purity, is too empirically demanding as a possible glocal outcome. Instead they all assume at least a modicum of change in the demeanour of local actors and cultures as the result of local-global entanglements.

The categories are *relativization*, whereby social actors try to preserve their cultural institutions, practices and meanings within a new environment, underpinning differentiation. *Accommodation*, involves actors adopting the practices, institutions and meanings associated with other societies, to protect key elements of the prior local culture. *Hybridization* occurs when social actors synthesize local and other cultural phenomena to produce distinctive, hybrid cultural practices, institutions and meanings. And finally there is the possibility of *transformation*, when actors incorporate the practices, institutions and meanings associated with other cultures, or which are in accord with global culture. In this case, “transformation may procure fresh cultural forms or, more extremely, the abandonment of the local culture in favour of alternative and/or hegemonic cultural forms” (2006, 135). It is important to note that these outcomes are not predicated on

the immutable properties of actors or processes. In other words, they are made through practice and in singular conditions.

Nonetheless, the categories are useful because they qualify the simple binary of local versus global, which informs much current populist rhetoric. Instead, ‘glocalization projects’ are the everyday strategies of local cultures as they engage global challenges (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2006). This is some way from seeing the local as a reified entity and the global as an abstract and totalizing process. In what follows, these nuances of global constitution are exemplified by addressing the features, variable appearance and consequences of what may be an increasingly modal postmodern populism as a form of glocalism.

It is not necessary to depict this modus as a simple, atavistic response to “out there” global forces, or a form of selective autarky when used in political platforms that offer a nativist and exclusionary slant on migration, job protection and the preservation of cultural identity. Indeed, on the left of the political spectrum, twenty-first century populism could even pass for a more elemental reflex or “double movement” to the trammels of neoliberal globalization, as prefigured in Karl Polanyi’s work (1944). Often cast as a brand of resistance politics, this reflex plays out the dialectics of sameness and difference; domination and resistance, democratization and

authoritarianism in glocal settings (Polanyi, 1944; Block, 2016; Pettifor, 2017). And just as there are many varieties of globalization so might there be different shades of populism to confound or rescue it.

Populism in its variety:

In what follows, the appearance of different kinds of populism in local-global relations is rehearsed to weigh the prospects for a global systemic crisis or transformation. Postmodern populism is, or may be, a driver of change in neoliberal practices, and / or a reflex (or strategic) localism couched as resistance to globalist ideology and institutions. And there is also another, largely normative, aspect to the debates about populism. It might be argued that postmodern populism actually exposes the failures of the neoliberal strain of globalization, but is it progressive enough to champion the deep-seated economic complaints of “ordinary” people without discriminating against immigrants and trashing multiculturalism and democracy?

This is not a simple calculation. If contemporary populism is a backlash against globalization –whether neoliberal or cosmopolitan – its appearance and relative success are due to a number of contextual factors. Among these are chronic economic, and especially financial, woes, anti-immigrant sentiment, perceptions and experience of growing inequalities and disillusion with conventional politics and politicians.

There is also disgust at widespread corruption in the governing classes. Populism holds out redemption from these travails, but it is sullied by its past and by its reputation.

Even allowing for a “progressive” strain, outside the United States populism has always enjoyed a bad press, mainly because of its association with authoritarian, far-right and even fascist tendencies, especially in Western Europe. As Inglehart and Norris (2016) note in their review of left-right populisms, previous analyses of parties and party ideologies on that continent have often associated populism with the Right, mainly because of the authoritarian cast of their leadership styles and treatment of dissenters, immigrants and minorities. Terms such as “radical right”, “extremist right” and “far right” invest the literature with a degree of necessary categorical variety but, counter-intuitively, may actually underestimate the complexity of the wider picture. For conceptual richness still fails to capture some bespoke and local features of populist politics, parties and movements around the world. For example, in the Americas, Eastern and Central Europe and Asia, some practitioners – Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and the late Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, come to mind – favour(ed) leftist economic policies.

In turn, even left-wing populism is no stranger to authoritarian impulses. Authoritarian populism sometimes embraces the use

of “exclusionary and even violent political power” (Scoones et al, 2018, 3) yet still delivers socially progressive outcomes, such as free tertiary education in the Philippines. And as Levitsky and Way argue, to compound the definitional mix, there are different varieties of authoritarian populism (2010). These differences span regimes that allow some room for opposition, all the way to would-be and outright dictatorships.

In turn, the threat posed by populisms to both strong and weak democracies varies with the local strength of two “meta-norms”, as Levitsky and Ziblatt have it (2017). The first is “mutual toleration”, or the willingness to accept political rivals as legitimate opposition. The second is “forbearance” or restraint in the exercise of executive authority.

Circumstances and context dictating, norm erosion in either case can lead to greater political and societal polarization. And in Venezuela under Hugo Chavez polarization actually increased public tolerance for authoritarian control measures on media freedom. Meanwhile, following elections in Italy in the Spring of 2018, a populist governing coalition emerged comprising the free-wheeling “anti-establishment” *5-Star Movement (Movimento Cinque Stelle* or M5S) and the *Lega* with its Eurosceptic and anti-immigration platforms. An unlikely marriage between erstwhile rivals, the coalition can be seen as a further increment in the crisis of traditional parties and partisan loyalties, driven by a public mood of chronic disappointment and fear.

In Italy the balance of politics has shifted to a more right-wing, Eurosceptic and anti-globalist demeanour, though, at the time of writing, it is too early to be conclusive. M5S has a left-wing pedigree on, for example green environmental policy, but endorses policies of immigration control with the same vigour as parties and movements of the right. The hybrid version of populism seen in the Italian coalition not only underlines the sense that populism is ideologically shallow and promiscuous, but that voters increasingly endorse such a stance, especially where it invokes defence of the national interest and national culture.

The interesting question, though one beyond the scope of this chapter, is why then does the opposition to usual politics and to globalization take populist form? If there is a mobilization of anger and despair, coupled with the ambition to transcend established and establishment politicians and parties, is it just the untutored quality of populist leadership, organization and platforms that has most appeal? If so, would it be appropriate to place all populisms and their anti-globalist credo in the same niche of contentious politics as, for example, the Occupy Movement; with each cast as glocal manifestations of a modal discontent? In this scenario, “the people” might seem hardly separable from the outcast “99%.

Of course, there are differences between types of populism and these include variety in ideas, style, organisation and (policy) inclination. But what conjoins them is outrage, and, if unrequited, this alone may have severe consequences for the axial and organisational principles upon which liberal-democratic, multicultural and, of course, core, globalized societies have been built, as well as for ones seeking to replicate that path (Crouch, 2011). In such circumstances there may be no need to offer a programmatic alternative. So, at least in the short-term is rage enough?

Certainly it is enough to simplify the daunting task of classification. Perhaps we need only know what populism is against and thus what occasions it. But if all populisms are nourished by the same conditions as were listed above, - although not all need be present in every case - what distinguishes them and what are the consequences for the temper of politics?

These are not trivial questions. As Jacques Ranciere tells us, while use of the term populism may not serve to designate a "defined political force" it is sufficiently embracing, or agnostic about differences to allow "amalgams between political forces that range from the extreme right to the radical left " (2016,102). More than this, populisms are also permissive about the kind of organizational features and leadership style needed to galvanise activism and support.

Some are leader dominated and reliant on identification from members and supporters; others are scarcely more than loosely coordinated networks. To reiterate; how fanciful is it to see Occupy and M5S as varieties of protest, distinguishable in some regards, but each typical of contemporary protest politics, not least because they are light on organization and programmatic content. In both cases many supporters not affiliated with traditional party organisations and other political NGOs offered their backing for what they see as authentic “low” or vernacular forms of discontent.

And in these terms, neither is it that surprising to see M5S cohabit with the *Lega*, which looks far closer to the authoritarian image of the liberal nightmare. Arguably all these examples, as well as a host of others, also play to Gramsci’s notion of “transformism”, wherein popular discontent is mobilised, but sometimes - though not necessarily - in support of authoritarian precepts. All such instances betoken a strategic shift in the appearance and balance of political forces away from typical forms of collective action and brokerage politics (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). Sustainable and effective collective action, at least from the perspective of the seminal thesis by Mancur Olson (1965) typically requires varying degrees of resource mobilization to be deployed when organizing and through leadership. Formal organization is deemed necessary to

coordinate action, mobilize resources and forge collective identities, all before collective action can occur.

But as Gidron and Bonowski argue (2013) populism, at least in its current guise, is not like that, and its appearance in contemporary democracies is leaving an “imprint on important political phenomena” (2013, 2). For, as these authors also opine, the ability of populist politics to “galvanize new forms of political engagement is.... important in an era of decline in formal political participation such as voting turnout and party membership”. The flip side of this is that in less established democracies populism may increase political and social polarization and usher in authoritarian solutions to problems of societal integration. While there is general agreement that populism is “confrontational, chameleonic, culture-bound and context-dependent” (Arter, 2010) it is also at large across countries and regions with quite different cultures and histories.

At the least all this suggests that certain features of populism may be present, indeed, have to be present, despite variety in other respects. As we shall see, these features can be ideological, though without being determinate. More loosely, populisms may cohere around “rhetoric that constructs politics as the moral and ethical struggle” between people and elites (de La Torre, 2000, 4). In other words, populism is a discourse built around contextually variable, but always

present, constructions of ‘us’ and ‘them’. I will also suggest that populisms share certain postmodern attributes that inflect the claims they make and the manner in which their narrative is couched. Here, changing technologies of political communication render the dualisms of senders and receivers of political content and of leaders and followers, increasingly redundant. Technology’s part in framing and constituting politics – democratising it on some accounts - also confounds simple notions of populist politics always being top-down.

These considerations make for a complex picture of populism as a factor in global-local constitution. Populisms vary by place and circumstances, along with what they address strategically and in the manner of that address. There are shades of populism, and this is not just a reference to its comparative variety, but recognition that there have been historical variants too.

Any classification, and especially one that admits the many different cases of populism, requires a clear statement of common features and must then identify sub-categories or “local” types (Mudde, 2016). The typology also has to distinguish populism from non-populism and such differences are, or should be, categorical. As Cas Mudde says, populism is neither elitism nor pluralism. In the former it is the elite not the people who are virtuous. In the latter, social and cultural diversity is applauded, with homogeneity at best a sign of

social and political stagnation; at worst repressive. That said, it is permissible to talk about actors who are more or less populist. But the strict conceptualization that precedes such permissiveness demands that the researcher has first to agree that an actor *is* populist before determining by how much. And identifying features common to all cases is not easy.

Take the linking of populism with nationalism. It is not uncommon to hold that nationalism is a defining feature of populism. But is it a necessary component? It is true that ethno-nationalism is a source of contentious politics within many territories (for example, India, Sri-Lanka, the former Yugoslavia and Spain) but it is not clear that it is either a necessary condition for, or consequence of, populism. On the other hand populists in established democracies may be inclined to invoke a more respectable brand of civic nationalism, if only to distance themselves from the charge of being racist, xenophobic or even fascist. Moreover, populism, and certainly what is sometimes called “neo-populism”, combines readily with neo-liberal economic policies. Some left populisms, notably in Latin America, support socialist economic policies, including redistributive social programmes.

As to categories, Mudde rightly points to the widespread use in typologies of *adjectival populism* as a means of distinguishing types. Thus we have “authoritarian populism”, “civic populism”, “xenophobic populism”, “socially and

culturally inclusive or exclusive” populism and so on. The list, while not endless, shows a lively regard for conceptual innovation, often around the theme of ideational differences as distinguishing features of different populisms. The much-used binary of “left” versus “right-wing” populisms is also fraught, but has the virtue of tapping into the once grand narratives of modern politics. But in practice there may be little regard for ideological consistency. Right-wing populists may evince support for neoliberalism *and* nationalism, while left-wing populists sometimes have recourse to national protectionism as a form of local defence against the world. The appeal of a populist leader such as Rodrigo Duterte appears to cross the class divide and his platform takes in the discontent of more prosperous Philipinos and marginalised segments of that society.

Trying to map all this onto the articulation of populism (as localism) and globalization is also difficult. As we have noted, there are some properties that define populism *per se*. These are a strong attachment to the local, suspicion and distrust of international and global actors, as well as of domestic elites, and enduring hostility to incursions from the outside world (migration, cultural flows, capital movements and flows of labour). In turn these common denominators of populism are everywhere inflected by local conditions, including historical factors, and by contingencies of all sorts. Among other things, local conditions determine the temper of the politics delivered

by populism, including its appeal to, or rejection of, democratic norms, or the style and mythology of its leadership. Inflected too by the type of globalization it opposes - market liberalization, ethical cosmopolitanism or, in the case of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) EU super-sovereignty as a trope for dangerous globality.

In a recent foray Jonathan Friedman corrals populism's basic precepts with the label "sovereignism" (2018), an almost elemental regard for retaining control over one's conditions of existence. He renders the binaries of sameness and difference and global versus local as a "set of oppositions" with "emergent cosmopolitanism" at one pole and reactive indigenization at the other. Globalist discourses muster as open, cosmopolitan, multicultural, liberal, anti-sovereign, anti-indigenous and pro-immigration. Localist discourse is closed, nationalist, monocultural, conservative, collectivist (including socialist), pro-sovereign, pro-indigenous and anti-immigration. My brief excursion through types of populism suggests that these binaries underestimate the ambiguity and contradiction in the demeanour of populists. And this is exactly Friedman's point. But in much commentary, they still serve as markers of praise and blame. Much like George Orwell's aphorism in *Animal Farm*, localist politics built around these precepts is often treated as bad – authoritarian, exclusionary, xenophobic - by definition.

Even though different types of populism may cohere around the discourse of “us” and “them”, of people versus the elite, we need to be sensitive to variability in types of populism-localism. All this is much in line with the idea of populism as a “thin” ideology. Populisms share a suspicion of and hostility toward elites, mainstream politics, and established institutions. Beyond this, as Cas Mudde says, no definition of populism will fully describe the gamut of populists (2015; Friedman, 2018; Werner-Mueller, 2017). There is no encompassing and “thick” description of what precepts should guide and which strategies might implement the will of the people. And there is no holistic take on how politics, economy and society should be ordered. Populism is a long way from being programmatic and invokes the values of localism to undergird its claims to novelty and authenticity. In part this is why it is both a portable formula for electoral success in times of crisis and something of an empty signifier when it comes to proffering a blueprint for, and the necessary policy detail on, how to deal with perceived hard times.

Today, populist rhetoric and appeals display a good deal of vigour, whether on the part of those “left behind” by globalization or, and / or, worried that immigration endangers national culture and values, *pace* the UK after Brexit and Germany according to the *Alternative for Germany (AfD)*. It is seen too in the machinations of Donald Trump, with his

seeming rejection of the global liberal order in favour of a latter-day Jacksonianism that is progressive because of its democratizing feel, but replete with economic nationalism and nativist sentiments.

Other down-home populisms can be seen from Marseilles to Moscow, via France, Italy, Spain and Greece, Hungary and Poland. On some accounts it is visible in Narendra Modi's strain of Hindu nationalism in India and in the 'patronal authoritarianism' practised by Vladimir Putin in Russia and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey (The Times of India, Jan 22, 2017). In Latin America the latest wave of left populism, the so-called "pink tide", is clearly a local facet of global opposition to neoliberalism as ideology and practice.

The fact is that different leaders and their brands of populism sit at various points on the populist-authoritarian-nativist scale, again pointing up the importance of context in glossing what might otherwise appear as an undifferentiated response to liberal globalization and its *leitmotifs* of open borders and hybrid cultures.

Populism redux

So, populism's thin ideology is properly implicated in the crises of liberal democracy and of neoliberalism (Crouch, 2011). And as a feature of both, it would be easy to depict it simply as an elemental and even fundamentalist response. But

that would be to ignore a distinctive feature, though again one variably observed, that both qualifies its resolute nature and speaks to its regressive and progressive traits, as well as its transformative potential. I speak here about the extent to which the resurgence of populism in recent decades may be understood as part of the postmodern condition (Jameson, 1991).

In his provocative essay on the cultural “logic” of late capitalism Frederic Jameson (1991) opines that the triumph of economic globalism from the late 1970’s onwards, ushered in a new cultural era that was distinctive because of the usurpation of modernist ideals and ideas by populist images, aesthetics and texts. Postmodernism is often seen as the birth of “a society of the image or the simulacrum, and a transformation of the ‘real’ into so many pseudoevents”, as Jameson says. The culture of postmodernism is characterized by “a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense” where “depth is replaced by surface.” (1991, 127). Crucially, postmodernism brings with it the erasure of older distinctions, notably between reality and fiction, and this extends to political discourse. Rarely, is the concept just a description of change, but rather a summary of the contested and awkward passing of one “order” and the rise and instantiation of another, which tends to disorder. In this regard, Trump’s populist style is postmodern and the same may be said of Vladimir Putin.

Michael Hauser (2016) writes that both display a “radical heterogeneity of discourses, a decentered ideological structure, a central void, the end of universal truths” and, of course, the end of axial ideas, unless you count the appeal of “Russia first” and “America first” under that rubric.

Modernism was the product of the age of money and of rationality. Postmodernism, says Jameson, is the product of a new era characterized by “the intensification of the forces of reification” (2001, 58). In the age of global capitalism, the utopian sublime of modernism, seen most clearly in art and aesthetics, has been vitiated and the anxieties and emotional void left, along with a legitimation deficit, have been filled, at least until recently, by a postmodern cultural ideology of consumption. Because of the universalization of market capitalism, the distinction between culture and economics has collapsed in a blurring of fields. Culture now pervades everything and everything is subject – though not necessarily in thrall – to the universal “logic” of commodification, marketization and mediatization.

Thus postmodernity is a world relativized by global forces and full of risk. And many of Trump’s supporters are seeking relief from the insecurity of this kind of world, especially where jobs and communitarian values are concerned. Their aspirations are the antithesis of postmodernism’s contempt for solidity and all claims to authenticity. And yet postmodern populism

feeds their insecurity, valorizes their sense of powerlessness and offers redemption through a return to fundamentals and certainties. If this is the politics of illusion, it is also a paradox and should be seen as typical of the complex of motivations that inform waves of protest politics around the world at present (Nederveen Pieterse, 2018).

So what is postmodern populism?

In sum then, postmodern populism partakes of the following characteristics (Axford and Huggins, 1997; Axford, 2018). *First* and at its most general, the idea suggests that contemporary politics is undergoing, or should undergo, radical and maybe systemic changes. Such claims are not new, but have a stark resonance today. As early as 1993 Martin Jacques talked about the meltdown of the formal boundaries of politics and political discourses as part of the crisis of the nation-state and of modernity itself. He was particularly concerned with the seismic tremors in Italian politics during the 1990's, auguries of a now widespread techno-populism, and his vision of epochal change is more widely applicable some twenty-five years on. Trump's populism and the Brexit campaign are firmly located in what Vattimo called "the giddy proliferation of communications" (1992, 27) that now frames politics and the sense of crisis that pervades it. Nowhere is exempt from this kind of framing.

Second, and intimately linked, postmodern politics manifests in a growing frustration with usual politics and politicians. The difference with past discontents may well lie in the speed and facility with which protest can be mobilized and expressed. The Internet, and especially social media, makes it easy to be a dissenter, or just a curmudgeon. Hitherto unheard of – and unlooked for - “activists” are now able to bypass the kinetic structures of usual politics. In some, though not all, cases, they lack strong identification and see no need for their intervention to be brokered. This is the politics of contagion. The problem for populist leaders is what do to with public cynicism once they harness it; how to pick up the emotional slack and fashion a sustainable platform that goes beyond nationalist rhetoric, anti-governmentalist tub-thumping and fundamentalism. How sustainable is the politics of anger expressed through populist vehicles?

But is populism even built to last? In the present conjuncture the postmodern version musters as a distinct challenge to the remnants of embedded liberalism and its successor neoliberalism. And in this Dani Rodrik argues that it is best seen as part of an ideological and policy rebalancing of market globalization (Rodrik, 2018). But even if true that could still leave postmodern populism as no more than a cathartic response to periodic crises; a shock to the system rather than its successor-in-waiting. That too syncs with its thin ideology

and hit-and-run style of politics. Populism appears to demand transformation, but of a back-to-the-future variety.

***Third*, postmodern populism has emerged as a robust and explicit challenge to the very idea of transcendental meanings and forms. It is the antithesis of absolutes and grand narratives and its embrace of new media augments such relativism. And yet, in no small measure its success lies in trumpeting the defense of absolutes – sovereignty, uni-culturalism; while selling a politics that has little regard for truth and civility. It easy to dismiss this as a form of anti-politics, but Is it damaging for democracy?**

Of a certainty it challenges received wisdom that independent, authoritative sources can, and perhaps should, set the temper of debate and curate or broker the political agenda; assumptions implicit in the founding myths of democratic elitism. But such a change still might be seen as democratizing in its own right or, more contentiously, popularizing. Of course, the tone of much criticism tends to dismiss any such claim. In a recent foray into the relationship between the Internet and democracy, Cass Sunstein catalogues the ways in which the norms of brokered conflict and the politics of accommodation in a pluralist democracy are (he says) being violated in the online world. He argues that instead of tolerance and mutual comprehension social media promotes mutual incomprehension, social fragmentation and

intolerance of others (2017). For critics such features epitomize populist politics.

***Fourth*, despite the reference to “left” and “right”-wing populisms, postmodern populism is often linked to the demise or transcendence of left-right politics and of simple models of political allegiance. To some extent the idea of transcendence flatters the cut-and-paste model of policy choice often taken by populists in pursuit of their aims, where left and right-wing preferences on immigration control, protecting domestic industries and rejecting austerity spending are adopted promiscuously regardless of ideological provenance. In a weary aside, the British journalist Nick Cohen complains that in areas like immigration control and identity politics “the worst of the right has aped the worst of the left” (2018). At all events, depending on the pathological image employed transformation is portrayed as either a shift to a politics based on the revival of palpable communities or, more usually, a politics in which all kinds of identities are relativized or mutable under the impacts of digital media. In Orwellian terms each can be seen as either good or bad depending on context, perspective or circumstance, and the politics that results is always contingent, while suggesting otherwise.**

***Fifth*, postmodern populism is thus a reflection of the mediatization of politics, where that refers to the processes through which media permeate, influence and even constitute**

wider culture and society. Such processes have profound consequences for the construction of glocalities. What has become known as Web-2.0 (interactive and full of user-generated content) is a clear example of what we might call digital glocalization . Dannah Boyd has it thus: “(g)localized structures and networks are the backbone of Web 2.0. Rather than conceptualizing the world in geographical terms, it is now necessary to use a networked model to understand the relations between people and culture, to even think about localising in terms of social structures not in terms of location” (2005, 181). Again, it is entirely in keeping with the mixed and contradictory character of populist parties and movements that this image can be taken as the antithesis or apotheosis of localism.

Postmodern populism, revolt and neoliberalism

None of this should surprise us, because it is an echo of shifts and paradoxes revealed in the ideologies and practice of domestic politics and in global trends over the past decade. Responses to crisis have congealed uneasily around a more robust national-centrism, both in developed and emerging markets, albeit for different reasons. Globalism – and certainly globalization – subsists, but not in its Western-dominated, free-market, high-roller guise. The idea of a “new” globalization depicts a global economy that is much more fragmented and multipolar. In some of the best known cases of populist incursion free markets are still applauded at the same time as

the rhetoric of closed or tightly regulated borders, refurbished sovereignties and controls over labour supply, all qualify the mantra of market liberalization. Responses to crisis and engagements with globalization outside developed markets and core states and societies, reveal an equally complex, and less than uniform, picture. We have also witnessed the appearance of global or proto-global publics enabled or constituted through online connection, as during the 2011 uprisings in North Africa and the Middle-East. More widely, it is possible to discern a networked globality of counter-cultural, glocal discourses around the valence issues of local precarity, poverty, human rights and self-determination.

Across the board we can see different clusters of protest (revolt) driven variously by the documented failings of neoliberal capitalism and austerity, by crises of governance in emerging states and societies, and by ethnic and regional tensions in, for example, Myanmar, Syria, and Catalonia. But this is not a monolithic pantheon, as each cluster moves to different temporalities and rhythms (Nederveen Pieterse, 2018, 168). So it is not clear that they are of a piece when it comes to describing and explaining what triggers protest and whether they all should be considered as glocal expressions of the same global systemic crisis.

Jan Nederveen Pieterse notes that their concerns overlap and so they are part of a “general conjuncture” of discontents

(2018, 169); but whether there is a “convergence of radicalism”, a “globalization of defiance”, “left” and “right” manifestations of that impulse, or expressions of a unifying ideology, is much more open to question. Populism and some kinds of alter-globalization for that matter, are a revolt of the left-behinds, the expanding precariat, the poorly governed and the culturally bereft. But as forms of contentious politics, they move to different impulses, attract a more varied constituency than global “have-nots” and adopt a variety of strategies that are context specific. In those varied contexts, the rise of populist forces enlarges fissures in the relations between citizens and those who govern their lives. For many citizens ties to established parties of both the social-democratic left and centre-right have become increasingly tenuous. As disillusion grows so the appeal of a less compromised politics increases. This may not be an ideological shift; more a move of last resort; a metaphorical expletive delivered through the ballot box (which is mostly the case), though sometimes on the street and through social media.

Reasons to be cheerful?

The fissiparous quality of protest tempers any impulse to generalise, though there are some common, if shadowy, enemies in the shape of bankers and other scions of the corporate world. This is a world manifesting different kinds of revolt, and that variety is itself a reflection of growing – not to say systemic - multipolarity (Nederveen Pieterse, 2018). The

de-centredness, or multi-centredness of this world also qualifies the use of blanket labels such as “global capitalism” or “global neoliberalism” as unequivocal descriptions of a predominant or hegemonic variety of globalization or global system. Capitalism is differentiated and neoliberalism increasingly fails to convince as an overarching and steadfast rubric because big players in emerging markets - China, India and Northeast Asia – have developed, and continue to develop, outside it. The brands of politics that have emerged in these regions tend to the models of strongman, authoritarian leadership; but even so, there is comparative variety.

And it remains true that in advanced economies in the West and North populist movements and parties of both the left and the right have emerged in recent years to protest and counter the perceived and experienced ills of market capitalism. To a greater or lesser extent, and almost regardless of ideological hue, they offer a cure or palliative for perceived maladies that challenges both established and weaker forms of democratic politics (Inglehart, 2018). But does it have to be like this? Is their kind of glocalism always likely to be regressive and thus suffer the calumny that attaches to most versions of populism and to the machinations of many populist leaders?

In other words, in its postmodern guise, can populism be redeemed as a sub-set of glocalization projects tempering globalist excess and at least doing no harm to democratic

principles and practices? Well, in spite of Ernesto Laclau's insistence that populism is a hegemonic project (2005), or Douglas Kellner's treatment of Trump as an "authoritarian populist" (2018) postmodern populism might be redeemable; or rather, the democratic and glocalist components of its make-up can be rescued from the dark side, as both Chantal Mouffe and David McKnight argue (Mouffe, 2013; McKnight 2018). This is more a task for activists than observers, though its realization is hampered by the apparent job description required of any progressive populism, that it has to ape a reworked social democratic politics, rather than become a transformative, postmodern variant. For activists, but also for commentators, the key question remains what would such a strategy comprise and how far it can manifest an emancipatory glocal politics not in thrall to authoritarian norms and practices (Scoones et al, 2018).

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