

POPULISM VS THE NEW GLOBALIZATION

BARRIE AXFORD



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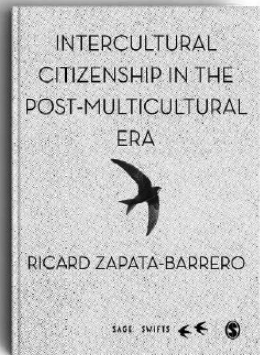
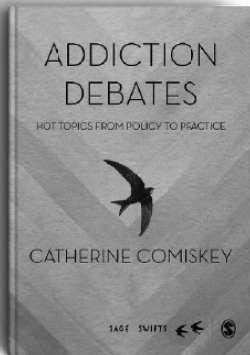
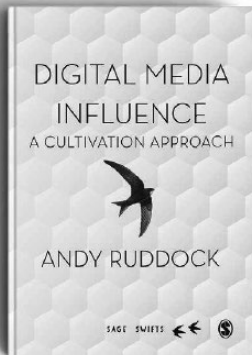
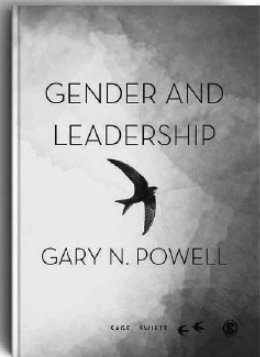
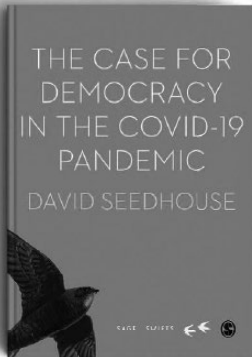
POPULISM
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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For Frances





POPULISM AND GLOBALIZATION: UNEASY BEDFELLOWS

INTRODUCTION

Populism and globalization share a baleful reputation; though to be fair, not universally, and not for the same reasons. Intellectually too they have had chequered careers. In the academy they are often pilloried for being imprecise concepts; no more than convenient, and sometimes misleading, shorthand for more complex, or quite other, phenomena (Freeden, 2017; Steger and James, 2019). Outside the academy the ascription ‘populist’ has been applied with something like abandon to a host of political incursions that share few characteristics beyond outrage at the way things are, and this may be an important datum. Populists rarely self-identify, and their coyness in this regard is also intriguing.

The concept of globalization, sometimes used to signify a game change in the social-scientific prospectus, suffers from the tendency to conflate empirical-analytical and normative positions. There is also evidence of conceptual slovenliness, as practitioners and scholars slip too easily between the notions of globalization as process, globalism as ideology and globality as systemic. As we shall see in Chapter 4, while the brunt of commentary tends to see globalization as systematic interconnectivity, it is the more fey concepts of globality and global consciousness that offer purchase on the imbrication of situated lives with institutional structures and rules that transcend the local. Of course, in popular discourses and in the imagination of activists, where little of this academic drollery has purchase, globalization remains a vibrant source of dismay or ambition. Populism – postmodern populism – is an expression of these sentiments.



When applied to real-world agonisms, opinions are rarely ambivalent and work with a rough-and-ready calculation wherein populism is the antithesis of globalization. This is as much a normative stance as a datum, and the normative charge is always palpable, not least in the much-repeated aphorism that populism is a 'backlash' against globalization. Much in line with George Orwell's coining in *Animal Farm* (1945), each term is deemed good or bad by definition, with praise or blame attributed on the basis of their allegedly regressive or progressive features strained through competing world-views and pressing contingencies. At such a pass, and in the real world, the normative calculation might dictate either plumping for the lesser of two evils, or crying a plague on both houses. Bearing in mind that some observers believe that obsessing with populism is a distraction for scholars and activists alike, and that globalization is over, there is still no escaping the fact that these concepts are code for the temper of our times, and thus too important, and certainly too newsworthy to ignore. Their articulation, and what that tells us about the cast of the world today, is the focus of this short book.

All this sounds portentous but rather abstract. In fact, we are talking about narratives that have considerable analytical, normative, ideological and empirical heft, as well as significant 'real-life' consequences. Populism is cast variously as globalization's reflex political discontent today, and possibly its nemesis, or as a backlash against the 'silent revolution' in values that characterized the closing decades of the twentieth century (Inglehart, 1977). Sometimes it is painted as liberal democracy's Mr Jekyll, a mostly hidden, but immanent, schizoid tendency. In less picaresque accounts, it is a frisson on the journey from neoliberal hegemony to the more eclectic and plural forms of a 'new' globalization that, in part, has re-valorized the national and all forms of local and, in a forlorn politics, chosen parochialism as a defence against the world, or a new gateway to it (Canovan, 1982, 1999; Inglehart, 2019). For all the attention populism has reaped in the academy and beyond, at this point it is as well to be cautious about its status as a destroyer or maker of worlds.

In the following pages and with due care over conceptual nuance, I explore what I will later expound as *postmodern* populism as a significant feature of the current phase of global constitution, which some observers argue is a new phase. And at this point it is also worth remembering that *postmodern* too is a term that, in the vernacular, 'has form'. I highlight the tensions between a process of allegedly secular, if variable, convergence across, sometimes heedless of, borders, and the potential for disruption, perhaps for transformation, that resides in populism's brand(s) of contentious local politics, its robust take on the sanctity of some collective identities, and in its mediatized persona. These prospects too are

often glossed as good or bad by definition. Specifically, the book is framed by the ways in which assumptions about globalization – especially, but not exclusively, ‘market globalism’ (Steger, 2015) – and knowledge about the global are being reworked under what are frequently taken as crisis conditions.

For the burden of much reflection is that contemporary populism is, to use a weasel word, ‘implicated’ in one or more related crises or transformative moments – of modernity, of capitalism, of liberal democracy and of globalization. To that we can now add the ecological crisis and, of course, the current global pandemic of Covid-19. Rarely is there precision as to cause and effect (Diamond, 2018; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020). In these reflections, the recent global financial crisis, along with enforced and voluntary migrations are frequently bruited as contexts for and/or causes of recent outbreaks of ‘left-’ and ‘right-’wing populism, with the latter sometimes styled ‘national populism’, of which more later (Taguieff, 1996, 2016). Current manifestations of identity politics too are often linked to the appearance, or revitalization, of populist rhetoric, leaders, parties and movements.

So to reiterate, populism is slated as a quickener in the playing out of globalization’s current travails. In this role it musters as an expression of immanent tensions in the fabric of politics and societies, as an instrument of catharsis, as a possible denouement, or – perhaps counter-intuitively – as no more than a periodic, if uncomfortable, variant of politics as usual (Blühdorn and Butzlaff, 2019). And there is a further aspect worth noting at this stage, one sensitive to the vicissitudes of global capitalism and the calculus of global change in the still new millennium, but agnostic (at least) on where populism fits in that narrative. This sees a focus on populism as a side-show to the real business in hand for critical global science, which ought to be taken up with what Simon Tormey characterizes as ‘the critique of elite governance in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis and austerity’ (2018). In other words, a science dedicated to unmasking hegemonic orders. Scholarly obsession with, and mostly revulsion towards, populism and its ‘various extremisms’ can blind observer and activist to the ‘misbehavior of elites in a world in which eight billionaires own as much as half the world’s population’ (Nederveen Pieterse, 2018). In this scenario, even the disreputable qualities of mainstream politics are worth approbation simply on the grounds that they are not populist; a view pretty much endorsed by Francis Fukuyama when he consigned populism as another elite discourse, one that works ideologically to bolster an elite *gestalt* and elite interests (Fukuyama, 2017; Nederveen Pieterse, 2018).

More on all this as we proceed. For the moment, let me repeat that for many commentators and for good or ill, globalization implies secular integration

across many areas of life, along with the growth of a modal consciousness of global constraints and opportunities. But in fact, globalization is a multidimensional process moving to different impulses that inflect economic life, culture and, of course, politics. It is performed by a diversity of actors through their engagement with more encompassing economic, cultural and political scripts. More often than not the complexity of what I have called world-making practices (Axford, 2018) translates into emergent, rather than embedded, globalities, for there is no certainty that processes of globalization will yield fully institutionalized outcomes, let alone determinate ones. Indeed, its recent career easily lends itself to claims that it is either rampant or in demise. Both scenarios owe something to the recent successes or failures of neoliberalism as a globalizing script. Hyperbole was once the stock-in-trade of many commentaries. The upshot was that early theories of globalization were sold on all-or-nothing visions of the process, leaving them inadequate as descriptive or explanatory devices, and just wrong-headed.

GLOBALIZATION AND POPULISM: SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The relationship between globalization and populism is itself an echo of a trope familiar to students of globalization; the antinomy of sameness and difference played out as an elemental dialectic of global and local. This dialectic is apparent in both routine and non-threatening ways – in the day-to-day engagements between local and situated subjects and global networks and flows – and in more visceral encounters seen, for example, in Arjun Appadurai's 'geographies of anger' (2006). In the latter, strangers are treated with suspicion, disdain and even violence when they alight in the guise of terrorists, or would-be terrorists, some forms of migrant labour and refugees. Difference is often justification enough for suspicion, not embrace. Some observers, including Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban, claim that today we are more illiberal than of yore, and the better for it. In truth, the evidence is mixed and the direction of travel still unclear. For while there is much here that describes proliferating, and occasionally despicable, features of contemporary politics around the world, that is just part of the story.

On the face of it, populism – and certainly national populism – is the antithesis of globalization. It is a sanguineous, but essentially moral, appeal to and evocation of militant and pristine difference couched as resistance by 'the people' – always virtuous or pure, and certainly ill-done by – to the wilful and wanton destruction of the particular, the local and the idiosyncratic by remote

and uncaring (sometimes global) elites, indifferent economic forces and a host of malign, or opportunistic, others (Zaslove, 2008). In different populist discourses, the strategic location and peculiar qualities of the elites in question will vary. And as we shall see, the rhetoric of 'the people', employed as a stick with which to beat opponents, is also highly charged when used in populist rhetoric, not least because it too is conceptually imprecise and normatively laden when used in different political idioms. In one of the many paradoxes of the populist credo – if such exists – its advocates appeal to the inclusive, even universal, subject of 'the people', but are selective about conferring membership, or cavalier about actual numbers, favouring those with notionally 'authentic' claims to a particular birthright and the heirs to bespoke, albeit imagined, histories. Sometimes, 'the people' is conjured as a rhetorical device to justify actions and to demean opposing views. Just how the concept is used, and with what consequences for quality of life and the temper of politics in different countries, will become clearer as the argument unfolds.

Local-global accommodation is often considered the default outcome of a modal 'glocalizing' dynamic, one that tends to produce hybrid identities and syncretic forms. In one sense, this is hardly surprising. The existence of local difference – especially cultural difference – paints what for many scholars is a benign picture of global constitution. Here, diversity morphs with little difficulty into the image of an even more impure, connected and still largely pacific, world, which is hybridized or creolized; diversity is its stock-in-trade. Set against predictions of a global future moving to more-or-less pathological forms of identity politics, local cultures feeling swamped by a tide of cultural and economic relativism or fractured postmodernity, we are offered a seemingly more wholesome brew.

But there are also more abrasive and polarized accounts of and prescriptions for the temper of an ideal world. Slogans such as 'left behind by globalization', 'taking back control', even 'America first', while inchoate, may speak to another dynamic entirely – or else distill particular alarms over economic austerity and the destitution that results, inequality, multiculturalism and political correctness. All have been successfully amplified or, to use current phraseology, 'weaponized' in various political agendas; not all of them populist. In this lexicon, independence, (in)security, a sense of place and, abstract though it may seem, sovereignty, also have emotional purchase and electoral leverage, with advocates promising new kinds of unsullied or redemptive politics and a return to a more benign past.

In such narratives, and on the part of those feeling distraught and unheard, the defence of cultural and other enclaves does not appear as the last refuge

of scoundrels and fools, or of the terminally gullible, but is embraced as a return to first principles and laudable essentials, not the least of which is patriotism. Populism as localism then takes on a heroic, rather than a toxic, cast, at least in the eyes of its proponents. Although there is a parallel – and possibly counter, narrative – it is not rooted in common feeling and habits of the heart, but in contempt and cynicism for things as they are. This narrative is found in the conceit that populism's appeal is always negative; rooted in a lack of trust in elites, economic alienation, political marginalization, dying communities, the fissiparous nature of identity politics and in the despair thus engendered. Sometimes the two strains are conjoined, and I will return to this matter in Chapter 3.

POPULISM AND THE POLITICS OF DISCONTENT

So we must tread carefully here, if only to avoid the Orwellian trap found in his mantra of 'four legs good, two legs bad', of things being taken for granted, and of claims that are true by definition – except when it is decided that they are not (Orwell, 1945). Not all those who support populist ideas and parties cleave to a politics that is discriminatory, exclusionary and brutal. The electoral platforms of left-populist parties, such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, are largely devoid of racist and xenophobic content. In 2016 and, for a short while, in the 2020 US presidential campaigns, Democrat hopeful Bernie Sanders touted a rhetorically spare brand of populism in the guise of a revamped 'New-Dealism'. His solutions to austerity and widening precarity were essentially collectivist and, whisper it, social-democratic. Then there is the matter of what might be seen as policy, or ideological, inconsistency within populist parties and groups. In Italy of late, the balance of politics has shifted to a more right-wing, Eurosceptic and anti-globalist demeanour. The Five Star Movement, which made a short-lived alliance with the more obviously right-wing, nationalistic Lega, has a leftist and green pedigree on environmental policy, but endorses policies of immigration control with the same vigour as parties and movements of the right.

As Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin have shown (2018), it is easy, but mistaken, to caricature support for populist parties and leaders; to depict the 'populist revolt' as a clear instance of Morlocks rising from their dark caverns to devour the Eloi. That interpretation is all too apparent in some commentary on the election of Donald Trump, about the leave majority in the UK Brexit referendum of 2016, and with regard to the 'Gilets Jaunes' (yellow vests) in France and across Europe (Goodhart, 2017). In such accounts, the best that is said of and for

populism is that it parades as a form of anti-politics; the worst, that it is a carrier of what Georges Balandier called 'democratic sickness' (1992: 43).

Whether populism musters as a viable – or any – alternative to the ills now generally held to beset mass representative democracy, runs like a thread through both balanced and committed treatments of the phenomenon. The questions asked are standard: is populism immanently democratic or necessarily anti-democratic? Can it ever be pluralist or is it an implacable enemy of diversity? These stark dichotomies also inform much commentary on the trajectories and temper of populist incursions into contemporary politics. So, among a host of queries, it is appropriate to ask whether curating the 'will of the people' always pushes populist regimes and movements in an authoritarian direction? And in terms of impact, are we talking about a strain of political contagion that is no more than a *zeitgeist*, its progress and demeanour always contingent and probably time-limited?

What can be said is that few places are now immune to a politics that both invests regimes where pluralist democracy has shallow roots, and those where events and trends in the global politics and economics have weakened the legitimacy of previously sound or largely unchallenged institutions. This will be a recurring theme. As a case in point, the previously remarked, and always precarious, coalition between Italy's free-wheeling populist movement, the Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Star Movement) and the more traditionally conservative and authoritarian Lega in the spring of 2018, provides fascinating insights into the ways in which conventional political parties and mainstream print and broadcast media are losing their grip on electoral politics, and where the routine brokerage and aggregative functions associated with mass political parties in representative democracies attract increasing calumny.

Notwithstanding the short period of grace afforded to beleaguered political elites by the ravages of Covid-19, the parlous esteem in which the two-party dominant system in the UK is held following the Brexit referendum, is also a datum in any such judgement. Elections to the EU Parliament in May 2019, in Italy and elsewhere, would seem to confirm this trend, although by no means entirely, with the latter an important qualification. How then to consign the Italian and EU experience in terms of what it means for the shape and temper of politics in quite mature, democratic systems? What have been and what will be the consequences for democratic theory and practice? In weighing such questions, there is also the necessary caution not to over-read the scale and impact of populist incursions into usual politics.

These are not imponderable matters, but they are complex. We must be wary of off-the-shelf answers. An appropriate caution is to take due care

over how we judge populism as a strain of politics likely to yield global and accommodative outcomes as opposed to pathological forms of localism and authoritarian rule. National populism speaks to and claims to be the expression of particularistic identities and world-views. There is rarely a universal populism, or a claim to it, even though, as Niall Ferguson notes (2016: 42), 'populists are nearly always part of a global phenomenon', and the idea of populism across borders, or a global populism subsists in various prescriptions and ambitions (Attila, 2019; Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2019). President Trump's one-time adviser Steve Bannon referred to national populism as the 'global Tea Party' (in a speech at the Vatican on 8 May 2014), implying a global network or coalition of the newly precarious, whose *raison d'être* is the protection of difference in the guise of nations and their threatened cultures, or imputed civilizations. More prosaically, Matteo Salvini, leader of the Italian Lega, sought to build a coalition of populist right parties in the European Parliament (EP) following the EP elections in May 2019. As I note in Chapter 2, apparent, or sought for, convergence may hide, but not negate, marked differences between populists.

These are vignettes from what many would still dismiss as populism's darker side, but is populism amenable to a much wider and more inclusive audience or constituency than the authoritarian nationalism of the liberal nightmare allows?

Populism looks to co-opt the voice of the forgotten 'ordinary' citizen and disports as the only begetter of genuine patriotism (Zakaria, 2016). It traffics a unifying meta-language in times of uncertainty and 'will of the people' is its most potent meme (Hauser, 2018). Under the mantle of national populism, it disparages adversaries as enemies of the people and unworthy of their trust. A campaigning Donald Trump wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* (14 April 2016) '(t)he only antidote to decades of ruinous rule by a small handful of elites is a bold infusion of popular will. On every major issue affecting this country, the people are right and the governing elite are wrong.' 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'. Of course, there is an element of playing to the gallery in this kind of rhetoric, and it is certainly opportunistic, but there is no denying its resonance with portions of otherwise diverse national electorates willing to be swayed, or who feel unrequited. And there is no gainsaying it's campaign savvy.

The people set against all manner of subversions and incursions is a constant theme, sometimes replete – Rodrigo Duterte in the Phillipines, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Viktor Orban in Hungary and Donald Trump in the USA come to mind – with mysogynistic and racist clamour and often couched in the rhetoric of

victimhood and the imagery of beleaguered national identity (Muller, 2017). Even Theresa May, erstwhile prime minister of the UK, and hardly the epitome of a charismatic populist leader, felt emboldened or besieged enough to inveigh against what she saw as the democratically elected parliament's attempts to usurp the will of the British people to leave the EU in March 2019. Some contenders for the leadership of the UK's Conservative and Unionist Party in the spring and summer of the same year were not shy in employing similar rhetoric.

But not all sentiments jealous of the nation and the national interest are plucked from the authoritarian-populist playbook, or rehearse deviant political theory as an invitation to come over to the dark side. In some theoretical accounts, the global narrative of the nation-state is not mustered as a realist call to arms in a war of all against all. The emotional need for people to cleave to and refurbish a national story does not have to be a stalking-horse for illiberal and authoritarian nationalism, blatant xenophobia or lumpen populism (Degler, 1959). In other words, populism is not, or need not be, the same thing as nativism, although the two are sometimes conjoined. That said, nativism is manifestly a feature of some right-of-centre populisms, wherein 'a' people construct and refurbish myths of origin and lay claim to territorial boundaries as markers around exceptionalism. In various ways, both these traits invoke emotional and sometimes legal natality as the guardians of collective identities beset and belittled by the toils of a borderless world, as it is perceived.

This is not a new story. The polarization of attitudes around questions of identity is a notable feature of many multi-ethnic and multicultural societies and, as the Brexit process demonstrates, there is evidence – growing since 2015 – that support for leaving the EU has grown among those who feel that being a member undermines Britain's distinctive national identity (Curtice, 2019). But in the longer historical warp of political modernity, both civic and ethnic nationalisms have played a large part, though with quite different endgames in mind. Everywhere modernization has a tortuous history and diverse outcomes.

Moreover, things are not all doom and gloom. World polity theory reminds us of the global culture of the nation-state and the extent to which apparent isomorphism – independent development under similar constraints – still legitimates national and local autonomy and cultural difference. The upshot is a universal cultural script or institution built, even dependent, on difference as its key organizational principle. Such detail also counters any sense of global culture as presumptively monolithic, while endorsing the desirability of universalisms like human rights and an international order built on generalizable rules. So, while the idea of 'the global' conjures visions of an autonomous cultural field, a 'self-evident' global scale and institutions, as Saskia Sassen has it (2006: 7), it

is much more nuanced, infinitely messier, constructs that better depict world-making practice. Among these the articulation of local cultural traditions and identities with global norms and scripts – known as glocalization – stands out. Less this still paints too bland a picture, as always, it is the manner of their articulation that is critical when examining the implications of the current spate of populisms for different signifiers of globalization (open borders, market ideology and practice, multiculturalism, labour flexibility, cosmopolitan tenets, civilizational renewal, and so on) and features of globality. And even these signifiers are not of a piece but speak to different versions of globalization.

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 the pantheon of global studies, but probably more generally, it comprises a historical and spatial dialectic in which the vernacular in every sense engages (absorbs, resists, accommodates, succumbs to, even abrogates) more encompassing structures and processes to produce, or just intimate, new forms of glocality (Roudometof, 2016). When the two collide, the politics that results can display a visceral, and sometimes downright unpleasant, quality. But not always, because there is a good deal of variety.

Thus, populism as the politics of choice or desperation in a confrontation between free market principles and national economic protectionism may not be congruent with its mobilization as a defence of national culture, ethnic difference or religious purity – although it can be. In other respects, concerns about its probable effects on representative institutions as these are found in established democracies may be valid, but how far do they underplay or ignore the potential for direct, even deliberative, democracy that resides in the same politics (Mouffe, 2013, 2018)? In some less established democracies, as Levitsky and Ziblatt advise (2017), the erosion of democratic norms has contributed to the rise of ‘strongman’ leaders with authoritarian traits. But the appeal of strong leaders is not confined to populists and authoritarian political cultures. So, at this point in my narrative the necessary caution is that where populism is concerned – and because of the devil in its detail – one should beware the claim that one size fits all.

I will show that populism should be seen as part of globalization’s elemental dialectic of sameness and difference, of local and global, rather than as a harbinger of its demise. The outcomes need not be pathological kinds of politics, although a transformative motif always leaves that possibility open. Populism is ‘implicated’ in shaping the current phase of globalization and may be a transformative frisson, but it is far from clear whether it is a symptom of crisis, an effect, a cause, or just an inflection of politics as usual. Nor is it clear

whether the current spate of national populisms is a long- or short-term feature of the politics of a globalized world, presently tied to the longer-term effects of economic recession, fuelled by the failures of financial globalization and the frantic movement of peoples across borders. Conceived thus, populism might even be seen as counter-hegemonic, a form of resistance to neoliberal excess, or a Polanyian 'double movement' in face of market failure or market excess (Polanyi, 1944; Gamble, 2019). Indeed, Andreas Nolke's take on the double movement thesis is to identify cycles of globalization and protectionism as axial features of recent world-historical development (Nolke, 2017).

POPULISM AND GLOBALIZATION: THE BEGINNING OF A THESIS

Let me begin to suggest an interpretation which, for the moment, rules nothing out, but couches the debate in the frame of global theory, rather than, or as well as, a jeremiad on the scope for some tawdry strains of anti-politics. When challenging the latter tendency, Ernesto Laclau argued that rather than being treated as an abnormality, we should view populism as a 'distinctive and always present possibility of structuration of political life' (2005: 13). Taken at face value this is still an anodyne formulation, but it is pregnant with meaning because it holds out the prospect of populism manifesting as Dr Jekyll *and* Mr Hyde, depending on how it is constructed. Margaret Canovan offers a not dissimilar take when she glosses Michael Oakeshott's depiction of political modernity as a tension between the politics of faith and the politics of skepticism (Canovan, 1999). She adapts Oakeshott's binary as the redemptive and pragmatic faces of democracy. Populism arises in the inevitable, though periodic, gaps between the two. But for those who lament the (re)appearance of populism in recent years, talk of immanent tendencies is much too sanguine. Critics object that populism rubs against the grain of social and value change as this has (beneficially) shaped the modern world in the global north for the past 70 years. Ronald Inglehart characterized this change as an intergenerational shift to a post-materialist value system, against which there is now a backlash – a culture shift – fed by growing feelings of insecurity (Inglehart, 1977, 2019). In this milieu, populism flourishes and it is not deemed a healthy growth.

These days the national, or the local – those allegedly 'natural' breeding grounds of populist sentiment – can be seen as a variant of what Ulrich Beck called the 'internalized global' (2006: 23). It can be seen too in the contested Europeanization of politics and policy that is the less braggart version of what used to be called European integration, or the European project. This too stands

as a trope for emergent and increasingly contested globality. Diverse forms of national populism are expressions of contested and dynamic globalization that tend to – admittedly varied – glocal outcomes, and these are dictated by context and circumstance. They are, nonetheless, systemic in that they are the political and cultural expression of a new phase of globalization.

The thesis owes an intellectual debt to Roland Robertson's insight that local and global are mutually constitutive (1992). Glocalization highlights how local cultures may critically adapt to or resist global phenomena and reveals the ways in which the very construction and transformation of localities is a standard component of globalization. This is not a linear process, and certainly does not follow some evolutionary logic. It also conjures a turbulent politics, and here the language of crisis, even transformation, may be apposite. But I still want to couch that discussion in terms that suggest a more systemic frame of reference and that are familiar to global scholars and to some students of populism: those of global convergence and its discontents, contested identity, hybridity, syncretism (with the latter two concepts implying cultural amalgamation) and, of course, localism and glocalization, the processes through which local and global are articulated.

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 allegedly 'thin' ideology (Freeden, 1996; Mudde, 2004, 2015), 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 and practice. The tortured processes of global constitution reveal elements of convergence, differentiation and hybridization that decant into 'glocalization projects', as Giulianotti and Robertson have it (2006), as well as into more abrasive 'localization projects'. These projects point to different kinds of accommodation between local and global. Such processes are variously discommoding to the perceived or prescribed integrity of the local and to the ways in which locality has been and is imagined by denizens. In practice, local–global engagements may conjure a state of affairs where national and local cultures and practices are (i) eroded through cultural homogenization of the kind described by George Ritzer (2004), (ii) reinforced in a politics of cultural resistance to globalization, or (iii) replaced by hybrid or syncretic identities which are the result of the interpenetration of local and global. It is important to note that outcomes are not, or should not be, predicated on the immutable properties of actors or processes. In other words, they are made through practice and often in singular conditions.

My argument will be that what I call *postmodern populism* – which implies the relativization and even transcendence of modernist principles and forms – holds up a mirror to current politics and the present phase of globalization, and what that shows is both unedifying and palatable. It is unedifying because it offers what many see as false solutions to perceived troubles; and 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 post-modern populism, but introduces some ambiguity when judging its merits as a disruptive and possibly transformative agenda. The prefix *postmodern* is appropriate, albeit contentious, because it speaks to the reinvention of populism in the global, digital age – in what are increasingly mediated politics and cultures – and because of the ways in which different populist vehicles and the sentiments underlying them reinforce or offend the principles of philosophical and political modernity, at least as articulated in the West and global north.

As ever in this discussion, there is room for apparent contradiction, maybe even paradox. Postmodern populism is a phenomenon of its time, which is one of dislocation and fragmentation. At one and the same time it acts as a solvent for ontological certainties – in politics, economics and culture – and yet claims to be their bastion. Because of this it seems an unlikely vehicle for those seeking refuge and redress from insecurities caused by modernization and globalization, even when it parades in precisely that guise. So, the appropriate question has to be ‘what explains its appeal?’ And there is a further twist. Postmodern populism is a feature of what many commentators now call the ‘new’ globalization. The latter designation takes critical account of the argument that we are now in a period of globalization best understood as national-liberal or, encompassing both liberal and illiberal regimes, as sovereigntist – the latter an apt but unlovely term. The recently dominant trope of a hegemonic and borderless global order – capitalist and (neo)liberal – increasingly is a thing of the past. Other contenders, other globalizations, such as ‘justice globalism’ or ‘jihadist globalism’, and the whole idea of there being multiple modernities, also point up the fissiparous qualities of the umbrella concept ‘globalization’ (Steger, 2015). There is undoubtedly a populist backlash against globalization; but what kind of globalization? Indeed, is it still permissible to still talk of a globalized world?

2

WHAT'S IN A NAME? POPULISM IN THOUGHT (AND SOME DEEDS)

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I examine the concept of populism in greater detail, rehearse how it appears in different literatures and begin to reflect on how core tenets – if such there are – translate into practice. As well as tracking its provenance, the aim is to identify the main strands in populist thinking along with necessary and/or sufficient facets of its identity. Proceeding thus will enable me to ask whether populism has deep ideological unity, perhaps core ontology, and whether that matters when assessing its significance in the current political climate? I make the case for populism as an ensemble concept, one able to entertain a range of political styles and thus suited to a variety of politics.

The idea of populism as a world-historical force with terminal implications for the many species of globalization now extant is tempting, but probably overstated. This is not to deny its potential as one of the would-be despoilers of global economic liberalism, or its Janus-faced character in the projected demise or possible transformation of democratic elitism. Moreover, whether in actual or faux-authoritarian guise, national populism appears to be a global phenomenon. As Manfred Steger and Paul James advise (2019: 246), this strain provides a template for a diverse group of players, including Viktor Orban in Hungary, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Norbert Hofer's Austria, Marine Le Pen in France, Matteo Salvini's Italy, Andrzej Duda's Poland, Nigel Farage – and now Boris Johnson – in the United Kingdom, Pauline Hanson's Australia, Iván Duque's Colombia, Rodrigo Duterte's Philippines and, of course, Donald Trump in the USA.

This list is not exhaustive, and because of rapidly changing circumstances some of the actors now look the worse for wear. In July 2020, Poland's



incumbent president Andrzej Duda retained power with the slimmest presidential victory since the end of communism in 1989. So there is some erosion of support in specific places, but overall the list is quite impressive. A recent study by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change catalogued 46 populist leaders or political parties that have held executive office across 33 countries between 1990 and 2018 (2019). On their figures, over the same period the number of populists in power increased from four to 20. And, perhaps coincidentally, in a more condensed time-frame we have undergone what Larry Diamond calls a 'democratic recession' (Diamond, 2010, 2018). This recession may or may not indicate a secular trend, although in a mischievous interview in June 2019, Russian president Vladimir Putin announced the demise of liberal values and rules on a world scale. Claiming to be in at the death of Western liberalism was probably tongue-in-cheek on Putin's part, or wishful thinking. But, coming a mere three decades after Francis Fukuyama's anthem to the same global script, its effrontery was striking (Fukuyama, 1992).

Perhaps even more striking is the fact that the current upsurge of populism has taken place both in locations with a history of such incursions – Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe – and in countries once deemed stable democracies, if not always civic cultures – the UK, the USA, Italy and India. Down-home populism can be seen from Marseilles to Moscow, via France, Italy, Spain and Greece, Hungary and Poland, even Sweden. It is visible too in Narendra Modi's successful strain of Hindu nationalism in India and in the 'patronal authoritarianism' practised by Putin in Russia and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey (*The Times of India*, 22 January 2017). In the UK, following Boris Johnson's elevation to the leadership of the Conservative Party and the premiership in summer 2019, his decision to prorogue parliament in order to better secure the 'will of the people' as he understood it was greeted not only with cries of 'illegal' – a criticism upheld by the Supreme Court – but accusations that he was a cynical populist and dictator *manqué*. At much the same time, German electors in Saxony and Brandenburg sent a clear anti-immigrant and anti-Islam message to the federal government, by voting for Alternative for Germany (AfD) candidates to the tune of 23% in Brandenburg and 27% in Saxony.

Data speak volumes, but as ever there are cautionary notes. Even the gains made by the AfD in Germany's regional elections were lower than predicted, and the Centre-left, Centre-right governing coalition took solace from the result. The so-called 'pink tide' of Latin American left-populisms over a decade ago has ebbed. In 2017, it was the economic crisis in Venezuela that

undid Hugo Chavez's legacy regime and continues to ravage its people. In 2018, the people of Nicaragua took to the streets in protest against cuts to pensions and social security. Anger had also grown over the steady accumulation of power by president Daniel Ortega, who won the right to indefinite re-election and banned leading opposition politicians from standing for public office. In increasingly difficult times, it has proved hard for these populist leaders to sustain landmark social programmes, mainstay of claims to bring succour to their oppressed people (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020). The behaviour of such leaders has also tested democratic tolerances to the limit by succumbing to the cronyism and corruption they once railed against. But in another twist of fortune, in Argentina's primary elections held on 9 August 2019, conservative president Mauricio Macri was defeated by left populist rival Alberto Fernandez, apparently on the power of an anti-austerity vote. Is this counter-cyclical, or indicative of a new regional cycle? Overall, the prospects for unrest in the region look high. Political dysfunction and economic malaise have fuelled widespread uprisings, with much of the ire directed at the political class in various countries.

Elsewhere, the auguries continue to be mixed. Elections to the European Parliament in May 2019 saw populist parties and candidates do well in France, Poland, Hungary and the UK, although the last is something of a special case. However, there was no clean sweep for illiberal and anti-EU forces. Overall, the results showed only modest gains for populists since the previous elections in 2014, and this on a larger turnout. Yet the tendency to talk up the capacity of Eurosceptic populism to undo decades of EU integration was very marked in the run-up to the 2019 elections, and such anxiety is perhaps unsurprising given the shock of the Brexit vote in 2016, Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential contest in the same year, the volatile state of the global economy, and the continued salience of migration issues in a number of member states. All this was extant before the onset of Covid-19. Yet with suitable social-scientific restraint we would do well to note Jan Nederveen Pieterse's caution that while populism 'is portrayed as a wave or explosion, it actually figures only in few countries. In most of these it won only by tiny margins – Trump won by a few states and slim numbers (and did not win the popular vote), Brexit passed by a few percentage points, Erdogan's referendum to expand his power was rejected in eleven of Turkey's twelve largest cities, and so forth' (2019: 119). Moreover, in Hungarian local elections held on 19 October 2019, the dominant party Fidesz suffered large losses, despite having taken 52% of the national vote in the European Parliament contest held in May of that year.

DOES ALL THIS HAVE A PROVENANCE?

The hyperbole or bullishness that now invests a good deal of commentary on 'the populist moment' has a recent intellectual back-story and a rather longer historical one (Krastev, 2012). On the latter, we should respect Eatwell and Goodwin's caution not to treat the current spate of national populisms as entirely new (2018), while taking note of Enzo Traverso's observation that what is abroad these days is too new to rush to judgement (2019). Such divergent views are par for this particular course. Of course, nothing is gained by ignoring earlier outbreaks of populism as they inflected or defined types of politics as varied as the *Narodnichestvo*, a Russian movement of students and intellectuals in the 1860s and 1870s, the agrarian Progressive Movement in late nineteenth-century America, Italian fascism in the 1930s, the 'charismatic', grassroots populism of Argentina and Brazil in the 1950s, and the politics of decolonization and nation-building that emerged during the 1960s. But this is not to say that the appearance and style of today's populism can simply be read off from one or more past episodes, or that context, contingency and the shifting calculus of social change in any one period are less important than the weight of historical example.

On the former, we might begin in the mid-1980s when Pierre Taguieff first coined the phrase 'national populism' to describe what he saw as the changing temper of domestic politics in France (1996). Then, Jean-Marie Le Pen was beginning his crusade to radically cut immigration, take a root-and-branch approach to problems of social cohesion and scour alleged corruption and nepotism among the gilded classes in state and society. As Eatwell and Goodwin also say (2018), that brand of national populism has proven remarkably durable and translatable, and is still capable of reinventing itself as the eponymous guardian of the people's virtue in the changed circumstances of a more globalized world. National populists claim to 'prioritize the culture and interests of the nation, and promise to give a voice to the people' (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018: ix). Ironically, for democrats these would be unexceptionable sentiments even in our more politically correct times, although the devil lies in the detail of interpretation. And as a sign of such times, Le Pen's daughter and political heir, 'Marine', leader of the Front National (now National Rally) since 2011, has attempted to soften its image as a nationalistic, racist and anti-semitic party.

But for Taguieff, both then and now, the label 'national populism' is not one of approbation; more an alarum for the decline of modernist, progressive politics and, longer term, the death-knell of political and societal pluralism.

By the mid-1990s the label was being applied to Silvio Berlusconi's brand of techno-populism in Italy, with his promise of 'videocracy' for all (Axford and Huggins, 1997). Taguieff's usage has spawned a deluge of research, journalism and more-or-less informed commentary on the Internet about the nationalistic, authoritarian and even fascistic character of contemporary populism. Moreover, the success of Berlusconi's avowedly non-party vehicle, Forza Italia, in the Italian elections of 1994 ushered in the age of the 'tele-tribune' – the media strongman – as Taguieff so eloquently despaired, and more sophisticated and systematic exploitation of media by political actors across the spectrum (Taguieff, 1996: 14). At about the same time in the United States, Pat Buchanan's 'new populist' appeals to the worried burghers of Virginia in 1996 also promised to break the mould of conventional politics by putting together a coalition of support among people with previously disparate – or no – political allegiances, and linked only by a sense of shared misfortune.

Berlusconi was the embodiment of the tele-tribune, but this is a promiscuous concept, and a similar indictment dogged Tony Blair and 'New Labour' in the UK during the same period. Nowadays, Donald Trump emotes in the role of Twitter-tribune, his rapport with core supporters unmediated by the usual cautions and inhibitions of most old – broadcast and print – media. This style of politics, a facet of what I call postmodern populism, comprises a growing engagement with the promotional values and outputs of the culture industries and social media to effect a thorough aestheticization of politics. In this, it challenges received wisdom about what counts as authentic, and thus legitimate, expressions of politics and the sites at which these should be performed.

The mediatization of politics through the adoption and spread of Internet technologies, especially social media, is at the heart of this shift. For observers and opponents this was and remains very heavy traffic, both intellectually and normatively, as well as practically. It threatens to sideline palpable modern forms of political expression and organization in the guise of mass political parties and their programmatic intent, along with authoritative voices in what has become dismissed as 'mainstream' media (MSM). Because of the ways in which critics like Taguieff couched these threats, it was common to label the phenomenon a form of 'anti-politics' and that slight endures. However, while the mediatization of politics and political discourse continued apace, populism slipped off the intellectual and activist radar in the balmy late 1990s and the early 'noughties', when 'Third Way' politics, the demise of the Soviet world-empire and the subsequent expansion of the European Union all seemed increments in the inferred *telos* of liberal globalization and liberal democracy. No longer, of course; but we must not jump too far ahead in our story.

It is easy, but mistaken, to interpret features of (electoral) politics at that time simply as a cynical and instrumental use of technical resources to mount clever campaigns and target niche audiences. Rather, Berlusconi and Blair were front-runners in playing out what could be seen as a communicative 'logic', which – like it or not – now embraces all politics and all practitioners of the art. In this logic – and talk of 'logic' is loaded – what is casually labelled 'new' media has transformed politics, because political life is increasingly organized as a media phenomenon (Axford, 2018). Politics has embraced the gestalt and in doing so transformed itself.

Of course, saying that does not make New Labour's world-view the moral equivalent of Berlusconi's. What it does do, and this is of relevance to the success of populist and other non-mainstream political parties in later years, and to the fallout from the Brexit process, is to question the assumption that a transient index of political organization and identification – mass political parties and a politics configured by left-to-right ideology – is a modal, even an immutable, feature of all democratic politics. The significance of these observations for the recent spate of populist politics will become clearer later in this and subsequent chapters. But for now, we might take as straws in the wind two, apparently conflicting, findings reported in the British Social Attitudes Survey for 2019. In a headline, but not unexpected, datum the survey found that far more people identified strongly as a 'Remainer' or a 'Leaver' than do so as a strong supporter of a mainstream political party. But the research also pondered whether the reasons why attitudes towards Brexit remained relatively stable between 2016 and 2018 is that many voters filtered their opinion through a strong partisan lens (British Social Attitudes Survey, 2019: 28; see also Clarke et al., 2017). What the authors of the report also infer is that, partly as a result of the polarizing impact of the referendum campaign and its protracted aftermath, the strong identification with 'leave' and 'remain' camps betokens quite different visions of Britain and of its place in the world.

Which brings us back to Taguieff's lament, one that inflects the main theme of this book in other ways. Although not primarily concerned with affairs beyond the boundaries of the national state and society, his critique can be read as an early foray in what is by now a developed body of literature on the tribulations of the liberal international order of states, markets, multilateral institutions and societies based on the rule of law. Written a few years before the publication of Francis Fukuyama's qualified paean to Western modernity (Fukuyama, 1992), it is a jeremiad on the prospects for the stability of that model of world order and of liberal globalization (Ikenberry, 2011, 2018; Kagan, 2019). Vladimir Putin's diatribe against liberalism in 2019 can also be read as a warped valedictory for

the same order – or just another piece of fake news. Of more systemic import was, and remains, the implacable opposition of national populists to economic globalization and to political and cultural liberalism as a global script.

THE VARIETY OF POPULISMS

Again, we must remain careful about lumping all manifestations of populism together. To repeat an obvious point of comparison, populist incursions from the radical left are far less numerous than ones from the right of the political spectrum. And they often champion different styles of politics. But are they merely sub-species of the same phenomenon, differentiated only by local colour or in terms of the rhetoric and style they employ? Here too the evidence is mixed. Where assaults on unfettered markets are concerned, there is often very little to distinguish left from right populism. Nationalist sentiments have found favour in the protectionist tub-thumping of left populists such as Bernie Sanders in the USA and Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador in the Mexican elections of 2018. At the same time, there is much more divergence over where left and right populisms stand on liberal-democratic values and pluralist politics. Yet some radical-left solutions to the shortfalls of liberal democracy have a distinctly Leninist feel when set against the brokerage model of politics once typically found in successful pluralist democracies (Mouffe, 2018). While this does not make for common cause with rightist interventions affronted by the same features of globalization, it is worth more than a glance when trying to pin down what unites and divides populists and, nuances aside, in deciding what is populism and what is not. I will comment further on the familiar, and not always helpful, distinction between left and right populisms later in the chapter. The point now is to take note of the narrative of anti-globalism that invests both varieties.

National Populism congeals opposition to globalization around the counter-narrative of the nation, its people, and the challenges to national integrity and prosperity posed by globalization's boundary-destroying ethos. In this opposition it is not alone, although much right-wing populism – leader-centred, hortatory, exclusionary and protectionist – is at odds with the spirit and sometimes the style of equally ardent anti- or alter-globalization protests and movements with a leftist persona. There are also novel kinds of platform that may – but here's the thing, may not – be populist, which also challenge the temper and content of usual politics and have little truck with market globalism. In his address to new forms of social movement – neither obviously left nor right – Manuel Castells (2012) applauds the leaderless and organizationless character of Los

Indignados in Spain, or the Occupy networks in various cities around the globe. More recently, both the Gilets Jaunes in France and the climate change protest Extinction Rebellion in the UK and elsewhere have presented themselves as having no chain of command, membership or developed programme. Indeed, they have taken pride in the lack of such attributes.

In this they are indeed characteristic of mobilizations now seen as the basis for much 'connective action' around the world (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Axford, 2018). Here the changing nature of political mobilization is said to move to a 'logic' that dispenses with the model of collective action claimed as paradigmatic by empirical political science in the 1960s and 1970s (Olson Jr, 1965). That logic typically required varying degrees of resource mobilization to be deployed when organizing and through leadership. Formal organization was deemed necessary to coordinate action, mobilize resources and forge or sustain collective identities; all before action can occur.

But as Gidron and Bonikowski argue (2013), at least in its current guise, populism is not like that, and its appearance in contemporary democracies is leaving a marked 'imprint on important political phenomena' (2013: 2). This is still a cautious attribution, but one that hints at the ability of populist politics to 'galvanize new forms of political engagement', and suggests that this is crucial 'in an era of decline in formal political participation such as voting turnout and party membership' (2013: 2). The 'new mobilization' thesis (Benkler, 2006; Shirky, 2008) derives from research on the political impact of the Internet, and suggests that Internet-based participation not only allows actors to produce content and collaborate with others, but also enhances the repertoires of possibility for 'low' or vernacular, and previously unheard, politics.

And this too is an important claim, one that bears on the tactics used to circumvent the implied bias of 'mainstream politicians' and 'mainstream media' and their trafficking of allegedly 'false news' in both established and weaker democracies. Just how far does access to and use of the Internet (especially social media) actually mitigate or replace rather than entrench any prevailing or perceived mobilization of bias? For all the welter of assertions, the evidence is mixed, although inferences often plump for mainly deleterious consequences (Morozov, 2011; Cadwalladr, 2017). But in more forthright attributions, especially about less established democracies, populism is argued to increase political and social polarization and usher in authoritarian solutions to problems of societal integration. As I have bruited, these features of populist mobilization can be understood as a postmodern phenomenon, subsisting on an unlikely combination of cynicism and credulity on the part of disaffected publics now less anchored by the pull of firm identification, and circulating

in a media firmament that augments – and seems to thrive on – hyperbole and allegory. This is a politics of paradox. Supporters of populist parties and movements distrust almost anything they hear from mainstream politicians and media, yet remain wedded to pretty much everything said by their own leaders. Adverse public opinion on how populist leaders have handled Covid-19 may give the lie to that saw, but the question remains. Are the populist faithful easy to lead and easy to fool? As journalist Nick Cohen tartly observes, is populism just the ‘willingness of voters to be lied to’? Or are such sentiments typical of the arrogance routinely employed (by establishment elites) to belittle populism and the agency of citizens? (Cohen, 2020b: 61).

For now, we might agree that populism is always likely to be ‘confrontational, chameleonic, culture-bound and context-dependent’ (Appadurai, 2006: 14). The crucial point, again, is that these features appear across countries and regions with quite different cultures and histories. In other words, populism is a global script and a universal cultural trope for turbulent, even dislocating, politics. Moreover, populisms employ an increasingly modal style, especially when trafficked online. But such common features are invested in a wide array of localisms. For example, in the elections to the EU’s parliament in May 2019 an array of sovereigntist and EU-critical parties were contestants. They shared the broad goal of returning power to member states (although, with the exceptions of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and The Brexit Party in the UK, not full withdrawal from the EU) and curbing immigration, but ran with quite different economic and social policies. They also had opposing views on how to treat with Russia and the USA.

Poland’s ruling Law and Justice Party has no interest in building ties with Russia, unlike other members of the far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) grouping in the parliament, such as France’s Marine Le Pen and Jorg Meuthen from the German Alternative for Germany (AfD). Matteo Salvini, at one time architect *manqué* of a new populist alliance in the European Parliament, is firmly at odds with the AfD and Austria’s Freedom Party on whether to flout EU rules on budgetary discipline. His aim to have other EU member states take in many of the refugees whose first port of call is Italy, finds no favour with the Hungarian ultra-nationalist, Viktor Orban.

As I noted above, overall, the gains made by populists in the poll gives some credence to the view that usual politics in many EU countries is beleaguered; the old centre-left to centre-right party hegemonies in disarray. But the electoral map that emerged from the contests did not reveal an unequivocal shift to the populist right (or the populist left, for that matter). Greens and various shades of social liberalism also profited from voter disillusion with the conduct

of long-standing and establishment parties and governing coalitions. Yet in what may prove a significant datum, shortly after these same polls, national elections in Greece checked Syriza's four-year left-populist, anti-establishment experiment. On 7 July 2019, the Greek electorate voted a centre-right party, New Democracy (ND), into power. What, if anything, do the European and Greek results say about the calculus of political change? What is its direction and demeanour? Before returning to these issues in Chapter 3, let's first examine populism as a concept.

POPULISM IN TOOTH AND CLAW: A CONCEPTUAL EXCURSION

What are the features of populism today? Obviously, the answer lies in its qualities as a political and cultural ensemble. I do not intend to embark on a detailed exegesis of 'what is populism?', which would require too painstaking an examination of this 'slippery' concept, not suited to a short book (Freeden, 2017: 1). But I do want to explore common features and disparate forms. As you might surmise, there is a good deal of conceptual refinement in the literature on populism; much of it valuable, but tending towards connoisseurship. That said, deciding what populism is, and what it is not, is important to offset the tendency to conflate concepts. It is important too because if we can designate and delineate the phenomenon, we can judge its scale and intensity and begin to assess causes and impact.

Certain features of populism may be present, indeed, have to be present, despite variety in other respects. These features appear ideational, possibly ideological, though without being determinate. As we shall see, in the literature, the designation of populism as an 'ideology' is contested. More permissively, and certainly more generically, populisms are said to cohere around 'rhetoric that constructs politics as the moral and ethical struggle' between people and elites (de la Torre, 2000: 4). So, populism can be understood as a discourse – and perhaps an ideology – built around contextually variable, but always present constructions of 'us' and 'them'. So far, so good.

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, 2015). And while difficult, conceptualization and typology also have to distinguish populism from non-populism, with such differences categorical. This is sometimes hard to do. For example, William Connolly writes that Donald Trump is not a populist, but an 'aspirational fascist', implying that there are discernible differences between

the two, but differences that can be bridged (Connolly, 2017). And there is no doubt that national populism shares a number of attributes and practices with fascism. Steger and James (2019: 245; see also Eatwell, 2017) express these similarities as (i) the reliance on populist appeals, which is, of course, tautological but obligingly true; (ii) the valorization of personal, cultural, political and economic rebirth as ideological tenets or branding strategies; (iii) a victim mentality, translated into blaming others for any perceived or experienced decline in fortunes; and (iv) the key role played by an authoritarian leader. A regime, party or movement could be either populist or fascist by displaying these attributes, and they are necessary definitional components of both. But fascism *tout-court* does not equate only to these features. They are necessary but not sufficient qualities. Fascism as ideology certainly places nation and, more to the point, race above all other values. Populism does not require a race motif, although some instances either embrace or toy with racial tropes to secure or enhance their appeal. Populism also shares with fascism what Roger Eatwell calls other aspects of a 'foundational ideology', though 'mongrel' might be a more fitting description (2017). Eatwell further says that fascism has borrowed aspects of populist discourse and style, while populism easily degenerates into leader-oriented authoritarian and exclusionary politics.

In what looks like a more clean-cut set of distinctions, Cas Mudde argues that populism is neither elitism nor pluralism. And while that sounds banal, it is also usefully elemental. 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. In practice, and to reflect messier reality, it may be permissible, perhaps necessary, to talk about actors who are more or less populist, because populism is never going to be a stable quality (de la Torre and Mazzoleni, 2019). That said, the stricter conceptualization that precedes such permissiveness demands that the researcher has first to agree that an actor *is* populist before determining by how much and with what features. Identifying features common in all cases is not easy, except at a very high level of generality.

Take the linking of populism with nationalism. It is not uncommon to hold that nationalism is a defining feature of populism. Angus Stewart even went so far as to call populism 'a kind of nationalism' (1969: 183). 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, Spain, Poland and Hungary) and that historical and contemporary manifestations of populism can be found in some of these countries. It is also true that many populists define the nation in very restrictive terms – membership again – and,

in extremis, this can yield a politics of, variously, white nationalism, the pursuit of ethnic domination and a strenuous monoculturalism.

But it is not clear that nationalism is either a necessary condition for, or consequence of, populism, although in most accounts that is either taken for granted or implied. And if one claims that it is, what kind of nationalism or appeal to national signifiers are we talking about? How is the nation narrated and to what ends? Populists in established democracies may well be inclined to invoke a more respectable brand of civic nationalism, if only to achieve distance from the charge of being ultra-nationalist, racist, sexist, xenophobic or even fascist. And to reiterate, populism, and certainly what is sometimes called 'neo-populism', combines nationalism readily, or more easily, with neoliberal economic policies than one might assume. Some left populisms, notably in Latin America, support socialist economic policies, including redistributive social programmes. But these can still be presented as being in the national interest and necessary to fulfil national destiny, or national survival.

For all these reasons, the label national-populism has to be used with care, so as not to imply that one size fits all in the everyday accommodation between the two. And, as Paolo Magri tells us (2018), there is a mix of nationalist and populist elements in the makeup of many regimes. For example, in Russia, Vladimir Putin uses populist tropes to boost his popularity, emphasizing his links to ordinary people. This is an attempt to galvanize support, but not to promote an active citizenry, as the draconian state responses to protests in the summer of 2019 showed. When pursuing concrete political goals like 'defending' Russians in Georgia and Eastern Ukraine, or combating imputed Russophobia from rival nations and cultures, his appeals and rhetoric take on a more nationalistic flavour and play to the narrative of the nation under threat. Even left-wing populism can become nationalistic and authoritarian when democratic institutions are weak and civil society frail, as seen in Venezuela and Argentina. Alberto Martinelli also notes that for left-inclined populism, links with nationalist ideology are fraught with danger just because of the possibility of an 'authoritarian drift' and possible recourse to violence (2018: 18). Across the board in European populism today, the link with nationalism stiffens the resolve of populist ideology and rhetoric around the key issues of 'inclusion into/exclusion from the community and the reaffirmation of national sovereignty against the EU "super state" and the project of ever-closer union' (Martinelli, 2018: 18).

When claiming to defend or embody the aspirations of the nation, populist leaders cannot be seen as too partial. They must look like and play the part of would-be unifier, the force able to 'bring the country together'. The appeal of

a populist leader such as Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines appears to traverse class and other divides, and his manifesto addresses the discontent of more prosperous Filipinos as well as marginalized segments of that society. In this, as we shall see in Chapter 6, the manner of self-presentation is all-important, with the leader as both plebeian and consul a powerful motif in populist mythology. This kind of pluto-populism, the strain in which rich individuals woo and persuade ordinary citizens that they not only empathize with their suffering, but have solutions to their ills and outlets for their ambitions, is a facet of celebrity and ‘influencer’ culture more generally. But the conceit does not always bridge divides, and it is freighted with risks for its protagonists when their online persona is outed as mere hypocrisy.

POPULISM AS IDEOLOGY – MAYBE

All this feeds the idea of populism as a ‘thin’ and mutable ideology, a concept adapted by Cas Mudde from Michael Freeden’s original intervention in 1996, and used, though not without demur, ever since (Freeden, 1996; Mudde, 2004; Aslanidis and Kaltwasser, 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Here the familiar conceit is that populisms share a suspicion of and hostility toward elites, mainstream politics and established institutions, but little else. Indeed, Mudde says that no definition of populism will fully describe the gamut of populists (Mudde, 2015; Muller, 2017; Freeden, 2018). To reiterate, he claims that 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. In this interpretation, populism is a long way from being programmatic, and is pretty much reliant on the mantra of outraged localism – spiced with traces of ‘thicker’ precepts from nationalism, socialism, conservatism or fascism, and a nice line in mobilizing rhetoric – to undergird its claims to political salience and impart a semblance of ideational gravitas. In part, this is why it is both a portable formula for electoral success in times of crisis and, for some critics, found wanting when it comes to proffering a blueprint for, and the necessary policy detail on, how to deal with hard times. As Michael Freeden allows, populism is opportunistic and quite promiscuous in its dalliance with ‘topics, ideas and catchwords’ having a provenance elsewhere (2017: 3).

With so much variety and seemingly little in the way of core ideational heft, the interesting question is, why does much opposition to usual politics and to globalization so often take populist form and not some other? If there is a mobilization of anger and despair, coupled with the ambition to dispense

with or transcend established and establishment politicians and parties, is it just the untutored quality of populist leadership, organization and platforms that explains its appeal? Let's begin to answer this question by repeating the caution that there are substantial differences between types of populism and these include variety in ideas, style, including leadership style, organization and (policy) inclination. But what conjoins them – and provides support for them – is outrage, and, if left unrequited and sufficiently primed, this alone may have severe consequences for the axial and organizational 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). Students of political motivation have tended to shy away from explanations of identification and behaviour that rely on emotions, preferring a rational-actor model of allegiance, which elevates 'interest' over 'passion'. But there is a need to review the affective and aesthetic qualities of engagement, and populism affords just such an opportunity.

Carefully handled, this would not reduce complex political phenomena to emotions, but facilitate a richer understanding of the part played by affect in the making of identities and decisions (Demertzis, 2017). Where populism is concerned, there may be no need to offer a programmatic alternative, and that too would be in keeping with the spirit of the times. All that is needed is hostility – *ressentiment* – towards old and ascriptively disreputable grand narratives or, more specifically, anger over neoliberal economics as a calamitous phase of capitalist development, and 'unchecked' immigration as a threat to both livelihoods and culture. So, at least in the short term, is outrage enough? Can simple, but possibly visceral, affront explain the whole gamut of populist incursions? The evidence is mixed. Greeks voting for Syriza's anti-austerity stance once upon a time appeared to fit that bill, but what about the appeal of Vladimir Putin's authoritarian nationalism in Russia? In 2016, Donald Trump profited mainly not from those with economic grievances, but among those whose fears about the future were based on the belief that they were being sold down the river by an establishment whose values they did not share.

Certainly, the outrage thesis has the merit of simplicity. If we accept it, then we need only know what populism is against to know what occasions it and what sustains it. If true, what this suggests is that populism's attraction lies not so much in its underlying, and enduring, features, though we have to mark these as evidence of any ontological specificity, but, to borrow a phrase, in its very adaptability and lightness of being or, to adapt Ernesto Laclau, the trick of being there when the occasion demands (2005). In Laclau's analysis, but also more widely, it is populism's anti-essentialist quality that is key to understanding

its success, even though this is counter-intuitive and runs against the jaundiced wisdom that populism is all about essentials. For such critics, populist leaders are also manipulative in their construction of 'the people', favouring a top-down compartment in which the latter's true identity and interests can be divined and curated only by the consul (Muller, 2017: 77; Thomassen, 2019). But for Laclau, populism is always pluralist and the people never just one (2005). It is not hard to see that these divergent views prescribe and demarcate quite different brands of politics.

These are not trivial observations. But as Jacques Rancière tells us, while there may be intense debate about populism's character and whether the term designates a 'defined political force', the fact is that it is sufficiently embracing of, or agnostic about, differences to allow 'amalgams between political forces that range from the extreme right to the radical left' (Rancière, 2016: 102). And its ideological thinness, or even the lack of an ideology at all, does not appear troubling to those discontented by usual politics and the thicker dogmas and more steadfast routines that have prevailed there. Indeed, given the perceived, and now prolonged, failure of precisely these modalities to deliver the goods for substantial parts of their citizenry, it may be an attraction, although perhaps with time-limited appeal. Through its opposition to all manner of globalizations, Steger and James suggest that populism has commuted from a 'thin' to a 'thick' ideology, now possessing a 'surprising degree of ideational substance' (2019: 191). No doubt true, this is still a bit like saying that populism achieves the status of being an ideology almost by default.

Bucking the trend again, populisms also remain permissive about the kind of organizational features and leadership style needed to galvanize activism and support. Some are leader dominated and reliant on firm identification from members and supporters; others are scarcely more than loosely coordinated networks. Apparent common touch, whether real or counterfeit, has worked to the advantage of Trump, Farage and Boris Johnson. By all accounts Viktor Orban is an empathetic listener. All have profited – and at crucial or embarrassing times were given the benefit of the doubt – on the basis that they are not like mainstream politicians and all the better for that. Each passes the apparently acid test of being the kind of guy you would be happy to drink with in a bar, or swap funny stories. Indeed, Italy's Beppe Grillo, founder of the Cinque Stelle Movement, Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky, Marjen Sarec in Slovenia and Jimmy Morales in Guatemala, were all entertainers, professional comedians or comic actors. But that is another story.

Outside academic address, and with little regard for Max Weber's original concept, there is debate over the much-touted 'charismatic' qualities of different

populist leaders and *wanabees*. But for all the emphasis on the role of a powerful leader – the tribune – in many types of national populism, that attribute is not a necessary component of organization. At the same time, the roll-call of strong and often maverick leaders serves to define, and sometimes demean, populism for many critics; their alleged strength equating to talking a good fight and being tough on dissent and minorities, rather than to any demonstrated, or potential, capacity to govern effectively (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017; and see the contrary view in Moffitt, 2017). All these factors underline populism's reputation as an elusive construct; ideologically spare and evanescent – though not ephemeral – and institutionally light.

But to reiterate, whether it is a defined political force or a thin/thick ideology may scarcely matter, save for those seeking reasons to be cheerful in face of populism's onward march, or having a scholarly regard for taxonomic refinement. Michael Freeden himself cautions against putting barriers around a concept that is, well, messy (2017: 1), and whose usefulness to academic thinking about political and social change, democracy and contentious politics lies in its very unruliness, in being unlike, or not sufficiently like, anything else, and periodically exuberant. Given populism's reliance on the canard of redeeming past glories, and not having much of an eye to programmatic change, Freeden, unlike Mudde, is not even prepared to accord it 'thin' status. It is, he says, 'too scrawny' to be any kind of ideology, and he makes this point about UKIP, which fell off the British electoral map in the EU Parliament elections in 2019. Well and good; but for a while UKIP was potent as a political force, taking the lion's share of UK seats in the 2014 elections to the same parliament and – more important – shifting the Conservative Party off its centrist axis. The Brexit Party, child of Nigel Farage's ambition, is likewise spavined as an ideology. But it would claim to have secured the UK's exit from the European Union by triggering a rightward shift in Conservative Party policy over membership and, as Farage put it, killed the Liberal Democrats and hurt Labour in the general election of December 2019. The party then gained 2% of votes cast nationally, but no seats. When the UK formally withdrew from the EU on 31 January 2020, all rationale for its continued existence seemed to have disappeared; but in the Covid-19 years, and post-Brexit transition, when trust in government will fluctuate, it may yet enjoy a second coming.

So, ideology or not, what are populism's underlying features and how are they deployed in different populisms? Freeden distills three core attributes of national populism (2018). First is the conception of society as indivisible, or as a unitary, organic body. Second is a reliance on myths of origin, or a defining genesis moment, to couch and legitimize claims to a national genealogy; a national

story, in other words. Finally, there is a visceral fear of change introduced from outside, from alien forces and from those domestic sources of power that are the compradors of outside influence. These are pretty capacious tenets, easily accommodating a variety of otherwise quite different politics. For example, they allow the sub-categories of left- and right-wing populism to display noticeable, and probably salient, distinguishing features. Right-wing populists are wedded to the mythology of the 'pure' people; left-wing populism works with a different construction of *the* 'people', cleaving to a more republican worldview. And as de la Torre and Mazzoleni say, left-wing populists 'do not use race to construct the inassimilable other; and they do not restrict democracy by imposing nostalgic images of law and order where women, non-whites and LGBTQ communities occupy their subordinated place' (2019: 11).

These are important caveats on the idea of an undifferentiated populism; not just conceptually of course, but in terms of the quality of political life they endorse or prescribe. Despite, perhaps due to, its ideological scrawniness, populism's underlying features are translatable into many vernaculars. Different shades of populism are distinguished by how populist tribunes frame the elemental conflict between the people and those who would do them ill. However, while these underlying features allow us to distinguish populism from other political modalities, and one type of populism from another, they may not be enough to explain why populist parties and leaders appeal to diverse electorates in the absence of a thick ideology and while being programmatically light. Well, apart from the aforementioned distinct possibility that the absence of writ is exactly what endears them to citizens, however fleeting that fascination.

POPULISM AS A DISCURSIVE FRAME

The basis of populism's attraction now shifts somewhat, or is broadened, to reveal it as a discursive frame and a pragmatic tool, or else a style to be deployed in the pursuit of power. Of course, calling populism – or any politics – a *style* is not always an endorsement. The attribution often translates as the triumph of technique, or political technology, over substance. When that happens, the manipulation of public opinion and electoral processes is said to imitate, but actually hollow-out, democracy. Most frequently applied to the conduct of elections in post-Soviet states, a political technology substitutes for a fully developed ideology and masks a lack of programmatic, or any serious, content. In a jaundiced description of populism thus consigned, Michael Hauser says that it displays 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 'Russia first' and 'Make America Great Again' under that rubric (2016: 146). All of which is very postmodern.

Treating populism as a discursive frame is a seductive way to distinguish types of populism because it separates language as communication, and style as performance, from the more demanding and discriminating criteria used to ring-fence an ideology. Communication is key to constructing identity, whether we are talking about firm or malleable identification, lifetime commitment or passing fancy. To be sure, this might be another way of saying that populism is little more than political technique or a strategic ploy couched in cleverly marketed language. But the idea of populism as a political tool with little in the way of underlying features, let alone a fully-fledged ideology, has one great advantage as a way of discerning both types and gradations. It opens up a field on which anyone can play and it does not discriminate much over sources of motivation and degrees of identification. By using off-the-shelf populist rhetoric – and that means language that speaks in the idiom and addresses the particular concerns of targeted audiences – an actor is marked out as more-or-less populist without the need to establish an ideological back-story and then adjudicate on the basis of its presence or absence. All manner of proto-populists are thus captured, as well as the usual suspects. Tony Blair can be labelled a populist, but that need not stand as a complete summary of Blairism or 'Third Way' politics. The same goes for President Trump. Trump uses populist rhetoric, but he does not love, and may even distrust, the people. By contrast, Viktor Orban's utterances read and sound like the whole bill of national-populist goods. Again, I am not suggesting that any of this assumes a moral equivalence between discursive types or the kinds of politics they advocate. In other words, we can still distinguish and judge the qualities of different populisms.

Treating populism as a discursive construct – and thus always what actors make of it – is part of the constructivist agenda as this has influenced much of the social sciences, including critical international relations and globalization scholarship, over the past two decades or so. And what actors make of it is a dictum with some analytical weight when discussing the global convergence implied and prescribed by neoliberal economics. For global convergence in any field is always mediated by local factors, including denizens' embrace of or resistance to the ideology and practices of neoliberalism. Populists construct the local in ways that counter the wholeheartedly pro-globalization discourses of various elites, and in this they are more-or-less successful when they whip up and cash in on discontent. Of course, to its opponents, every discourse

is subterfuge, but that is exactly the point, allowing apologists for a more 'authentic' narrative to flourish.

When push comes to shove, we have to deal with the face-value prejudices and presumptions of actors and the consequences of their world-views. As Michael Hauser also reflects (2018), populist discourse presents only as a kind of 'spectral unification', where what he calls 'metapopulism' creates or promises a unity opposed to the liberal universalism of Western globalization. Whatever else, this is a paradoxical construction. Wholeness and authenticity are claimed by rejecting a dominant normative conception of universality, while proclaiming the modality and desirability of its opposite – particularism. More importantly, whether paradoxical or not, it is the construction with which other actors and observers have to engage.

So, need we look beyond the undoubted fact that both populists and neoliberals perceive their construction of the world to be valid, or as having political traction, and act accordingly? Apart from its merits as a way of understanding motivation, such an approach moves subjectivity, consciousness and agency, along with their expression, to the heart of the explanatory account of local–global interactions, of the intertwining of sameness and difference. Ben Moffitt's treatment of populism as a political style, a performance that deploys 'the people' as part of a script, also fits with this broader understanding of 'discourse' (2017). Moffitt's is an intriguing and insightful way of coming to grips with the question 'what is populism?', one that shares some features of my interpretation of postmodern populism as a mediatized phenomenon. His particular gambit is to see populism as a political style, whose delivery lies in mediated performances by leaders and much less in specific content or ideology, making it highly corrigible in different contexts. In fact, we can go further. As we shall see in Chapter 6, Trump's populist style is postmodern and the same may be said of Vladimir Putin.

Style and performance play a large part in shaping how meaning is instantiated and either sustained or altered. For the analyst, this requires attention not just to ideology and social-historical context, but to the communicative milieu and forms in and through which meanings are produced. Today, we advert the soft technologies of 'new' media (digital media) and what Eckstrom, Patrons and Thornborrow call their 'unique styling resources' in shaping how meaning is engendered and interpreted through linguistic and semiotic performances (2018: 14). Ubiquitous digital communications technologies have become the unremarkable staples of living. Along with other flows and networks, they are the medium of globalized production, consumption and circulation. For populists, this is just another paradox.

Moffitt's work suggests that by treating populism as a style or performance we are acknowledging a profound mediatization of life that is producing a novel social ecology, a transformation of previously ordered structures and social relationships. It is worth reiterating that this transformation is not confined to populist discourses and populist politics, but is ubiquitous (Sandywell, 2011). So, while crucial to any understanding of how populism subsists today, just treating it as pure style or performance may not, of itself, distinguish it from other political modalities, which are also mediatized. And, of course, performance can never simply float free of all determination, however fragile.

For now, what can we take from the ways in which populism has been construed? I see both ideology and discourse as part of the populist ensemble. There is much to be gained from treating populism as an ensemble concept and a mongrel construction, with underlying features that one might, but might not, choose to call an ideology. Its underlying features are generic, but are variably observed. I am happy to accord this the status of a 'thin', or even a 'thick', ideology, but attach no especial significance to the attribution, except that it allows a necessary degree of flexibility when distinguishing between actual cases. Treating populism as a performed, though far from scripted, discourse also imparts an actor-centred feel to what might otherwise appear as a set of specific or obligatory linguistic and discursive choices (an ideology?) that curate identity and value in predictable ways (Eckstrom et al., 2018). The mediated and mediatized qualities of populist ideas and discourses loom large in the descriptive and explanatory account that follows.

3

POPULISM IN PRACTICE: CAUSES, CORRELATES AND CRISES

INTRODUCTION

Generic 'populism' is distilled from different strains that share underlying features. Their stock-in-trade is the rhetoric of 'us' versus 'them', or elites versus the people, though, as we shall see, here too they show variety when consigning 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Anti-globalization plays a growing part, today perhaps the key part, in their narrative. It too is a commodious label, providing cover for all manner of politics and many types of revolt. Interestingly, as Steger and James say, an 'ideational "thickening" of populism has occurred as political leaders have learned to recast "globalization" and "globalism" as pejorative terms and placed them alongside the more established populist concepts of "corrupt elites" and a moral "people"' (2019: 191).

In this chapter my first task is to take an excursion across the map of populisms to underline the fact that, although widespread, populism has variable purchase in different countries and moves to different impulses. Its motley forms and variable success tell us as much about the conditions prevailing in those countries as it does about the global spread of populism as a template for modal change.

Second, I will return to the question broached in Chapter 2, which is how to explain the upsurge of populist support in contemporary politics? In its current manifestations, especially in the countries of the global north, populism is a facet of economic and political, but also cultural, turbulence. Indeed, Manfred Steger and Paul James speak of the current phase of globalization as the 'Great Unsettling', a period when postmodern globalizations have emerged to challenge the modernist narrative that had dominated the previous phase of global



integration (2019). At least in its 'exclusionary' strain, populism is the result of that turbulence, and thus part of globalization's changing morphology. But it is also testimony to the wisdom of Laclau's dictum that populism is a 'distinctive and always present possibility of structuration of political life', with immanent potential for disruption and change in times of doubt (2005: 26).

POPULISM IN PRACTICE

So, what is the measure of populist success (or failure) today? As I have intimated, despite the frenzy of reflection and animus triggered by Donald Trump's election in 2016 and the Brexit referendum result, with dire warnings that populism was about to go mainstream (Goodwin, 2018, 2019, 2020a) the global picture is actually more inchoate than one might suppose (Nederveen Pieterse, 2019). It is true that there have been recent, and unexpected, additions to the pantheon in the USA and the UK. But we should be careful in taking them as paradigmatic. Take the British case. The transformation of British politics in a populist direction accelerated following the EU referendum in 2016, with the Conservative party morphing into a – still ersatz – vehicle of national populism, championing ordinary people against cosmopolitan elites, exit 'saboteurs', diverse 'Remoaners' and those willing to 'surrender' to the Brussels bureaucracy. Such rhetorical inventiveness is characteristic of a jobbing populism, and was already apparent in (then prime minister) Theresa May's campaign style in the run-up to the British general election in 2017. Of late, such polemic has become common currency in political exchanges, leading to charges that civility is dead or mortally wounded. In fact, the roots of current discontent, if not its manifestations, go deeper and pre-date the EU referendum. The outcome of the UK general election in December 2019 still leaves two main parties of the left and right dominant in terms of vote share and seats in the House of Commons. But is seeming continuity any more than a carapace for a politics already hollowed-out by longer-term shifts in the calculus and durability of political identification?

Taken together, these developments may augur, perhaps even confirm, a disturbing or exhilarating shift in British political culture, depending on your view. Change in the depth and meaning of partisan allegiance is one thing. Arguably more profound is the impact of the Brexit process on Britain's national myth; its civic culture of residual deference, trust in institutions, tolerance and limited activism. In its stead, British politics is now routinely described as more polarized and febrile, prey to what Peter Pomerantsev calls 'pop-up populism' (2017). Slur or not, this aphorism highlights the current

appeal of the postmodern, non-essentialist qualities of populism – pick ‘n’ mix dogma, florid rhetoric diffused through savvy communications with targeted audiences and – this is crucial – drawing on a deep well-spring of discontent and feelings of insecurity. Populist rhetoric of this stamp was apparent too in Jeremy Corbyn’s invitation during the 2019 election to confront enemies of the people, ‘the many’, in the shape of ‘big polluters’, ‘greedy landlords’ and ‘bad bosses’.

In the course of such changes, the mediating weight of history and culture looks like being sloughed off, with the usual cleavage of left–right allegiance losing out to concerns over identity and culture, alongside general disillusionment. The upshot, at least on some accounts, has been a mainstreaming of extremism, or at least of extremist language, with a national populist worldview emerging as the new consensus – Corbyn’s left populist interventions aside (Stocker, 2018). But once again the actual evidence is mixed, especially when inferences are made from a wider canvass of public attitudes on, for example, immigration, austerity and social cohesion. These attitudes demonstrate ambivalence rather than coherence of opinion and identity across a range of issues (British Social Attitudes Survey, 2019, 2020; Wheatley, 2019). Thus, a recent study by British Future and the Centre for English Identity and Politics (2020) showed quite strong signs of an inclusive interpretation of Englishness. And in another paradox, polarization on one measure – most obviously about leaving the EU to protect national identity – is accompanied by the softening of opinion on other valence issues such as immigration control (and the reasons to occasion it) and gay rights.

SO WHO ARE ‘THE PEOPLE’?

As the British case demonstrates, constructing ‘the people’ by pitting them against an enemy, whether corporeal or symbolic, is low-budget politics by any definition, but, of late, resonates with the public mood. With the usual canons governing voting allegiance in some disarray, it simplifies otherwise hard choices for citizens and politicians alike. And, as Mudde and Kaltwasser note (2017), discursively constructing ‘the people’ is always a more-or-less inclusive exercise, depending on the mythologies in play, on how history is glossed and on contingencies. The Trump campaign in 2016 was successful in uniting an unlikely coalition of free-marketers, American preservationists and swathes of voters who had little in common beyond an almost visceral distaste for Hillary Clinton. And the real charge, the untamable element, in the slogan ‘Brexit’ was that, chameleon-like, it assumed the hue(s) ascribed to it by voters – at least

in 2016. In Laclau's sense (2005), it was indeed an empty signifier, one with a sting. When primed, voters duly filled it with their own yearnings and anxieties, with their sense of loss and outrage against elites and outsiders, as well as disdain for the governing class *per se*.

All populism envisions an ontological battle between 'people' and 'elites', but not all populisms construct 'the people' in the same way. Those labelled 'inclusionary' populists tend to describe the people as all those within a national jurisdiction who are not classified as part of the elite, which is a tautology that still leaves grey edges around membership. This inclusive strain is often associated with left-populisms, and these are generally more permissive in their toleration of difference. Cas Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) note that, in Latin America, left populists embrace the poor and other marginal groups who are routinely discriminated against on ethnic or racial grounds. In Europe, Syriza and Podemos have been outspoken on the social evils of anti-immigration and racism. Jeremy Corbyn's version of left-populism was also of the inclusive variety – alleged anti-semitism apart. Of course, saying that populism is inclusive is not the same thing as agreeing that everybody benefits equally from populist rule.

Exclusionary constructs are more closely linked to strains of right-populism, but not exclusively so. In this strain, the 'people' is a more strictly demarcated status, and borders – around jurisdictions and to taste and imagination – are important. Almost all right-populisms cleave to the idea of an ethnically homogeneous nation or people and, of late, this may well include religious homogeneity and prescriptions for greater religiosity. Authoritarian leaders, such as Matteo Salvini, Viktor Orban and Jair Bolsonaro, and ideological cheerleaders like Steve Bannon, are prepared to couch their platforms inclusively, across conventional borders, in language that depicts Judeo-Christianity as the main pillar of a beleaguered Western civilization. In similar vein, the notion of the 'Anglosphere' to denote a select group of English-speaking peoples also imparts a quasi-civilizational flavour to debates about 'who belongs'. In Poland, the ruling Law and Justice Party parades as the political wing of conservative Catholicism, while Vladimir Putin embraces the Orthodox Church as an institution in lock-step with his mission to fortify Russia's identity and retrieve national pride. Nor are such sentiments confined to countries where there is an appreciable Muslim, refugee or immigrant population. Hungary – admittedly an extreme case in this regard – is some 20% more likely to regard Muslim refugees as a problem than the EU average (Eurobarometer, 2019: 469). Taking all this as of a piece, Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins and Anton Jager are willing to depict the current successes of populism as a religious backlash, at least in part (2019).

Their argument bruits a growing suspicion of, and dissatisfaction with, secularism as a key factor in populism's recent successes, while noting continued decline in formal religious observance. Interestingly, they do not detect much yearning for a return to lives in thrall to religious doctrine and deference to the clerisy. Rather, populism's 'religious' appeal draws on fears that secular, Western societies and the cosmopolitan elites who shape them lack a true moral centre, leaving a void inimical to the quality of life of many people. In this *gestalt*, secularism is not only godless, and thus damaging to spiritual well-being, but has robbed capitalism of its moral compass. As evidenced in its recent history of financial mismanagement and spectacular greed, secular capitalism is also charged with undercutting the material prosperity of non-elites, widening the gap between them and privileged groups, who tend to be financially secure but culturally rootless, and thus the 'citizens' of nowhere (Goodhart, 2017). There are echoes here of other, non-populist, critiques of global capitalism that point to the need to curb rewards, redress or reverse growing inequalities, and end environmentally destructive ways.

Interestingly, Steinmetz-Jenkins and Jager see this as populism's 'hijack' of religion (2019), rather than evidence of a possibly laudable strain of opposition in the face of market excess and implied moral bankruptcy. But they underestimate the extent to which what some commentators call the emergence of a 'post-secular' era has been provisioned by the universalist pretensions of Western modernization, by consumer capitalism, by cosmopolitan visions and lifestyles, and by the relativizing effects of globalization on many cultural and belief systems (Casanova, 2011). Nonetheless, they are partly correct in their assessment, since religion can play a divisive part in the populist *gestalt*, when religious otherness is conjured as damaging to personal and collective security and religion is bruite as the touchstone of civilizational conflict. Of late, Islamic lifestyles have been the subject of suspicion and exclusion in many countries, although not just on the part of populists. Many right-populist parties in Europe are anti-Muslim, including the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and Poland's Law and Justice Party, which secured a second term of office on 13 October 2019. Geert Wilders' vociferously anti-Islamic Party for Freedom (PVV) remains the most popular single party in the Netherlands, at least on votes cast.

In the stampede to protect culture and heritage, the distinction between left and right populisms sometimes gets blurred. The victory of Mette Frederiksen's Social Democratic Party in Denmark's June 2019 general election was a triumph for a left-oriented party that campaigned for asylum seekers to be expelled, for a cap on non-Western immigration and for all immigrants to be required to work for 37 hours per week in return for benefits. Frederiksen also supported

a plan to make repatriation rather than integration the goal of asylum policy and for a ban on the wearing of burqas and niqabs. In parliament, the Social Democrats voted in favour of a law allowing Danish authorities to confiscate money, jewellery and other valuable items from refugees crossing the border. In this ironic twist, the far right, in the shape of Denmark's populist Danish People's Party (DPP), lost out to a leftist party that simply filched its policy clothes by adopting a harder line on immigration and cultural diversity.

A recent study for the Brookings Institute (Hamid, 2018) argues that anti-Muslim and anti-Islam sentiment have to be considered as defining features of right-wing populism today, and there is some evidence for that claim. For example, in Hungary, the ruling Fidesz Party claimed that businessman George Soros – a hate figure for the populist right and for Eurosceptics of all persuasions – and the European Commission were scheming to flood Europe with Muslim migrants (Kreko and Inyedi, 2018), and thereby scored a double hit in the court of already hostile public opinion. The (Muslim) refugee issue was also key to mobilizing support in Czech Republic President Milos Zeman's re-election bid in 2018. As I will relate later in the chapter, anti-Islam sentiments are part of a deeper shift in party allegiances from economic factors to cultural ones and to matters of identity.

TRENDS AND TENDENCIES IN POPULIST SUPPORT

Across Europe, though less obviously in other parts of the world, the graph of (national) populist success over the past decade or so looks in the ascendant; or did so, pre-Covid-19. Newspaper headlines throughout 2018 and 2019 proclaimed the need to beware the twin spectres of populism and nationalism. *The Times* newspaper of 23 June 2018 stated that, 'nationalists are ripping up the Franco-German map of Europe', and in even more dire language it reported on 31 December of the same year that 'across the world populists have been on the march. The concern is that this is not just a ... blip that can be corrected once the establishment has learned its lesson, but that it is a fundamental shift'. But, as ever, we have to be careful about interpreting the evidence and cautious about what it portends, while still noting important trends.

For trends or tendencies are there to be noted. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse relates (2019), different kinds of market economies produce different types of politics and these beget varied strains of populism. So, if there is a grain, it is sometimes hard to discern. Allowing for variation, he argues that three cross-cutting trends have emerged in recent times and are visible in any and all populist narratives and interventions.

The first trend is a return to nationalism, and more to the point, 'economic nationalism', as witnessed in the politics of Brexit, Trump's presidency and Steve Bannon's world-view. As an expression of economic populism, publics across the European Union, the USA and Southeast Asia have rejected all manner of transnational trade pacts in an attempt to offset the travails of market globalization and to challenge its core assumptions; namely, that trade agreements should be driven by a business-led agenda, and that the needs of investors also benefit the rest of society through a process of trickle-down wealth diffusion (Rodrik, 2018).

Agreements found wanting include the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Brexit too is part of this rejection, although elite Brexiters of an economically liberal persuasion favour some trade deals (with the USA) over others (with the EU) and endorse the mantra of free trade over protectionism. The combination of economic liberalism and cultural conservatism also plays well with sections of national publics, though not universally.

The second trend is more culturally inflected. Populists are redefining the nation in very narrow cultural terms. This trend often manifests as ultra-nationalism and, in extremis, as white nationalism or white supremacism. It also surfaces in slogans such as 'taking our country back', in opposition to multiculturalism, and by looking to achieve or subvert ethnic and/or religious privilege.

The third trend suggests that by rejecting market globalization populist parties and movements endorse a (re)turn to localism, or provincialism, as a form of essentialism, although they seldom advocate complete autarky. As we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5, this rubs against the grain of much globalization theory, which stresses the room for accommodation (at the least) between local and global.

And there may be a *fourth trend*, one I have adverted previously. It is what *The Times* of 13 October 2018 called 'the triumph of the strongman'. While it may be true that populism's success is due to underlying causes as much as to the charismatic mein of leaders, the style of politics that results is important for two key reasons. One, it charts a move away from rational discourse about the ends of politics, and from governance predicated on finding satisficing outcomes to complex problems, towards authoritarian and 'one-stop' solutions for the same issues. Two, as what Roger Boyes calls 'choreographers of threat' (2019), populist strongmen have garnered an appreciative and growing – though not always uncritical – audience. Strongmen – Putin, Bolsonaro, Duterte, Trump, Erdogan and, until his abdication in 2019, Evo Morales in Bolivia, will serve to illustrate the genre – claim to supply the

answers to a number of existential questions for uncertain times: Who can we trust with our most chronic fears? Who can restore élan when national belief is at such low ebb? And who can allay fears about the future? 'Let's get it done', as the Brexit formula insisted, was a cry of exasperation over the protracted length of disengagement from the EU, and also a summary of such fears; one that was heard on the lips of voters of all stripes. In the late autumn of 2019, the question 'can we trust anybody?' may have been uppermost in the minds of many British voters, regardless of partisan persuasion, as the country shuffled piecemeal towards Brexit and then opted for a general election, called by its interlocutor and subsequent victor, to 'bring the nation back together'. Apparently, he was believed.

THE ISSUE CORRELATES OF POPULISM: COMPLEX CAUSATION

The appearance of the aforementioned trends in different localities and regions reveals a highly variable map of populist incursions, tempering the urge to generalize about causation, or to accord precedence to any explanatory variable. In the USA and the UK, both liberal market economies, the populist agenda lies in the fallout from neoliberalism's dog-days, though some critics insist it is a reflex of, or countervailing force to, that ideology's hegemony. This agenda includes fears about wages and jobs, deindustrialization, regional imbalances, immigration, growing inequality, trade pacts and international competition. In other words, it is a litany of liberal globalization's ills. In the UK, for an unlikely constituency of free-marketers, mainly English nationalists, and those feeling abandoned to corporate greed and the cosmopolitan fancies of cultural elites, continued membership of the EU was the sum of all such fears (Nederveen Pieterse, 2018: 116).

Meanwhile, Trump's campaign promises in 2016, and in the Covid-ridden hustings of 2020, were a combination of neoliberalism, neoconservatism, nationalism and postmodern relativism, revealing him as a full-spectrum populist. By contrast, in Nordic countries, populist parties and voters tend to be exercised mainly about immigration and Islam and less so by the threat of economic globalization to national welfare-statism (Brookings Institution, 2019). Some commentators suggest that this reflects the greater economic insecurity of citizens in neoliberal regimes like the USA and UK when compared to the more robust protection afforded their counterparts in the coordinated market economies of continental and especially Nordic Europe (see Rodrik, 2018; Nederveen Pieterse, 2019). That may have been true at one time. But of late, populist rhetoric in countries such as Sweden, Finland and Denmark does stress the

economic threat posed by immigrants – to jobs and welfare provision – as well as the difficulties of cultural integration and social cohesion.

Immigration remains a corrosive theme in the politics of Western European populist parties, fuelled by the tide of enforced migration that made for lurid headlines across the continent and the world from 2017. The enduring sensitivity of the issue was made more acute by the impact of austerity in receiving nations, exacerbating fears about overloaded health care systems, undercutting the wages of domestic workers and, of course, terrorist incursion. One effect was to negate or dilute sympathy for the outcasts from civil wars and terrorist violence in the Middle East. Altogether more visceral qualities of populism with a nationalistic and authoritarian bent are found in parts of Central and Eastern Europe, most notably in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. There, national populism is infused with heavier cultural baggage, particularly when it invokes the need to defend 'Christian values', a narrative with deep roots in the history of the region.

In the south of Europe, around the Mediterranean, the map of populist incursion is more varied. I have already noted the left varieties found in Podemos and Syriza, in Spain and Greece respectively, whose platforms are eclectic. Anti-austerity, combating government corruption and the EU's poor record of developing the countries of the Mediterranean Basin combine with antipathy to large numbers of refugees and flows of voluntary economic migration from North Africa and the Middle East. In Italy, the right-wing Lega, and its erstwhile junior partner in coalition, the ideologically rootless Five Star Movement, shared similar platforms. In France, the entrenched Islamophobia of the Rassemblement National (National Rally) marshals cultural and religious objections to Muslim immigration, a source of considerable tension in a society and polity committed to republican values. Increasingly, cultural issues muster as the primary source of division in post-industrial, post-affluent societies. In Europe, in particular, this is a growing trend, shifting the conflict zones of democratic politics away from economic and class issues to matters of culture and identity.

Latin America is largely free of populist parties and movements whose stock-in-trade is nationalist or religious exclusivity and concerns about assimilation. Having said that, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil courted the religious lobby and evangelical Christians by promising to govern according to the Bible. But, as I noted in Chapter 2, the recent 'pink tide' of populism, now in noisy retreat, espoused more socially progressive and secular values. And the theme of local variety also informs any discussion of populism away from Europe, the USA and Latin America. Religion is playing a part in the contested modernization

of Turkey and appears central to the shift from a codified secular nationalism to a still incomplete version of Muslim nationalism. Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) movement are key players in what he presents as a battle for Turkey's soul; an existential contest. Other examples of alternative modernization, with and without a religious motif, include the state-led market economies found in China, India and Russia, all advocates of different routes to modernity and different vision for globalization.

All these illustrations underline the local variety of populisms. Each is a reaction to, but also a driver of, political, economic, cultural and growing geo-strategic turbulence, played out against a variety of local back-drops. Nederveen Pieterse says that 'populism presupposes instability or transformation' and is never the child of steady-state politics (2019: 119); and has echoes of Steger and James's 'Great Unsettling' (2019). But that does not mean that the causes of populist incursions or expressed discontent are always proximate and in the short term. It is also clear that in many locations across the world populism is not the only off-the-shelf solution to national tribulations and bottlenecks in development.

We now have a number of questions to consider. First, what are the salient factors in national polities that mediate the rise of populism? Are they sufficient and/or necessary causes, or intermediate variables? Second, what cultural and economic dislocations (crises) contribute to the rise of populism? Are these long- or short-term considerations, underlying or contingent? Are they psychological or material? What do they tell us about the links between populism and turbulent politics?

POPULISM: NATIONAL POLITICS AS A SOURCE OF MEDIATION

Even allowing for variation, populism is a global phenomenon, one not systematically limited to certain kinds of regime and political cultures. But it is a mistake to assume that its appearance must follow a common pattern across time and space; although it is equally misplaced to reduce it entirely to local peculiarities, even if one can isolate these for purposes of analysis. The relative weight of underlying and generic causes and the mediating influence of local factors is a difficult calculus. Take the entirely plausible claim that populism is an expression of outrage or grievance, which I discussed in Chapter 2. There is ample evidence that populist vehicles mobilize and come to power, or just achieve greater prominence, when citizens hold elites responsible for economic and other chronic policy failures and where there is a growing sense of unease

about established ways of allocating value (Goodhart, 2017; Muller, 2017; Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018; Crouch, 2019). They may attribute such failures to incompetence, indifference, corruption on the part of elites, to the vagaries of globalization, or to the harsh logic of capitalist accumulation. And they desire, though may not actually expect, redress; an important qualifier. Grievances are fuelled by the perception of chronic inattention to, or lack of respect for, those 'left behind' materially, and relegated to subaltern status in all manner of other ways. In systemic terms this looks like, or may indicate, a crisis of performance that, under certain circumstances, could tip routine fluctuations in the popularity of elites and institutions into crises of legitimacy and motivation (Habermas, 1975). And the same may be true for the longer-term impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic.

So far, so plausible. But, to repeat, the calculus is not that simple. Sustained and growing outrage looks like a necessary contextual factor in, possibly even a cause of, populist mobilization and, more to the point, success. But it is not a sufficient cause, or not always. Grievance and a sense of outrage are widespread but they do not always translate into support for populist actors. In Greece and Spain, such actors latched onto the economic crisis after 2008 and fears about austerity to mobilize voters and put discontent firmly on the political and policy agendas. But in Ireland and Portugal, where not dissimilar conditions obtained in key respects, there was no populist frisson. So, the words 'under certain circumstances' are an admonition not to presume too much, again directing attention to how local factors mediate generic forces.

In their monumental study *How Democracies Die*, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2017) note that the threat posed by populisms to both strong and weaker democracies varies with the local strength of two 'meta-norms'. 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. Depending on circumstance and context, norm erosion in either case is likely to lead to greater political and social polarization. In the UK, undoing the civic culture seems to be having exactly these effects, which is not to say that conflict and dissent have been absent from that culture in the past. Toleration and forbearance are cultural traits sometimes codified in law. But formal and informal political institutions also play a role in enabling or constraining populist forces. The latter frequently rise to power within formally democratic structures. The more open and competitive the system, the easier it is for maverick actors of all persuasions to enter the fray. And even in steadfast democracies, the rise of identity politics threatens the safety of past accommodations at the same time as it makes room for actors and platforms once excluded.

Even so, opportunity structures vary enormously. Most obviously, a country's electoral system will determine how accommodating the political system is to newcomers (Team Populism, 2018). In the UK, the simple majority voting system for general elections militates against start-up and most third parties, except in very unusual circumstances. The UK Independence Party (UKIP) struggled to translate its appeal to large numbers of voters into parliamentary seats. But in elections to the European Parliament held under proportional representation, UKIP (2014), and then the Brexit Party (2019), made that leap. The general election of 2019 saw the party eviscerated at the polls, and only in part because of the simple plurality rules governing the election.

Type of executive is also a mediating factor. The direct election of a president or of the whole executive branch gives populist aspirants the means to harness executive power without needing a majority in the legislature. Separate electoral constituencies for executive and legislature is a time-honoured way of dividing offices and powers, but with other factors in play, it can allow populist leaders to garner executive authority without the support of the legislature. In strong democracies this still requires the executive to reach accommodation with the legislature on a routine basis, but that assumes acceptance of political, constitutional and procedural niceties – rules of the game – on the part of both. Where trust in the functioning of key political and cultural institutions is eroded and the performance of the system as a means of ensuring the well-being of citizens is compromised, over time a crisis of legitimacy may occur. Of course, for analysts, the problem lies in being able to specify the tolerances within which stability and instability, trust and its absence, play out. And for students of populism, the balance of interpretation now seems to dictate that populism is the politics of choice (or desperation) only when other things have gone awry, and other candidates for mobilizing and harnessing grievance are deemed either missing or not fit for purpose.

In strong, and in some parvenu, democracies, political parties and the party system should function as vehicles of elite recruitment, channels of communication between citizens and government and, most important here, mediating structures in the complex functioning of indirect democracy (Krastev, 2012). The gatekeeping function of political parties in such democracies is meant to make it difficult for extremist or even maverick candidates to enter the party and achieve high office within it. The reality is that in times of uncertainty, even established parties may fail in this gatekeeping role and allow populist, and other, forces to emerge. Of course, this is not always a bad thing. The situation in relatively new democracies is even more fluid. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán became prime minister in 2010 and began a shift that saw his party,

Fidesz, desert its centre-right, classically liberal and pro-EU stance. Hungary became what he now describes with some pride as an 'illiberal state'. In the USA, culturally disposed to applaud the maverick, Donald Trump, a political outsider, captured the Republican Party in the name of the people and authentic American values. In doing so, he transformed it. None of this happened *de novo*. In many expressions of populism, we find the prior failure or weakening of established parties and other brokerage institutions.

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS: ATTITUDINAL CORRELATES OF SUPPORT FOR POPULISM/MICRO DATA AND MACRO TRENDS

Let's turn to wider issues in what Ronald Inglehart calls 'cultural evolution' (2019).

The rise of populism today is taking place alongside the demise of the old 'left to right' order of party competition and voter allegiance, and may be hastening that process (Inglehart, 2018, 2019; Wheatley, 2019). As a consequence, many scholars argue that, in Europe at least, it is cultural resistance to globalization, more than a conventionally leftist dislike of capitalism or a rightward lurch to ultra-nationalist bigotry and racism, that now defines party competition. While opposition to globalization is a starting template for all populisms today, the cultural turn in the politics of resistance is inflected differently depending on the type of populism and on location.

Those who point to a major cleavage between globalization's 'losers' and its 'winners' note how immigration and an era of rapid multiculturalism are changing, possibly transforming, settled lifestyles. The responses to such changes are often taken as expressions of racism, or the unacceptable face of identity politics; and sometimes they are. But while some of those who vote for populist parties are racist, many are not. Work for the Pew Research Center (2018) revealed that when discussing eligibility for citizenship, most voters, including many who voted for populist candidates and parties, are not exercised by ethnic origin. Much greater weight is afforded to speaking the host country's language and adopting its customs and values. If anything, this elevates questions of social and cultural integration above a concern about immigrant numbers and phenotypical difference. That said, an Ipsos Mori poll of 18,000 voters in 25 countries (2017) found that 43% of British, 54% of Hungarians and 63% of Italians felt that 'immigration is causing my county to change in ways that I do not like'. Data like this confounds wisdom about the explanatory ubiquity of a single left-to-right attitudinal dimension. It also contradicts the easy assumption that 'economic left' opinions are, or should be, congruent with

'culturally left' ones, and vice versa. Culture now appears as a second, cross-cutting, dimension and a possible independent motivational factor in political identification.

A second, though related, take on the cultural turn has a rather more systemic feel to it, and locates the backlash against globalization in a protracted crisis of 'existential security'. In his book *Silent Revolution*, published in 1977, Ronald Inglehart drew attention to extraordinarily high levels of existential security experienced in mature democracies in the decades following the Second World War. This condition brought an unprecedented shift from materialist values that emphasized economic and physical security and hitherto endemic fears about the liminal quality of many lifestyles to post-materialist values that privileged individual autonomy, self-expression, openness to change and embracing diversity. The value shift so described brought with it huge social and political changes, from the rise of anti-war movements, demands for stronger environmental protection and their partial fulfillment, higher levels of gender equality across the social spectrum and the mainstreaming of gay rights. Democracy as a global cultural script also flourished. It was dependent upon unprecedented levels of economic prosperity and geo-political stability. Of course, none of this happened overnight. The change was often protracted, occurring at the speed of intergenerational population replacement and, while secular, remained subject to short-term economic downturns.

But for the past 30 years or so, citizens of even high-income countries have experienced more volatility in fortunes, so that they no longer take material well-being, or even survival, for granted. As a result, the graph tracing feelings of security has taken a downward turn. Ulrich Beck says that this is part of the crisis of second modernity – the inevitable consequence of living in the risk society (1996). In risk society, hazards are much less predictable and, even when predictable, often unmanageable. As a result, the scope for contingency, doubt and relativism increases vastly, to the point where fears about survival again become rife; this time without the dampening effects of fatalism. A sense of ontological insecurity is pervasive, and that can be exhilarating; but, more usually, it is debilitating. The list of contributory ailments is all too familiar – declining real incomes, erosion of job security, rising income inequality within, if not between, nations, and fears for the lot of subsequent generations, not least in terms of impending environmental and health disasters. Inglehart argues that the 'Silent Revolution' dynamic is still at work, but that it has gone into reverse with acute consequences, both politically and socially. The consequences include growing support for xenophobic, populist and authoritarian movements of the kind we have cited, but not only that (Brubaker, 2017).

In systemic language, this confirms a faltering – at least – of Western modernity; a modernity shaped by rational, cognitive reflexivity on the part of individuals and institutions, along with the critical monitoring of the self and social institutions by actors. And as a reaction to the perceived failure of reflexive modernization and the ability to manage the increasing fragmentation of everyday life, there has been a search for, or reversion to, more ‘authentic’, and certainly more expressive components of self and collective identity. This search involves a revival of what Scott Lash and John Urry described as ‘aesthetic reflexivity’ as a factor in identity formation (1994). The latter seems to entail a rejection of those meaning systems that are mediated by technical experts and abstract systems. Crucially, it evinces the need for greater security in a risk-laden environment.

On the ground, the search for security, and for recognition, has triggered new forms of contentious politics. As well as varieties of populism, new social movements – of indigenous peoples, climate change protestors, communitarians, feminists and Trans activists – have invoked elements of the romantic-aesthetic tradition. In its most robust, and least palatable, form, the search to minimize risk tribalizes relations between groups. I return to this issue in Chapter 6, along with other manifestations of postmodern identity politics as these appear today.

SO WHY POPULISM NOW? WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF DISCONTENT AND INSECURITY?

This question demands attention not only to the socio-psychological factors in identity formation, but to the ‘wider field’ that has occasioned such shifts in perception (Nederveen Pieterse, 2019: 121). The prime focus now moves from the morphology of populism *per se*, to the condition of modernities generally, and liberal market economies and liberal values in particular. In this scenario, populism today is primarily the fruit of a declining or fragmenting global order of market liberalism, or else a symptom of its re-balancing, as Dani Rodrik has it (2018). Without doubt these are systemic issues, but we must always remember that the chronic failure of national and multilateral institutions to manage economic shocks and financial crisis are experienced – and evaluated – in the quotidian, close to home. So, in addition to the wider field, I will examine attitudinal and contextual evidence to tell us about the composition of populist support, what motivates it, and what that means for the current temper of globalization (Tormey, 2018).

The current crisis of globalization is conveniently, though somewhat narrowly, painted as an economic malaise linked specifically to the global financial

crisis of 2007/08. In fact, the financial crisis both exacerbated and accelerated deep-seated problems in the neoliberal model of capitalist accumulation. Originating in the financial sectors in the United States and the United Kingdom, the crisis spread rapidly to affect much of the global financial system. Critically, it could not be contained within that system, despite the massive injection of public funds vouchsafed to banks in the UK and the USA.

For one thing, and counter-intuitively, crucial inter-bank lending dried up, precipitating a credit crunch, with the consequent slowing of investment and capital flows to the wider constituency of borrowers and would-be borrowers. The contagion effects were also evident in reduced trade volumes and a slowing of growth globally. In the Eurozone, the credit crunch hit borrowers, consumers and whole economies alike. Some countries, notably Greece, fell into recession and incurred massive sovereign debt. There, and also in Portugal and Spain, borrowers who had previously enjoyed low-risk premiums underpinned by EU monetary union, ran up large amounts of external debt when they invested in construction and other non-tradable sectors. These borrowers were left exposed and angry when credit dried up in the wake of the US housing collapse. The financial crisis brought Greece to its knees. More generally, across the Eurozone it undermined reasonably equitable relations between debtor and creditor nations when harsh austerity packages were made the precondition for bailouts by central banks and multilateral institutions. Western countries, hitherto the assured core of the global system and begetters of the pacific liberal international order, underwent the deepest recession since the Second World War (Kundani, 2017; Ikenberry, 2018).

At one remove, all of this challenged assumptions about the continued dynamism and beneficial effects of economic globalization. Pessimism replaced confidence, even among elite echelons that were fervid supporters of open borders. At another, the impact on vulnerable communities and sectors of the economy was profound. Wages either stagnated or, in real terms, fell, especially for workers in industries already suffering competition from countries where lax employment, environmental and safety regulations contributed to low wages and lower production costs generally. Living standards too declined after the financial crisis. The resentment generated among skilled, but mainly unskilled, workers in declining manufacturing and extractive industries was, and continues to be, deep. Undoubtedly, such dislocations made economic globalization, and particularly the financial variety, a focus of grievance, even when compared to the parallel impact wrought by technological changes in production techniques on the composition and stability of labour markets. In addition, financial globalization made it harder to regulate credit markets and

banks, both of which were held culpable in the hollowing out of domestic manufacturing in Europe and the USA, and for failing in their duty-of-care to customers (World Economic Forum, 2016; Rodrik, 2018; Green 2019). ‘Too big to fail’, the mantra that justified bailing out investment banks with public funds, quickly morphed into an abusive slogan when bankers were not held accountable for irresponsible lending and irrepressible greed.

This all looks like the makings of a perfect storm for the pre-crisis model of economic globalization, where self-regulating markets were pre-eminent and borders increasingly nugatory. It also paints a scenario in which it is tempting to explain populism simply as a rebellion by globalization’s losers. There are two qualifications. The first complicates our understanding of what actually took place, and is still taking place, pointing to a number of contributory, longer-term issues in capitalist development and in the career of globalization. The second questions whether current populism is just a revolt of the ‘left behind’, an elemental political response to economic, or more broadly, material tribulations.

As to the first qualification: there is no doubt that the 2007/08 financial crisis posed major questions about the sustainability of the neoliberal model of globalization, but there are other, chronic, issues that were entropic in their effect. Since the mid-to-late 1980s the global economic system has been transformed from a system of ‘embedded liberalism’, characterized by large increases in global trade and investment and rapid economic development in both advanced and developing economies (Ruggie, 1982; Rodrik, 2018). Embedded liberalism was a compromise between the demands of an open system of trade in goods and services and the desire to regulate such intercourse on the part of national governments and multilateral institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. But in the 1980s embedded liberalism gave way to a more aggressively globalist regime known – and frequently reviled – as neoliberalism, wherein trade agreements often overrode domestic regulations, increased domestic exposure to imports and (where it existed) compromised social protection for domestic workers. As Dani Rodrik says (2018: 14), in addition, the removal of restrictions on capital mobility became standard practice, but often without effective tools of governance that would both moderate market excess or failure and (better yet) anticipate them.

The disciplines imposed by embedded liberalism and neoliberalism impacted differentially on states and regions; and as we have seen already, variation tells us a lot about the strain and temper of opposition that emerged. In this respect, Europe has been more open to trade for longer than the United States

and, generally speaking, affords more social protection for workers. Even so, as citizens in Greece found to their peril, the demands of being part of a common EU currency and thus subject to austerity measures imposed by the Union and from without, made light work of social protection. And while subject to EU rules in key areas of policy, the UK never fully subscribed to its emphasis on social protection, especially in the workplace.

Meanwhile, the USA has only recently experienced serious exposure to trade openness and the vulnerability that brings, but it lacks an infrastructure of social protection to mitigate the effects. As a result, imports (notably from China) and trade agreements (with Mexico and Asian countries) became politically sensitive very quickly, although they were not always recognized as such by established parties and economic elites. The financial crisis, which left many low-income homeowners without hope of relief, generated even more anger over the profligacy of the finance sector, at bankers' impunity from legal redress and their indifference to adverse public opinion. Other, longer-term, conditions also festered, such as the racial divide, illegal (and then any) immigration from Mexico, and Muslim terrorism. Taken together, they created the conditions in which populisms of the left and the right could reappear in the USA and flourish in the run-up to the 2016 elections and well beyond. But, to add a note of caution, there is no simple equation between economic deprivation and support for populist parties and tribunes.

Where we can agree is that the financial crisis brought these and other longer-term and systemic tensions into sharp relief across the world, and by doing so crystalized opposition to neoliberal globalization. There is a wealth of nuance lost in that general attribution, but for the moment let's run with the argument. In particular, the crisis revealed tensions in the global political economy that were damaging for liberal globalization's ascendancy, but not terminal for globalization as an integrative tendency and a multidimensional process of accommodation between local and global (Gamble, 2019; Green, 2019). The core tension is the most elemental and the most intractable. It lies in the contested ontology of a system trying to balance the demands of universalism in the shape of unmediated, or only partly regulated, global flows of information, goods, services, capital, people and ideas, and one still wedded to the particularism of discrete national jurisdictions and the societies they frame and protect. If populism today has a core (albeit limiting) measure of success or failure, it must lie in the extent to which the battle to abrogate or underpin sovereignty and territoriality has been/will be won or lost. The economic impact of Covid-19, and its effects on what one might call the informal cosmopolitanism of a relatively borderless world, may shift the balance of probability decisively.

And the difficult balance referred to is conveniently summarized in the growing problems of the liberal international order of states, markets and multilateral institutions. I will develop this theme in the next chapter, as it points up longer-term issues in the global political economy that impact on the consciousness and motivations of mainly situated actors.

Now let's turn to the second qualification introduced above. Is populism mainly an instrumental response to economic dislocation and its impact on situated populations? Prevailing wisdom supports the thesis that populism is a rebellion by globalization's losers, by those labelled 'somewhere' people (Goodhart, 2017). And it is true that economic globalization has transformed economies, creating conditions in which populist and other discontents have arisen. As Matthew Goodwin opines '(a)mid societies that are characterized by persistent inequality, falling numbers of dignified, secure, well-paying jobs and a declining share of national income going to workers, only a fool would claim that economics does not have a role' (Goodwin, 2018: 6). But, as he and others also point out, things are not that simple. For one thing, there is evidence that challenges the data used to corroborate the 'loser' thesis. For example, taking Western Europe as a whole, the proportion of low-skill workers (those who have not completed secondary education) is declining rapidly. At the turn of the millennium, low-skill workers outnumbered university graduates; today, the opposite is true in many countries (World Economic Forum, 2016). Following the prevailing logic, the share of voters supporting anti-globalization parties should be diminishing too. But that seems not to be the case. In elections to the European Parliament in 2019, populist and nationalist parties got higher scores than previously, with several – Fidesz, the FPÖ in Austria, the Swiss People's Party, the Danish People's Party and the New Flemish Alliance in Belgium – polling over 20% of votes cast. This suggests that, economic grievances or not, those who support populist parties may have other reasons to feel anxious, threatened and 'left behind'. The sobriquet is shorthand for more complex motivation.

So, in Austria, and pre-Covid-19, the economy was strong, its strength indicated by one of Europe's lowest unemployment rates (4.2% in May 2019 against an EU average of 6.2%). Yet Norbert Hofer, now leader of the populist Freedom Party (FPÖ) and a presidential candidate in 2016, built up his support among Austria's large middle class by painting an alarming picture of thousands of refugees flooding across the country's borders to the detriment of what many Austrians saw as a secure environment. The attraction of Hofer's anti-immigrant platform mirrors a broader pattern across northern Europe. Amid relative economic stability and mostly low unemployment rates, purely

economic grievances look less than credible, although to reiterate, some voters may still feel, or be open to persuasion, that economic misfortunes are visited mainly on them. The Italian Lega failed to win an election held in the wealthy region of Emilia-Romagna in January 2020, where it had hoped to overturn 60 years of dominance by the political left. Emilia-Romagna is Italy's second wealthiest region. However, the fulcrum of Italian politics is undoubtedly moving to the right. The Lega won in Calabria and in Umbria, and even took 44% of the vote in Emilia-Romagna. In southern Europe, the chronic impact of the euro crisis makes populist economic arguments about 'the people' bearing the brunt of austerity more potent. Yet counter-intuitively, economic deprivation was a better predictor of support for Hillary Clinton in 2016 than it was for Donald Trump. Matthew Goodwin reports that the bulk of academic studies over the past three decades caution that 'objective' economic factors such as income have only a weak effect, or none at all, when trying to explain the appeal of national populism (Goodwin, 2018: 8).

This is not to dismiss the fact that large numbers of people across the West believe that they, and people like them, are being 'left behind', marginalized relative to others. They are also exercised about what the future holds. Individuals, maybe whole communities, feel caught up in events and processes beyond their immediate and long-term control and, as remarked earlier, they no longer have pre-modern fatalism as a bulwark against despair. Feeling that one is not, and probably never will be, in control undoubtedly feeds populism's negative appeal – although it may trigger other coping mechanisms, political as well as psycho-therapeutic. The roll-call of grievances comprises lack of trust in elites, economic alienation, political marginalization, dying communities and degraded cultures, the fissiparous and perhaps pathological nature of identity politics, the perceived effects of immigration and loss of culture, including religion. At the same time, it would be wrong to paint all supporters of populist (even national populist) parties and movements as in flight from modernity, or as a uniform constituency who simply reject the changing mores of liberal societies and cultures. Not all populists are 'Traditionalists' who reject modernity, the Enlightenment and materialism (Teitelbaum, 2020). On the contrary, many such voters are at ease with the pace and direction of social change (Goodwin, 2018: 12).

This is a complex picture, one grievance plaited with another, anxiety feeding anxiety. The 'left-behind' motif now looks more like an aesthetic, and populism – postmodern populism – the way it is scripted and performed. In the next three chapters I will argue that we can understand and locate this aesthetic as a facet of the reworking of globalization and of the passing of Western

modernity in both personal and systemic terms. Globalization erodes the physical and psychological boundaries around place and in so doing either liberates or threatens identities (and maybe livelihoods) tied to particular locations and imagined pasts. So, one noted consequence of global convergence is the relativization of identities. When globalization is thought benign, culture is treated as fluid, permeable and negotiable; identities are biddable. The truth is often messier and harsher. Which is why relativization is not the only force to be reckoned with. Countering the bland supposition of global cultural convergence is a repertoire of processes that defend cultural enclaves and presumptively whole identities. As we shall see in Chapters 5 and 6, these include processes of indigenization and hybridization, both features of a modal glocalization.

When all these forces are in play there is greater scope for both conflict and accommodation between global, civilizational, inter-societal, societal and communal narratives (Robertson, 1992: 140). Where populism is concerned, globalizing processes and consciousness of global constraints have served to coagulate identities and draw boundary markers where none existed previously, or else were present but not always articulated in anything resembling a politics of exclusion. At such a pass, culture ceases to look negotiable and cultural hybrids – typical features of globalization – are despised as impure and sometimes despicable features of social worlds. Populism – populist ‘ideology’ – is clearly the enemy of the postmodernist conceit that identity formation is a matter of off-the-shelf cultural manufacture, or a casual decision to re-invent personae in line with changing circumstances. And yet, as we shall see in Chapter 6, in its current guise, it is a postmodern phenomenon.

4

POPULISM AND THE NEW GLOBALIZATION

INTRODUCTION: THE POPULISM–GLOBALIZATION PARADOX

Trying to map all this onto the articulation of populism and globalization is difficult, so we need to remind ourselves of some key points. Populism is anti-globalist *per se*, and vehemently so, but is inflected by, and in turn impacts differentially on, the type of globalization it opposes: whether market liberalization – the recently dominant shorthand for all globalizations – coordinated market capitalism, state-led market capitalism, ethical cosmopolitanism, justice globalism, jihadi globalism, even advanced multilateralism, or, in the case of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party, perceived EU super-sovereignty as a trope for dangerous globality. That said, the bulk of commentary tends to focus on national populism as a response to market globalism, with left populism consigned to a residual oppositional category.

In their treatment of the ‘populist challenge to globalization’, Manfred Steger and Paul James (2019: chapter 8) point to the paradoxical nature of national populism when they say that it is ‘economically anti-globalist, but that its practice is culturally globalizing’ (2019: 246). In other words, it is both a facet of globalization and a countervailing force. This is a paradox commonly observed by globalization scholars; wherein the seeming antithesis of global convergence also musters as the carrier of particular kinds of globality. In this case, and as Steger and James also note, national populism is ‘intricately connected’ to changes in the demeanour and role of market globalization. But not so much as to fatally wound it. What it does, or may do, is alter the balance of forces that constitute globalization, still subventing its character as a world-compressing dynamic, but not as a candidate for neoliberal hegemony (Crouch, 2011).



All this is a further playing out of what is still generally taken as the ontological tension between local and global, between sameness and difference, and between 'objective' and 'subjective' processes of same. But the tension is particularly acute nowadays because neoliberal globalization is experiencing profound challenges, sometimes called a 'backlash', and its opponents have markedly differing prescriptions for the global future, including a world disaggregated into national redoubts. In the climate engendered by the Coronavirus pandemic, the latter is less a strategic vision of multi-polar, or disaggregated, globalization, than the reflex of insecure humanity. The response adverts both collective vulnerability and global responsibility for the crisis, while decanting to mainly local ways of dealing with it, and is a paradigm for the present global condition. The same is true of the politics of climate change, where the cause of national exceptionalism, as found in American, Brazilian and Chinese special pleading, has received something of a boost in the courts of domestic public opinion.

Viral and ecological disasters aside, there is widespread agreement that liberal globalization is being pressured by rising protectionism and by diverging growth paths in emerging markets. Taken together, they describe a triple crisis for older versions of globality (Gills, 2020). But to reiterate, talk of a backlash against this model does not imply an end to globalization, or even a piecemeal process of 'deglobalization'. Rather, it posits a rebalancing in, as well as a destabilization of, what Steger and James describe as once 'taken-for-granted shibboleths', most obviously the centrality of unfettered markets (Steger and James, 2019: 191; see also Benedikter and Kofler, 2019; Steger 2019b). Interestingly, the use of 'shibboleth' here suggests a degree of immanent fragility in the constitution of this, or any, globalization. Rebalancing tends to what I call a 'new' globalization, although the attribution has to be used with care. New globalization is no hyperglobalist rebirth, but neither is it an unequivocal shift to more state-centric forms of national liberalism, even taking into account the ubiquitous statism that emerged as the Coronavirus crisis spread. In my interpretation, postmodern populism is a specific moment in the more encompassing dialectic of global convergence and heterogeneity; a dialectic that tends to (g)localized outcomes displaying various types of accommodation between national and global imaginaries, while proclaiming an ontological divide between the two.

Postmodern populism is part of a post-triumphal, post-hegemonic, phase of global rebalancing. It is an expression of the tension that arises between globalization as a process of interconnection and de-bordering on the one hand, and strains of consciousness, as well as pressing exigencies, that resist

any such convergence. It is at once fractal and ubiquitous, which underlines the point made by Steger and James. This makes it a strain of the 'internalized global' bruited in Chapter 1 (Beck and Willms, 2004). It is internalized, because universals are always anchored in, and sometimes challenged by, the particular, while 'life narratives are shaped within a global horizon of experience', a mantra we shall revisit (Gaviria, 2018: 188). National populism, as Steger and James argue, is clearly orthogonal to the ideological landscape of the early twenty-first century and even more so to the liberal economic narrative of late twentieth-century globalization, with its borderless credo. Then, it was fashionable, and seemingly prescient, to declaim the potentially borderless quality of every kind of network and flow. Now, that bullishness is largely absent, at least in its Western redoubts (Moffitt, 2015).

What is it about the current phase of globalization that feeds and is fed by the populist *zeitgeist*? (Mudde, 2004). In what follows, I will tie the discussion of populism to the changing character of globalization, sometimes called the 'new' globalization, although that label does less than justice to the overlapping nature of historical globalizations (Baldwin, 2016; see also Steger, 2019b; Appadurai, 2020). The 'new' globalization is both a description of the de-centred and multi-polar constitution of globality today and a reflex to safeguard against the roils of an ever more connected and turbulent world. It is a reminder that globalization has always been a multidimensional and contradictory process, moving to no single constitutive logic, and historically variable. The new globalization is the context for the current populist surge and, in turn, that surge is testimony to its emergence as a serious political force; perhaps as an embedded global script.

And on the face of it, populists should applaud the 'new' version over the neoliberal model, because it valorizes difference in service to the national imaginary (Friedman, 2018; Kallis, 2018). National liberalism as a half-way house to pristine sovereigntism is not the finished article, but, for globalization sceptics and other non-believers, it is infinitely preferable to unsullied and capricious market economics, and some way short of autarky. Sovereigntism – an almost elemental regard for retaining or regaining control over one's conditions of existence – is the credo of new globalization and ecumenical enough to be usable by both left and right strains of populism, as well as by other discontents and those who fear all kinds of exposure beyond their national walls. National populists cannot assume that they have captured the castle in these turbulent years, and certainly not everywhere. Their anti-globalism remains a work in progress, with changing constellations of the global imaginary challenged by opponents who share little in common beyond antipathy to its dominance.

All this complexity is easily caricatured in the depiction of globalization as a binary process of domination and resistance, with populism cast as either hero or villain in the playing out of that motif. So to repeat, as a facet of global rebalancing, it is actually a form of 'internalized global'. This designation avoids the implication that interaction between an already integrated global system and derivative or otherwise subordinate local or networked actors is configured solely by their immanent qualities and must always yield determinate outcomes. On the contrary, I subscribe to the view of globalization as a process that is 'disordered, full of paradox and the unexpected, and of irreversible and juxtaposed complexity' (Urry, 2002: 58). In this scenario, (postmodern) populism commutes from the status of (possibly forlorn) agency, struggling to vindicate or rescue the national imaginary from globalization, to a force of global becoming.

Thinking this way requires that we view globalization differently. Much conventional work on globalization as a process of connection assumes that it proceeds through entities with separate and distinct essences and, to make the obvious point, 'local' and 'global' are often treated in this way. Through various media, and almost mechanically, these essences are brought into 'external juxtaposition with each other' to comprise, as John Urry says, a 'linear metaphor of scales', rather than being seen as a dynamic and complex imbrication of actors, structures and scales. In simple binaries, the global always dominates the local. Care must be taken to avoid the trap that Urry describes (Urry, 2003).

GLOBALIZATION AS CONNECTION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

As Manfred Steger notes (2019b), it is important to see globalization as both objective and subjective, with globalities formed out of their weave, and the global condition thus made palpable. Most definitions of globalization as process rely on connection to describe the extension of social relations across the planet. Used thus, the concept is ubiquitous, embracing all kinds of exchange and linkage – capital, people, texts, images, knowledge, crime, disease, fashions and beliefs – which traverse, reshape and, sometimes, obliterate local and national boundaries and identities. Undoubtedly, these processes are grist to the populist mill. Applied to the social world, connectivity implies links between actors and between actors and various media. The medium of connection could be trade, or movements of capital, human media in the shape of travellers or, increasingly, digital technologies and platforms that enable instantaneous connection and interaction. Connectivist accounts of globalization as process

are legion and theories of globalization as a web of increasingly extensive and intensive connectivity still dominate much of the theoretical literature, although they are by no means unchallenged (Meyer, 2007; Axford, 2013).

While connection is often taken as a purely descriptive term, almost neutral in fact, a more nuanced take on the various exchanges, networks and flows that traverse local and national boundaries is that they are engines of global becoming. Here, connectivity is much more than exchange between the container space of one territory and another. Instead, such processes intimate, at the least, a 'de-nationalization' of national competence, identities and practice, and at the most, a transformation to post-national scales of political and economic governance, sociality and identity (Sassen, 2006). Implicitly, but more often, explicitly, this is the terrain on which populists take a stand.

Which directs attention to the subjective aspects of globalization and how these engender and sustain populism. In global complexity, the ontological autonomy of local systems is qualified by the variety of formal and informal networks – communicative and interdiscursive, economic, political, religious and so on – that cross both phenomenal and imagined boundaries. In global complexity, agents (individual and collective) not only interact with a dominant – and probably territorial – set of cultural and structural properties, but with intersecting, overlapping and sometimes contradictory sets and the identities and power relations tied to them. For many people, and certainly for populists, the result is to undermine what constitutes a legitimate, even 'natural', political sphere or a social and cultural order. Which is where we truly enter the realm of consciousness. When people 'identify with' the global condition, as Roland Robertson has it (1992, 2012), this might produce a Beckian 'cosmopolitan consciousness' that is more-or-less formal, or less romantically, a pragmatic accommodation with global constraints. But this is not true of populists, or for that matter other strains of anti-globalist thinking and organization, which engage the global only as an adversary.

Global consciousness is the awareness by actors of global constraints; their propensity to 'identify with' the global condition (Robertson, 1992). Without consciousness, connectivity musters as no more than 'mere connection', just a cognitive tally. But when the concepts are taken together, they reveal the dynamics of mutual constitution, allowing us to identify new, or possibly hybrid, imaginaries and assemblages that are of differing scope and political hue. Populists, along with diverse anti- and alter-globalization networks of 'outrage and hope' (Castells, 2012), all demonstrate a practical consciousness that endorses or rejects any 'self-consciously common framework of human society worldwide' (Shaw, 2001: 62).

But as I have intimated, anti-globalist populism also hides what Manfred Steger calls ‘the globalist paradox at the very heart of populism’ (2019a). The paradox is that, despite its anti-globalist rhetoric, populism ‘rides high on the processes of globalization and the highly interdependent world it created’ (Steger, 2019a). While this is a touch disingenuous, since all opposition requires the prior agency of ‘others’ against which to rage, and carry the potential to undo that agency, Steger is making a useful point. The gist of it is that populism is not, or not only, a ‘backlash’ against worldwide interconnectivity, but an expression of it. Counter-intuitively, its interventions are world-making, even as its proponents fulminate against that direction of travel. At such a pass, we may be contemplating a new politics forged out of modal turbulence, as the older nostrums and routines of usual politics crumble (Margetts et al., 2016). Populism assumes and thrives on instability, even as it offers a return to non-reflexive identities and ontological wholeness. So, there is both congruence and disjunction in the relationship between populism and globalization. The latter dissolves the boundaries around classical signifiers like community and society, challenging their assumed ontological solidity and quotidian given-ness. In this more fluid and unpredictable world, the battlefield is full of enemies of the people, and thus more amenable to radical incursions couched in their name.

GLOBALIZATION THEN AND NOW

As a preface to what I call the ‘new’ globalization, let’s essay a brief historical excursion. No strand or phase of globalization has an immaculate provenance despite the obvious historicity of each variant in some respects. Saying as much may seem at odds with the ‘new’ globalization motif, which implies rupture with the past, but underlines that there are both historical continuities and discontinuities in the ‘intensification and expansion of social relations across world-space and world-time’ (Steger, 2019a), a definition which acknowledges that in key respects all globalizations are alike. But saying there are modal processes is not to deny different strains of globalization and competing visions of globality. Each strain moves to different historical and cultural impulses and rhythms. The upshot is that over time there have been different global dynamics and periodically dominant forms of globality, which are then superseded or reworked. As a case in point take liberalism, arguably the most successful of ‘global’ ideologies and practices, at least in the modern world.

As I intimated in Chapter 3, the history of globalization from the late eighteenth to the twenty-first century is a record of liberalism’s growing but still variable purchase on how to organize the relationship between economics and

politics, both within and between states. *Classical liberalism*, with its Smithian belief in the free market, international trade and a more scientific division of labour in the workplace, was still trammelled by national protectionism and imperial ambition. It gave way to the *embedded liberalism* that characterized the period from the end of the First World War in 1918 until the 1970s. That strain too was not immaculate, but its mixed character was the product of a more considered, even moral, attempt to balance the demands of free market economics on a global scale with the pursuit of social protection for workers and citizens at the national level. Embedded liberalism failed to engineer a long-term balance between these competing demands and its global reach was also compromised by Cold War rivalries between Western and Soviet power blocs and, for a time, by the remnants of imperial orders. This phase of modern globalization was already under pressure in the 1960s and morphed into its *neoliberal* successor during the 1970s, a decade of pronounced economic and political crisis.

Neoliberalism is the *bête noir* of much anti-globalist sentiment today, including populist opposition. Many opponents of neoliberalism treat its borderless market logic and stark prescription for economic and societal development as a regressive globalist ideology. During the heady days of neoliberal hegemony in the 1990s and early 2000s growth in trade was robust, but dwarfed by the growing volume of financial flows. As a result, the world economy became increasingly financialized, dominated by multinational corporations and financial markets, and only recently opened to new players with any heft, like China and India. But just as it intensified and extended the global division of labour, neoliberalism's economic logic was incubating its own crisis. For a time, successful in its own terms, the free-market credo also triggered opposition from those exposed to its disregard for regulation in the workplace, for welfare provision, for growing inequalities and reduced life-chances. However paradoxical it may seem, the financial crisis of 2007/08 and beyond intensified opposition to neoliberalism, just as the ideology was being undermined by the fall-out from the same crisis. Populism grew out of discontent with successful market globalization because it was seen as the prime enemy of the national imaginary. It then gained strength from crisis conditions damaging to exactly that model of global integration.

But as Jeremy Green says (2019: 27), although the neoliberal order was 'gravely weakened' by the financial crisis, it survived. Partly, he laments, because of the non-appearance to date of a 'coherent ideological alternative' to neoliberalism. But this judgement does not consider the effects of a more pluralistic global system in which the epicentre of the world economy was

already shifting from West to East. Nor does it weigh the significance of non-capitalist market forces in making new globalizations. Anyway, in his account, populism is quickly discounted as an authentic ideological, let alone acceptable (read socially liberal) counterweight to neoliberalism's failings. It is only a sign of the times, not a solution to them.

But increasingly extant, though still not systemic, is an emergent national liberalism that is at some odds with pristine neoliberalism, yet musters as a transgressive and duplicitous force. It is transgressive because it traffics nationalism or nativism, and sometimes xenophobia, as societal goods, threatening both the moral and social efficacy of liberal principles of good governance and human dignity. It is duplicitous because at least some of its protagonists – Trump and members of the anti-EU Conservative European Research Group in the UK parliament qualify – continue to back the virtues of free markets even as they champion the cause of national resilience in the face of such globalizing pressures.

National liberalism is a version of what I will recount later as sovereignty, with the latter the current expression of the enduring ontological tension between independent states and global markets. Although it is only one facet of the new globalization, it combines elements that are expressive of that condition. These are what Green calls an 'ascendant nationalist nativism' (2019: 57) tied to the contested status of neoliberal economic ideas as a global script. This is an unexceptionable description, but as Green notes, there are varieties of national liberalism that appear in different forms of militant localism, and engender a diversity of politics.

THE 'NEW' GLOBALIZATION

When discussing the new globalization, we do little service to its dynamics and to identifying the strains of populism that contest it, if we tie all such developments to the vicissitudes of neoliberalism as a global script. Avoiding reductionism means taking careful note of many contributory factors that Steger and James compress as the 'Great Unsettling', piecing together how these factors are 'interwoven in complex ways' (Benedikter and Kofler, 2019). Globalization, so recently hymned as a hegemonic project, is, once again, undergoing significant changes. Some of these changes intensify the compression of space and time; others are fractal in their effects. For some observers, these changes amount to a rupture with past practice and represent another 'quantum leap in the history of globalization' (Steger and James, 2019: 158; see also Benedikter and Kofler, 2019). At its most profound, and

in line with my broader argument, this is a shift from the modern forms of globalization (and of populism) to postmodern strains. And, like all globalizations, the latest iteration is replete with powerful impulses and trends, both convergent and divergent.

Shifting the global balance of power

First is a shift in the global balance of economic power, a shift that is of world-historical significance. We are in the midst of another long-term transition – from the Atlantic economy (Atlantic globalization?) to the Pacific economy (Pacific globalization?) (Nederveen Pieterse, 2018: 124) – a shift that further attests to globalization’s dynamism and its indeterminate nature. This re-balancing is often characterized as a process of ‘post-Westernization’, or ‘Easternization’, sometimes as ‘the rise of the rest’. More often, it is depicted as another turn in the cyclical transfer of hegemonic power. However, it is more accurately portrayed as a less determinate process of ‘multi-polar globalization’, and this has to be seen from wider and longer-term perspectives than the vagaries of Western neoliberalism (Arrighi, 2007; Nederveen Pieterse, 2018). While the direction of change is most visible in China’s economic surge, with consequences for the balance of world trade and investment, for global supply chains and for workers’ livelihoods in the USA and elsewhere in the West, this too is only one dimension of the changes in train.

For what is taking place is also a cultural trend, exemplified in developments such as India’s recent domination of cricket as a commercial venture and professional global sport (Axford and Huggins, 2011). Much accommodation, and a good deal of tension – between competing modernities and across multiple globalizations – takes place on the terrain of cultural systems. And little of it is wholesale. Easternization is a complex process wherein ‘non-Western societies and civilizations acquire, institutionalize and transform ... modern traits’ (Casanova, 2011: 263), but crucially, also enact their own versions of modernity out of their own histories. The Chinese case underlines the fact that the pattern of global economic integration is not a Western *telos*, and in some respects never has been; rather, it is another periodic rebalancing of emergent and entropic globalities (Axford, 2018).

Twenty-first-century globalization is significantly different from the twentieth-century version. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse says, it involves a ‘new geography of trade, weaker hegemony and growing multipolarity’ (2018: 11). Among other economic features of the new globalization, structural changes in the regime of economic global governance have led to a decentralization of

financial and trade institutions. On the latter, the free trade regime governed by the World Trade Organization (WTO) is being altered by a tranche of regional and sub-regional trade agreements. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) foundered on across-the-spectrum political opposition in the USA during 2016. But after Donald Trump withdrew from the TPP, a successor, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), was signed in March 2018. In addition, the One Belt–One Road initiative is a significant expression of China’s regional and global ambitions. On the financial front, new institutions of governance have emerged, dominated by China and some emerging market countries. These include the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the National Development Bank (NDB). It is hard not to portray these developments as an attempt to shift power away from Western (global) financial institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

What really sets the two strains of ‘old’ and ‘new’ globalization apart is the rise of emerging economies in the current phase. Their growth has outstripped rivals in the developed world to the point where they are now the drivers of the world economy. Although dramatic, this growth spurt could still be seen as tracking a pattern of global convergence already extant, whereby Asian and other emerging economies strive to achieve per capita GDP and living standards currently enjoyed by developed nations. But that understates the extent to which the rise of emerging economies upsets, possibly overturns, the practices and mythologies of two centuries of North over South domination, with its ‘familiar expressions of colonialism, imperialism and American hegemony’ (Nederveen Pieterse, 2018: 10).

Because of this shift, the new globalization has an epochal feel to it, although such a conclusion may be premature. Overall, the demeanour of twenty-first-century globalization is not assured and its new icons may have feet of clay. The data lends itself to different interpretations. Thus, in 2019 geo-political uncertainty in the guise of the US–Iran conflict and a slowing Chinese economy combined to trigger a global manufacturing downturn. A year later the novel coronavirus that began in China dampened Asia’s growth prospects still further, with global consequences still being played out, most obviously through its effects on those developing nations with poor health care systems, pronounced national debt and generally fragile economies. In the rest of the emerging world, the threat of a burgeoning debt crisis in, for example, Brazil and Turkey, hedged optimism for even a modest recovery from the previous year’s downturns. The Coronavirus pandemic will also reshape trade by shortening supply chains. For many multinationals, a move

towards regional, rather than global, supply chains offers resilience and, as the Economist Intelligence Unit reports, the flexibility to shift production of key components from one location to another. This makes it a trend that is likely to endure post-pandemic (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020). And relations between old and new preponderant powers are more volatile. US–China trade relations are fragile, at least in the short to medium term; and geo-strategically the same is true. Huawei, so crucial to developing the infrastructures of the 5G communications revolution, may, or may not, be a global company in thrall to the Chinese state. Calls to de-couple Western economies from ‘strategic dependency’ on China for a range of goods and infrastructural services increased markedly during the time of the Coronavirus, partly as a reflection of worsening relations with the USA, and partly out of fears that the Chinese Peoples Republic (CPR) controlled too great a proportion of trade in goods critical for national security. Meanwhile, Apple, Google and other big tech companies still seem to float free of much national determination and international regulation, although nowhere entirely.

So, important questions have to be asked about the significance of events and trends, and about the rise of emergent economies more generally. Are these secular changes or another periodic adjustment in the dominance of global (read Western) capitalism? Do they advance or retard neoliberalism? Are they just another frisson in the changing (if not cyclical) fortunes of nations in general and preponderant nations in particular? Do they signify the advent of post-liberal globalization *tout court*, as an illiberal state (China) and its cohorts make the running in terms of global growth and stewardship? Most portentous, are the shifts epochal because they intimate the breakup of the capitalist world economy and thus of capitalist history? The weight of these questions imparts a more nebulous quality to any judgement about apparently seminal indicators of change.

The likelihood is that multi-polar globalization has its own dynamics, including the lineage of Chinese economic development as an alternative to Western models of growth. But it is not another grand narrative of globalization – a new hegemony – in the making; rather, a major rebalancing in key areas such as trade, finance, international institutions and preponderant power. Each phase of globalization has its own permutations of power and of space–time compression, although there are ubiquitous dynamics such as the dialectic of local and global. What is clear is that, as part of this century’s great unsettling, multi-polar globalization fragments the previously dominant mode of Western neoliberalism, and perhaps Western modernity. For that reason, it contributes to a crisis in dominant

modes and to the instantiation of a globalization that is now a more complex, overlapping, disjunctive (dis)order.

Digitalization

Second is digitalization. There may be robust signs of global convergence economically and culturally, but the drivers and character of that convergence are changing, and this has consequences for the character of world trade, for growth, as well as for wealth creation and distribution. It also impacts profoundly on the ways we live our lives. Here I advert digitalization – the displacement of analogue technologies and cultures by digital means – as a new global formation that is fast becoming ‘continuous and ubiquitous’ (Sandywell, 2011: 14). In this respect, although in many others too, the ‘emergent global’, as Appadurai says (2020), is (or has been) all about speed. While the trade in goods is slowing down, maybe stagnating, trade in global services and information – especially where they are digitally enabled – continues to boom. Of course, there are disabling pinch points in these developments. Digital technologies are not replacing mass and low-cost manufacturing altogether; or not yet. But the roboticization of production threatens an ever-wider constituency of workers, no longer just low or unskilled operatives. The consequent political need to protect jobs in the face of such pressures is growing stronger, especially in advanced economies, and this spawns a politics to match. Here there is a crucial prospect to consider. Across the board, digital media are no longer intermediaries between social agents, no longer just channels or conduits of meaning. Rather, they are generative social apparatuses, machines that produce the social. Digital technologies are designed for a borderless world because, as Barry Sandywell argues, ‘the images of life, nature and relationships they promulgate tend to take a universal form’ (2011: 15). Yet there are paradoxes, some of them apparent in the ruttedness of places and identities when set against the desire to live ‘in the moment’, to benefit from simultaneity and routine access and yet be free of the usual joys and trammels of human contact.

On the one hand, digital mediatization is disembodiment globalization and contributing to a digital ‘great convergence’ on a global scale (Baldwin, 2016; Axford, 2018; BCG (Boston Consulting Group), 2019; Steger, 2019b). On the other hand, these same technologies enable the easier mobilization of difference; the expression of bespoke and previously unarticulated interests and emotions, new forms of politics, along with the construction of individual personas and collective identities. Moreover, the apparently borderless logic of Internet technologies is confronted by national attempts at ‘Internet sovereignty’, a

concept first coined by the Chinese in 2010, and this too is typical of the contradictory dynamics of the current phase of globalization. Putin's Russia and Xi Jinping's China are in the forefront of protectionist and illiberal laws and policy designed to put boundaries around access to and use of the Internet and curtail internal dissent. In the Chinese case, such measures are also part of its sponsorship of an alternative model of Internet governance; indeed, of globality, and of non-Western routes to it. All of which also countermands the presumed 'logic' of convergence and the once-easy assumption that globalization means Westernization or Americanization.

Disembodied globalization, as Steger defines it, refers to the 'mobility of intangible things and processes across borders, including ideas, words, images, meanings, knowledge, sounds, electronic texts, software programs and novel cyber-assets such as blockchain-encoded cryptocurrencies' (Steger, 2019b: 4). More than that, it is contributing to the transformation of intimacy, and of trust in expert systems and authoritative voices across both media and politics. Steger argues that disembodied forms of globalization have been charging ahead of late, when set against the track record of *embodied globalization* – the movement of people as migrants or tourists; *objectified globalization* – the mobility of things as traded goods, but also as industrial pollutants; and *organizational globalization* – the modality of empires, states and international organizations. All of the last three subsist as part of twenty-first-century globalization, but they 'belong' to and more readily convey the dynamics of previous phases.

Attempts at Internet sovereignty point up the ways in which global cultural scripts and artifacts may be appropriated and then indigenized by local actors to produce glocal outcomes and imaginaries. But the idea of disembodied globalization is still a robust statement of the systemic and aesthetic features of digitalized global cultures. The Internet is an inscription technology of planetary and even extra-planetary, scope, shaping the speed and temper of everyday life, the conduct of politics and governance, and the production and circulation of value. The changes it has set in train amount to no less than a 'seismic mutation of social life' (Sandywell, 2011: 17).

This has two key features. First, of course, is the centrality of coded information in almost all facets of life, such that everyday things become the carriers of digital codes, relays in complex networks and nodes in the transmission of information. The upshot is an age of febrile change in which the 'very fabric and rhythms of everyday life have been mobilized and liquefied' (Sandywell, 2011: 18). Such, of course, is the flavour of Zygmunt Bauman's thesis on 'liquid modernity', and both accounts evince the same cultural pessimism. And this is soil in which populists flourish. For commentators like Bauman (2000), and

also Jürgen Habermas (1975), cultural change on this scale is at best dislocating and, at worse, pathological, leading to the surrender of the core emancipatory values of modernity for a life of consumption, a life that is unfulfilling, and anyway seldom realized. Actors abandon the goal of moral community founded on communicative competence for the abject status of victims of, or supine audiences for, culture as spectacle and (post-truth) politics as habitual and stylized lying. As we shall see in Chapter 6, none of this is unique to a populist critique of liquid modernity, but once more it attests to the paradoxical nature of the processes observed.

The second feature of the seismic mutation is also testament to its transformative capacity. Globalization morphs together the core processes of classical sociology – industrialization, urbanization, even modernization – along with staple signifiers, such as community and society. Or rather, it dissolves the boundaries around them and thus challenges their assumed ontological solidity or conceptual ‘givenness’. This dynamic is a feature of globalization *per se*, but we now live in cultures of speed unlike anything previously seen. Even the ‘slowness’ imposed by Covid-19 lockdowns and the longer-term impact on just-in-time supply chains and recreational travel may not hinder the cultural economy of speed unduly. Ubiquitous digital communication technologies such as the Internet have become unremarkable appurtenances of living, as well as the grain of pretty much everyone’s future. With the advent of a workable Internet of Things through 5G technologies, that process is enabled exponentially. Increasingly, it will be the medium of globalized production, consumption and circulation, and very little will escape its compass, from entertainment to art, from shopping to personal security.

All this adds up to a ‘phenomenology of space-time, a transformation of previously ordered structures and social relationships to create a disordered world of interfaces and networks’ (Sandywell, 2011: 18–19). The conceptual language that informs this new phenomenology is a litany of all that globalization skeptics and opponents find both absorbing and perennially threatening: deterritorialization, network society, rhizomatic culture, hybridization, glocalization, fractalization and hyperreality. We are experiencing the digital aestheticization of globalization, propelled through the kindred (perhaps even prior) aestheticization of culture, politics and economics. And we are now enwrapped in new modes of representing and experiencing the world that, for growing numbers of people, are not restricted by time or place. Regardless of political persuasion and cultural outlook, this is an uncomfortable or exhilarating state of affairs for many people.

Arguably, these modes have few, if any, parallels in previous analogue cultures. The virtual inscriptions of cyberspace are creating new spaces and times of politics, governance and leisure, new business practices and new kinds of imagined community. The changes are perhaps most advanced and dramatic in visual worlds – especially in the seductiveness and growing availability of worlds through virtual and augmented reality technologies. But in truth, they are everywhere, mainly because digital information is accessible at any point on the planet – if not always easily – and thus supplies resources for personal and institutional innovation and greater reflexivity, and also opportunities for more systematic and draconian surveillance. The process is never going to be a tale of bland homogenization. The globalization of digital culture is variable and contested in terms of its liberating potential, its repressive and dehumanizing possibilities, and its variation across localities. And the digitalization of personal worlds and cultures demonstrates the same features, arouses the same passions.

Sovereigntism

Third is sovereigntism. In a recent foray, Jonathan Friedman corrals populism's basic precepts with the label 'sovereigntism' (2018; see also Kallis, 2018; Basile and Mazzoleni, 2019), an almost elemental regard for retaining or 'taking back' control over one's conditions of existence. Rough-hewn as that sounds, it has weight as both an organizing and hortatory device. In fact, sovereigntism, like populism, is a portable concept and response mechanism, and popular sovereigntism, the 'will of the people', is the evocation most favoured by populists. Just where does sovereigntism sit in the narrative of the new globalization? And how does it relate to populism?

Sovereignty resides centre-stage, if uneasily, in all accounts of modern globalization, where debate and dispute focus on the capacity and future of the state and the threat or promise of statelessness. The catalogue of alleged state decline is impressive and includes loss of executive writ over territory, failure to exert self-interested independence in the world at large, and the consequent failure of trust in the ability of state elites to represent the popular will and interests. Sovereigntism looks back, longingly, to a more untrammelled version of sovereign power based on 'mutually exclusive territories and the retrenchment to the national dimension' (Kallis, 2018). If populism is the bully-boy opponent of globalization, then sovereigntism is its intellectual avatar.

In such accounts, globalization is seen as the antithesis of sovereign power, but its reputation in that respect is still hedged about with qualifications

(Axford, 2013). A wealth of caution now invests academic treatments of the independence, authority and capacity of states in relation to globalizing forces. How do the latter impact on the very 'stateness' of territorial jurisdictions and qualify how they define the limits of society? Most observers now agree that states are not in demise. But are they effective actors, not just in the mythology of realist and neo-realist theory, but in their ability to penetrate, extract and coordinate resources within a territorially defined space?

These resources include the size of the available pool of trust in governments, and the belief that, by and large, what they do will enhance the quality of life for citizens. The Covid-19 pandemic will test the strength of sovereigntism, challenging its default position as a bastion for nationals, and underlining its vulnerability to the indifferent globality of pathogens. But is this a limiting case, or is the pandemic a turning point in the capacity of individual states to manage their affairs, as well as in the shape of global geopolitics? In a recent report from the Economist Intelligence Unit (May, 2020), three key trends are tabled as likely to surface and accelerate as a result of the pandemic. The first posits changes in the balance of power between the USA and China on the global stage, and is couched in terms of leadership in general rather than just economic prowess. The second points to a growing lack of pan-European solidarity, a trend highlighted and (arguably) exacerbated by the pandemic, and by Brexit. Finally, the impact of the Coronavirus on the demeanour of emerging powers such as Iran, Russia and Turkey increases the prospect for regional and global instability. At the least, these trends point to a much riskier and more volatile environment for state actors, one where the robustness of sovereigntist principles is at once threatened by the pandemic and underwritten by fear of contagion.

For students of globalization, the outcome of local–global interaction is not a zero-sum game; but for populism, at least as defined by its rhetoric, it is precisely that. Taking back control is an elemental, if often non-specific, ambition. The complexities of twenty-first-century globalization confront all shades of populism as a battle for the future of the national imaginary in geo-political, geo-economic and geo-cultural guises. Taking note of the previous indicators of new globalization, it can be argued with some conviction that since the new millennium the 'rise of a multifaceted populist challenge to the liberal mainstream' (has) exposed the shallowness of liberalism's supposed triumph in the world more generally, but critically in its heartlands in Europe and North America (Kallis, 2018: 2). We might also claim that in the shape of a renewed sovereigntism, the national state, indeed the national imaginary altogether, have staged something of a comeback in recent years, although reports of

their death were always grossly exaggerated. Sovereignism as a facet of the new globalization has 'emerged as one of the primary ideological-political fault lines of contemporary politics' (Kallis, 2018: 13). It is, as Aristotle Kallis notes, benefitting from lying at the 'intersection between rival populist projects of re-defining and allegedly re-empowering the community of "the people"' (2018: 13) and frequently apocalyptic – though sometimes experiential – accounts of a world in chaos, or soon heading that way.

While past globalizations extolled homogeneity and secular integration across fields and institutions, the new globalization is more equivocal, complex, even hybrid. It is more nebulous, perhaps more chaotic, than previous and grander visions. The 'Great Unsettling' spoken of by Steger and James connotes a period in which globalization processes have been 'vastly intensifying' (2019: 162), while 'spawning new forms of social relations' from the personal to the global. These shifts in the character of twenty-first-century globalization are indicative of two dynamics in the career of all globalizations, and highlight key features of the current populist insurgency. The first, to be considered in Chapter 5, is the dialectic of local and global as a form of world-making practice. The second, found in Chapter 6, is the putative transition from modernity to postmodernity. What I call postmodern populism is a demonstration of the dynamics and consequences of this transition and an insight into the kinds of politics that attends the new globalization. The intriguing question is whether postmodern populism is now an embedded feature of glocal and local politics, or whether it will disappear once the 'Great Unsettling' is through? – if it ever is.

5

POPULISM: PATHOLOGICAL LOCALISM OR VERNACULAR GLOBALIZATION?

INTRODUCTION

The related, though not coterminous, processes of localization and glocalization provide a nuanced conceptual and analytical framework for understanding the imbrication of postmodern populism and new globalization. In this chapter I will develop the argument that populism is a facet of local–global interaction, with a repertoire of vernacular responses to what is often seen as a secular integrative process. Because of the sovereigntist turn in both politics and scholarship, the concept of localization becomes especially charged as a description of world-defining practice today. That said, for many observers, new – or any – globalization is really glocalization by another name.

Of course, there are more acerbic accounts. In one of these, populism musters as a fervid localism, playing out the elemental dichotomy of local and global. As we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3, populist rhetoric, with its stress on ‘down-home’ parochialism, lends weight to that attribution (Robertson, 1992; Roudometof, 2016, 2018). In practice, local–global relations are likely to be crystallized through refraction, with the global refracted through the local, and thus ‘reveal the ways in which the very creation of localities is a standard component of globalization’ (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2006: 134). This is some way from seeing globalization as a process in which peoples and their cultures are doomed to annihilation or, less emotively, where local identities and cultural communities are routinely beset and probably damaged by global constraints. Instead, the blanket idea of constraints commutes to an understanding that indigenes and



national/local cultures exist 'in a global framework, both self-consciously drawing on globalized strategies of rights and identity, as well as being objectively situated through international legal frameworks' (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 28; see also Kearney, 1995). Couched thus, as Habibul Khondker notes, the idea of glocalization 'captures the interpenetration of the local and the global' (2019: 97).

These issues delineate one of the most intensely debated themes in the study of globalization, namely the 'analytical and empirical degrees of freedom that may be discerned in how local cultures engage with "the global"' (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 31). In this debate, the usual binary distinctions, even antinomies, of universal and particular and local and global are often invoked. But to reiterate, for global scholarship at any rate, the default position today is that 'any particular experience, identity or social process is only comprehensible with reference to universal phenomena' (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009: 32). The 'globalwide nexus' of the particular and the universal produces complex interrelationships, and these are mostly glocal in cast. Where does populism fit with all this?

The local, however construed, is where potential or immanent global homogeneity gets articulated with the vernacular, both actually and metaphorically. The outcome may be new cultural hybrids or syncretic forms and these are likely to be glocal, with the emergent properties of that condition (Raz, 1999). Rarely do such encounters produce pristine 'local' outcomes – where that disports as a more holistic and uncompromised ontology – and this despite the intent of avid localists, including populists. While the existence of glocalization projects severely modifies any sense that globalization is an abstract and totalizing process, it also qualifies equally stark localist solutions to the pressures of global convergence, in practice if not in polemic and ideology. At the same time, the enduring currency of the local points to the importance of social and territorial *place* in social theory, in political practice and in identity formation. So the question is, how far do local imaginaries end up as glocal because accommodation with global constraints and entanglements is highly likely, not to say inevitable? And if they remain resolutely localist, need this mean a defensive and absolutist strain of localism – an angry provincialism?

Most theorists of glocalization refute the assumption that globalization processes always endanger the local. Rather, they argue that 'glocalization shows how individuals and local cultures may critically adapt or resist "global" phenomena', thus demonstrating that globalization's ontology relies on processes of glocalization. And as we know, the formation of both mutable *emergent glocalities* and *rutted localities* takes place not only through connection, but

through ‘micro-social’ incursions and ruptures as agents adopt tactics that make sense of the world in which they live, and either endorse or combat what they see there (Hulme, 2015: 31). Such tactics remind us of the contingent nature of the processes in train, although with populism we are enjoined to see it as an absolutist and pathological strain of localism – the enemy of accommodation. In populist rhetoric at least, accommodating global forces, possibly through hybridization, always appears, or can be portrayed, as a betrayal of the people and a loss of culture. And, in some respects, this is not a distorted interpretation of the relationship of populism (as avid localism) to the global. While the very idea of glocalization assumes a degree of flexibility in the mesh of local and global, localization (and certainly localism) imparts a more essentialist feel that valorizes ‘place’ and ‘identity’, sometimes in brutalist or realist form (Roudometof, 2018).

Globalization is a challenge to the very idea of boundaries, but social practices tied to its complex and contradictory toils allow actors to refurbish or reinvent the idea of locality or community, sometimes tied to actual places. Of course, this formulation rejects the idea of local and global being distinct zones of activity, or self-contained geographical scales, though some varieties of anti-globalist politics insist that they are. Indeed, with varying degrees of approbation, there are many narratives that depict globalization primarily as a state- and nation-altering process, irrespective of populism.

Never immaculate, the national is routinely disrupted, though never completely debilitated, by the speed and density of connective practices. National populism is a backlash against perceived unbridled globalization of this kind, but also against the messier, though arguably more likely, prospect of the globalization of once or would-be immaculate enclaves. Where is the agency in such encounters? Globalities, glocalities and localities are obviously ‘made’ through the intercourse of agency and structures, but globalization and glocalization also take place ‘behind the backs’ of agents rather than through strategic intent. By contrast, localism is full of strategic intent, and some bluster, based on the premise – at least where populism is concerned – that there is an ontological and moral divide between global and local that must be policed. In this *gestalt*, glocalization is an impure process of intermingling; localism – in both inclusive and exclusionary forms – is essentialist.

GLOCALIZATION, LOCALIZATION AND LOCALISM

As Habibul Khondker notes, ‘globalization and glocalization are entangled in the empirical world’ (2019: 107). So, the core of the matter here is to identify

the processes, accommodations and ruptures involved in producing, reproducing and sometimes altering, local contexts and local subjects in a globalizing world. Glocalities are the product of world-making practices which involve intensification in world-wide connectivity on the one hand, and increasingly reflexive global consciousness on the part of (local and mostly situated) actors on the other. The process of *glocalization* highlights both the resilience in local ways of doing things and the scope for changing them. Glocalization always implies mixing. It underscores the mutability and negotiability of reputedly inexorable universal constraints or secular convergence. At the same time, the very notion of glocalization reminds us that locals exist in a global framework where, among other things, they 'self-consciously draw on globalized strategies' to subvert and legitimate their sense of difference (Phipps, 2009: 28).

So what does glocalization look like? In their study of football and globalization, Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson employ a helpful analytical scheme that identifies four categories of cultural glocalization (2007). These are *relativization*, where social actors try to preserve their cultural institutions, practices and meanings within a new environment, underpinning differentiation. There is also *accommodation*, sometimes called indigenization, where actors take up the practices, institutions and meanings associated with other societies, a pragmatic accommodation made to maintain key elements of the prior local culture. *Hybridization* occurs where social actors synthesize local and other cultural phenomena to produce distinctive, hybrid cultural practices, institutions and meanings. Finally, there is *transformation*, where social actors adopt the practices, institutions or meanings associated with other cultures. 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' (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2006: 135). If globalization implies cultural convergence, and populism (though not only populism) prescribes social differentiation and even polarization, then glocalization implies hybridity. The concept of cultural hybridization identifies the mixing of cultures affected by globalization and the creation of new, sometimes unique, hybrid cultures that cannot be designated either local or global (Kraidy, 2005).

Hybridization is the default position of globalization optimists and for those who want to use the concept as a way of understanding the complex and contradictory facets of cultural globalization. And it is quite easy to depict cultural globalization *as* hybridization, and thus as the cultural structure of globality. One such account says that globalization is 'structural hybridization or the emergence of new, mixed forms of social cooperation and cultural hybridization, or the development of translocal *mélange* cultures' (Nederveen Pieterse,

2015: 46). Others reject the idea that identity construction can ever be a post-modern pick-and-mix process.

There are many forms of hybridization and they all challenge boundaries, whether local or civilizational, phenomenal or imagined. Hybridization also runs against the grain of hegemonic projects. In hybrid cultures, cultural syncretism rather than cultural synchronization is modal and, in this regard, there are many exemplars. Jan Nederveen Pieterse mentions East–West fusion cultures, the Latin-American idea of the ‘mestizo’, of in-between identities and cultures found in creole communities, and the *mélange* cultures of global cities. Even the ill-defined notion of ‘Europeanization’, until Brexit and Covid-19 much in vogue as a prescription for Europe-making, can be seen as a form of trans-glocal and hybrid imaginary. The sheer creativity of cultural hybrid formation is then a transformative social dynamic, although we should not assume that prior to hybridization, discrete cultural enclaves existed everywhere. But for populists, none of this matters; or it matters to the extent that not only globalization, but also glocalization and anything resembling hybridization are deemed inimical to the national imaginary.

For good or ill, glocalization is a modal feature of all global systems. As Victor Roudometof says, it replaces the crude binary of local and global and it tends to relationships that are symbiotic or complementary (2018: 3). But for populists, it is at best an ambivalent solution to the threats posed by global networks and flows to local integrity. It is ambivalent because the logic of, or systemic dynamic expressed through, processes of glocalization may serve to protect the local to some degree, but also may confound national populism, or dilute its rationale. At the same time, hybridization is evidence of the indigenization of processes that are often presented as having their own logic. All of this countermands both the ‘cultural logic of globalization’ narrative, wherein protection of the local means running against the tide of history – and is thus doomed – and energetic localist arguments to the effect that localism is not only viable, but the seminal counterpoint to market globalization (Roudometof, 2018).

Is there room for a jobbing accommodation in all this, with the local parading as ‘the geographical location for the successful articulation of the cosmopolitan’ (Roudometof, 2018: 3)? Maybe, but any such prospect still infuriates populists, as well as some non-populist locals. As Fred Dallmayr cogently puts it, for all the globalist delight in the prospects for a borderless world, the values of deterritorialization and embrace of global ‘nomadism’ are shared only by an ‘elite of financiers and corporate executives, while ordinary people are increasingly impoverished and tied to obscure localities’ (Dallmayr, 2017: 2).

As we have seen, even if this is a polemical construction, it is a recognizable summary of 'backlash' politics.

LOCALIZATION AND LOCALISM

Glocalization is the accommodation of space and place. But localization is better understood as a process of 'place-making', and thus underlines the importance of local context in making social worlds (Castells, 1996; Roudometof, 2018; see also Bauman, 2013). *Localism* then ramps up the stakes implied by the idea of 'local context' because it expresses the 'experiential, emotional and aesthetic feeling of a particular location being endowed with meaning and value' (Roudometof, 2018: 5). Unless used as a descriptive term to denote a territorial unit of government, the notion of locality and of identities rooted in place carry with them a timeless and fundamental quality, which bespeaks depth and wholeness or, as Richard Rorty has it, 'authenticity' (1992: 46). And as 40 years of constructivist scholarship tells us, even recognizing a process as socially constructed – 'imagined' – need not detract from its 'meaningfulness' for actors (Wendt, 1992). The celebration of locality, of place, also taps a deeply nostalgic and sentimental vein of consciousness worlds away from liquid global (post)modernity (Bauman and Bordoni, 2014). As Fred Dallmayr also notes, 'heimat (homeland) stands in contrast to the warp of the world today: namely the "homelessness" of modern human beings who have been wrenched or torn away' from rootedness (2017: 14). Paradoxically, the images of 'lost' worlds are often carried through the very media that are dissolving the psychological boundaries of the local imaginary, or eroding 'traditional places within a culture' (Rabinow, 1993: 67).

National populism subscribes to the myth of a 'natural' isomorphism of people, territory and culture; a pristine world-view that is some way from seeing local–global relations as a contingent and messy accommodation with diversity, and taking joy from that knowledge. We all know that globalization is the dialectic of space and place, but that is only the starting point for analysis. For as John Short opines, 'the spatial dialectic of globalization is the construction of space and the creation of place. Globalization constructs space through space–time convergence, cultural homogenization, economic re-globalization, and political (dis)integration' (2001: 18). But the same forces are also creating places. Nationalism, community consciousness and the self-conscious construction of ethnic identity are as much part of globalization as 24-hour financial and futures markets and global travel (Short, 2001: 18).

Localization describes the processes whereby 'place-making naturalizes and constructs a locale as a place' (Roudometof, 2018: 10). Like glocalization, this

can be a benign and routine process, but 'localisms *also* [my insertion] adopt an essentialist view of place', and this informs their message and the kind of appeal they have for citizens made 'homeless' by globalization (Roudometof, 2018: 12). In populist form, localism then appears less an out-and-out celebration of locality, confident and aspirational, and more a solace for those who feel stripped of the comforting solidarities of place and, judging by the expanding ranks of the precariat, class too, along with the apparent certainties of gender, ethnic and religious identities.

Bruno Latour speaks of the longing for a return to the 'land of Old' that is inspired by the erosion of seemingly timeless values and institutions that supported a better quality of life, and this sounds apposite, if vaguely quaint (Latour, 2016). In reality, vaunting the local imaginary – and valorizing land and territory – to redress perceived inauthenticity and experiential slight can spill over into a much harsher politics of difference, because the charge of being thought of, or seen as, 'inauthentic' is still a very powerful one in a world where identities continue to be sundered, and where there is diminishing hope of finding and keeping safe ground. For populists and, to be fair, for many others, difference is not a costume put on for the sake of convenience or fashion, but the expression of fundamental cleavages. Being stranded between some cultural spaces and only lightly implicated in others, may be a liberating experience, providing room for an embrace of all kinds of otherness. But it can trigger a more brutal, or hard-nosed politics based on suspicion, exclusion and the desire to root out anything deemed inauthentic.

Latour has his own take on the shortcomings of contemporary politics, and it gives a further twist to the usual antinomy between local and global. On the one hand, the former presumes resistance that is rooted in the perceived authenticity of place, but too often gives rise to nationalism and xenophobia. So, recourse to 'the land' as a signifier of resistance to globalization, and liberation from its rigours, means ridding it of any regressive connotation. Leftist mythologies of revolt provide no real guidance here because the left has always viewed attachment to land, turf and territory as reactionary impulses. On the other hand, the global – spear-carrier for liquid modernity – comprises a planetary order driven by a reflective belief in progress and an unabridged mastery over nature. More on this in Chapter 6.

POPULISM AND LOCALISM

Nuances aside, the politics of some localisms and most populisms translate the binaries of local and global, sameness and difference, into a 'set of oppositions'

with 'emergent cosmopolitanism' at one pole, and reactive indigenization (including populism) at the other (Friedman, 2018). Globalist discourses muster as open, cosmopolitan, multicultural, liberal, anti-sovereign, anti-indigenous and pro-immigration. For critics who equate globalization with the expansion of neoliberal capitalism or a vogueish cosmopolitanism, these features read as a roll-call of the world's ills, or of good intentions lost to the harsh logic of market economics and rich people's fancy. By contrast, localist discourse is closed, nationalist, monocultural, conservative, collectivist (including socialist), pro-sovereign, pro-indigenous and anti-immigration. Obviously, there is a strong polemical component to both attributions.

But as I have been at pains to demonstrate throughout, Friedman's binaries probably underestimate the ambiguity and contradiction in the attitudes and demeanour of populists, globalists and cosmopolitans alike; and may therefore misread the scope for accommodation. Glocalist outcomes are one such accommodation, and reinstating the local as a site for democratic agonism, citizen activism and civic responsibility is another. Yet judged by the rhetoric of populists and their opponents there is scarcely room for manoeuvre. To its opponents, localist politics built around populist tenets is always regressive – backward-looking, authoritarian, exclusionary, xenophobic and unutterably shallow – all by definition. To its proponents, it reinstates the legitimacy and dynamism of the politics of place. For its part, cosmopolitan (globalist) discourse also triggers shades of approbation and contumely.

We live in turbulent times, of late made even more fraught. The frailty of societies noted by Carlo Bordoni (Bauman and Bordoni, 2014), is evidenced in the dislocation I summarized in Chapters 2 and 3 and by the global health pandemic of 2020. For some years this turbulence has contributed to a politics built around the set of oppositions adverted above, and these, whether long or short term, inflame suspicion of centrist politics and inclusive notions of community. In the early days of the pandemic, the existential threat of Covid-19 muted the blare of usual politics, at least as this was reported across different media. Elsewhere, and notably on 'alt-tech' social media platforms, the threat of the virus was weaponized to foment anti-semitic hatred (Ehsan, 2020). In Italy, during the mid-spring of 2020, Antonio Pappalardo's 'Orange Vest' movement fanned the embers of populist anger at the restrictions imposed by the health crisis, claiming it was a conspiracy against common sense and against the people.

But pandemic or not, where cynicism and distrust of elites have become the norm, how likely is it that large numbers of people will redeem their faith in the political class and in experts, rather than opt out altogether? As things stand,

we have no way of knowing. So, the option may still be populism, expressed as angry parochialism, or some other redemptive formula. Thus couched, localism musters as 'populism spatially expressed', and the valorization of 'the local' as another way of referencing 'the people' (Peacock, 2020: 141). Yet even if the effects of Covid-19 temporarily subsume other factors, the longer-term failures of market globalism and the processes of what Appadurai calls 'cellular', networked globalization remain key factors in forging and sustaining discontent (2006), along with what Fukuyama calls the 'new identity politics' (2017).

In the throes of the Covid-19 crisis even this troubled and contested world is open to a more exacting set of futures. For all the talk of and need for concerted action and common cause, who now embraces globalism of any variety, save perhaps the globalization of medical and scientific expertise and hopeful calls for greater cross-border cooperation? When the pandemic eases, except in virtual worlds, will we return wholesale to the cultures of speed and mobility that were taken-for-granted by huge numbers of people, and became the benchmarks of a postmodern global cultural economy? If localism triumphs on the back of the pandemic, will it cling to any of the routines of centrist politics, eventually relax suspicion of strangers and neighbours, or continue to enact a defensive and sometimes visceral persona in a parody of local democracy, responsible government and civility? And if the latter, will there be overwhelming pressures to revert to, or else foster, the reality of 'natural economy'? Will 'on-shoring' of production and supply replace 'off-shoring'? Is the future populist, nationalist or just more ruggedly and comprehensively statist? Having intimated that the temper of the world is set to glocal, which lends it an in-between as well as an indeterminate constitution, of late we may be forgiven for entertaining all such possibilities.

POPULISM AS PATHOLOGICAL LOCALISM OR VERNACULAR GLOCALIZATION

Obviously, none of these scenarios amount to what Arjun Appadurai calls an 'elegy to the local' (2020), yet with the exception of the first they all advert more-or-less intense localist outcomes. The temper of the politics then delivered will depend on the detail of their structuration. And here there is varied and sometimes conflicting evidence.

Let's stay with the possible effects of Covid-19, no longer a limiting case scenario. What will be the economic and social fallout, along with the political consequences? The longer the crisis lasts, the more damaging its economic effects. Continued obstacles to the free movement of capital, people, goods

and services, and disruption to technically intricate, and currently modal, just-in-time production chains all challenge the balance of the marketized global economy and the kind of societies it curates, even if they do not predicate the complete undoing of these features (Milanovic, 2020). At such a pass, the clamour for economic self-sufficiency and security, especially in agricultural and health products, is likely to increase exponentially, always justified by the fear of worse depredations to come unless the world disaggregates and the gates are barred. This would be a global reset of enormous proportions, little short of a great transformation. And despite safeguards being mustered to protect and thus reassure citizens, in such circumstances a sense of ontological insecurity will be rife; a rational enough response on the part of those dispossessed of jobs, income, shelter and the buffer of insurance. The upshot could be social breakdown in many places, including in the capitals of the once-upon-a time hyper-globalist dream. Who, if anyone, benefits politically from this amount of dislocation and anxiety? It is easy to say that populists will, since the demand to pull up the drawbridge in the spirit of protective localism is their USP. But would it be that simple?

Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, United States president Donald Trump was at pains to downplay its severity, a stance occasioned by his desire to reap electoral dividends by reopening the US economy as soon as possible. Throughout his tenure, Trump had traded on the image of 'know-nothing' populism, barely hiding his contempt for expertise and often complaining that domestic critics are, at best, unwitting agents of America's foes. His reluctance to heed advice and lead the fight against the pandemic in the USA and globally reaped an ill dividend in the shape of electoral defeat.

I am writing this in November 2020, just after the still-contested presidential election. Infection and death rates are high, the American economy is in a parlous condition and continued high unemployment remains a political sore. Racial conflict and the politics of identity have badly damaged the trust placed by most Americans in their system of government and constitutional formula. Trump's credentials were found wanting in his defeat by Democratic candidate Joe Biden, but his version of 'America First' was endorsed – or not repudiated – by seventy millions of the US electorate, a record high. How can the runes be read? At present, it is too soon to tell with any certainty. Trump has lost the election, but the politics he endorsed lives on; and the anger and even grief it articulated have not been assuaged. In short, the future of American politics and the demeanour of the body politic is moot. Elsewhere, the reputation of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party has suffered badly at the hands of domestic and international public opinion for its reflex attempts to cover up

the extent of the contagion and its treatment of medics brave enough to speak out against that deception. Adverse opinion may not count against the longer-term stability of the regime or crimp its challenge to the USA as a global leader, but it qualifies the sense that the Chinese brand of authoritarianism is immune from internal and external sources of pressure.

Meanwhile in India, the strict 'lockdown' of the population through curfew and travel bans produced chaos in March 2020, as the lives of millions of the poor and migrant workers were disrupted. Prime minister Modi's peremptory actions were at one with the pattern of authoritarian populism he has practised since taking over Indian politics in 2014. It remains to be seen whether Modi's brand of patronal authoritarianism and Hindu nationalism will survive a crisis in which hunger and even starvation may be increasingly widespread regardless of religious and ethnic divisions. And if he stumbles, will his passing dilute or intensify the authoritarian urge? In turn, Hungary's drift to illiberal localism and its denunciation of EU policies on involuntary migration are partly tempered by its continuing reliance on Union funding across the board. Of course, from a rather different perspective such reliance can be interpreted as a scandal in which EU cash props up populists and autocrats, rather than providing a means of holding them to account (*Financial Times*, 1 April 2020).

All of this complicates the rush to judgement about populist and authoritarian regimes being able to take unparalleled advantage of current circumstances to boost their profile or consolidate power. There is evidence of an increase in human rights violations and suppression of dissent, along with a barrage of fake news and disinformation originating in authoritarian countries and directed against their own citizenry and sources of opposition in the freer world (Henry Jackson Society, 2020a). But how complacent can populist 'strongmen' be in these times? The fact is that governments of all persuasions have taken a marked statist turn in their attempts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, tracked by accusations of creeping authoritarianism, unwarranted surveillance and, if they are of a centre-right persuasion, of a dangerous flirtation with socialism. Such developments sync with the roll-out of new globalization and may serve to deepen the sovereigntist tendency it comports. And if that becomes the new normal, does it further erode the dynamics of Steger and James's *embodied* and *objectified* formats of globalization, of which we spoke in Chapter 4? And would it militate against pragmatic glocalizations?

Attempts to limit the 'spatial sovereignty of globalization' rely, as Arjun Appadurai notes, on fashioning, then sustaining, a 'classic, deep, naturalized alliance between the local, the sovereign, the archival and the teleological' (2020). For populists, as well as for localists who may be populist, globalization

threatens ‘history, nation and the covenant between the two’ (Appadurai, 2020). As I have noted, politics aimed at maintaining the connection between them can display some visceral, not to say pathological, traits, depending on the degree of perceived threat and on the objects of exclusion. Writing about Myanmar and Sri Lanka, Michael Gravers (2015) catalogues the conflicts seen during colonial times, but translated to the present, when nationalism linked to the Buddhist faith and ethnicity results in violence and ethnic cleansing of migrant populations such as Burmese Rohingya Muslims. As Gravers says, violence appears when the religious imaginary is ‘integrated into a nationalist ideology of cultural/ethnic identity and a kind of political organization is formed’ (2015: 71). In this case, localism traffics as a defence of religion. In other cases, it is wielded as a shield against perceived threats from any minority, indeed from any source.

But other localisms are less red in tooth and claw; a reassuring qualifier since the goal of localism and demands for self-determination are present in all populist visions. Here the centre – central government, its bureaucracies and cohort elites – acts as ‘the symbolic location of the bureaucratic, elitist, unaccountable “other”, ‘that staple of populist rhetoric’ (Peacock, 2020: 39). Clearly, not all demands for self-determination come from populist sources, and of those that do, only some display authoritarian and ethno-nationalist features. And while much of this rhetoric has a within-nation reference, where it demands greater devolution, it is obviously applicable to the idea of the local-as-national pitted against the homogenizing thrust and dubious legitimacy of the global ‘centre’, where that translates as some kind of world government, or shadowy oligopoly made up of global corporations. The protection, or freeing-up, of territorial communities is, in part, a function of the crisis of neoliberal globalization.

Authoritarian and ethno-national strains aside, for the most part within-nation localism does not look like a pathological alternative to democratic elitism. As Peacock says, both localism and populism share a narrative in which democracy benefits from devolution, and devolution brings government closer to the people. This is a conceit evinced by left- and right-wing populists, though how much is imaginative rhetoric or campaign bluster is open to question. Writing about the years of coalition government in the UK between 2010 and 2015, Tait and Inch note that the government’s narrative of more decentralization and empowerment was, in some measure, an early ‘populist response to a perceived crisis of trust in the British system, rocked at the time by the financial crisis and its mutation into a crisis of public spending’ (Tait and Inch, 2016: 176). As a piece of political artifice this still looks fairly innocuous, but the Leave campaign in the 2016 referendum on membership of the EU embodied

a more strategic and robust version of the same impulse. But lest we get too one-sided in interpreting events, Katz and Nowak (2018) actually see localism as a survival strategy for democracy in a period of rising populism, looking to reinstate, rather than despoil, old virtues. Here rootedness implies 'real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular measures of the past and certain explanations of the future' (Weil, 1952: 56). And this has very little in common with ethnocentrism, exclusionary patriotism and, as Weil says, 'self-idolatry'. But it may take too much in the way of normative investment to come to such a judgement, or to believe that populism is the only real defence of local democracy and of non-material worlds. Overall, though, localism looks like an off-the-shelf option as a populist strategy, with the variety of localisms, or local contexts, adding more bespoke elements.

Populism presents as different varieties of localism and we warm to some more than others. Some reveal a pathological strain; others much less so, looking more like a variant of usual politics for straitened times. So, what price populism as vernacular glocalization? Perhaps we can agree that at their most general both localism and populism are a reactive and romantic flight from globalization and its rampant spatialities. That said, all social worlds tend to hybrid or impure forms. Hybridization involves fitting or adapting an idea to a place, so that it melds with the warp of local experience. In theory – and certainly rhetorically – populism tends to exclusivism and essentialism, but even in the more hard-nosed cases mentioned above and throughout this book, that yearning for essentialism decants to the hybrid in-between-ness characteristic of multiple glocalizations, to produce what Fred Dallmayr calls a 'glocal praxis' (2017: 13). We must keep the last option open as it syncs with the idea of a more strategically adroit and malleable postmodern populism; although, as Frazier Crane would say, 'well maybe'. Throughout the book I have stressed the need to locate all such flux in a transformation of social and philosophical architectures and mentalities, the shift from modernity to postmodernity. This is a profound conjuncture, but still piecemeal and messy. It does not signal an end to or reversal of globalization, but adverts the reworking of its ontology in changing, and increasingly turbulent, circumstances. Postmodern populism is a solvent in that process, with its effects not fully realized, and not yet climacteric. And current events may well modify all these judgements. In the next chapter I will unpack the features of postmodern populism as a mirror for our time, and maybe, as its apotheosis.



POSTMODERN POPULISM, GLOBALIZATION AND THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY

INTRODUCTION

The 'Great Unsettling', or rupture, spoken of by a growing number of commentators threatens the assumed developmental logic of national and societal integration – of classic modernization – *and* usurps the imagined endgame of secular globalization, of a singular late modernity or a smooth networked world. Populism is a *local* phenomenon, though its appearance as a *global* force with which to be reckoned reflects widespread anxieties and uncertainties about the *global-modern* condition as this visits localities and individuals. But for all its apparent reversion to Latour's 'land of Old', to the imagined virtues of a pre-modern way of life, populism is also a postmodern phenomenon in ways I shall relate.

In the crisis of modernity, postmodern populism lubricates unrest through a mediatized politics. Light on its feet, it is the quintessential empty signifier regardless of any 'left' and 'right' labels. This is a strong assertion, key to grasping the modus of contemporary populism, but cannot duck the rejoinder that populist politics is not unique in being mediatized. There is more to be said on this topic and I will do so. But for now, let me just hint at its scope and import. Critically, digital mediatization speeds up, circulates and re-contextualizes mainly local, and sometimes personal, grievances into global scripts or manifestos, making populism almost rhizomatic in the sense described by Deleuze and Guattari in their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1984). Rhizomatic entities comprise multiple hubs and nodes, each of which retains a separate identity



while being interconnected. Activists and apologists alike envision and experience the global variously through their local engagement with flows of cultural product, images, rhetoric, disease and information that are increasingly disconnected from their place of origin.

None of this dilutes populism's essentialist appeal to millions of rooted subjects. In postmodern populism, the disjunction between the relativizing 'logic' of the Internet, with its borderless credo, and the absolutist tone of the messages disseminated through it, looks paradoxical, but that has not inhibited the emergence of a politics that subsists on both. Mediascapes – another Appadurai coining – channel the narratives through which such imagined worlds are constructed. These imagined worlds are 'chimerical, aesthetic and fantastic objects'; terms apposite when describing the politics and style of Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and Viktor Orban, to name but three populist 'strongmen' (Appadurai, 2006: 77). But to go a step further and dismiss all such protagonists because of these qualities is a rationalist conceit to ward off the appeal of a politics that is clearly augmented when the narrative stakes are high, and where hyperbole, allegory, 'fake' news and alternative truths successfully conspire an existential threat to localities, beliefs and collective world-views.

In what follows I shall begin by rehearsing the contours of modernity and postmodernity, the better to contextualize the idea of a postmodern populism. I start with the seeming antinomy of populism (as localism) and globalization as evidence of the crisis of modernity described with varying degrees of alarm or approbation by Latour, Giddens, Bauman, Beck and others. This is to underline the fact that populism is pre-modern in key respects and post-modern in others; notably in its permissive blend of absolutism and relativism. It is seldom unequivocally anti-modern. While rejecting some of the classic tenets of modernist thinking, indeed of modernity, it remains disapproving of the ever more liquid – postmodern – version expressed through globalization, albeit that the latter now parades in its 'new' persona. And yet it is the product and carrier of an increasingly postmodern aesthetic. I delineate the features of postmodern populism in time of crisis, and as a mediatized construction.

MODERNITY-POSTMODERNITY AND THE LANGUAGE OF TRANSFORMATION

In Bruno Latour's critique of the politics of modernity neither the implied universality of globalizing processes nor the localizing thrust of nationalist isolationism and rough ethnocentrism can sponsor an effective response to environmental

crisis (Eurozine, 2018). Latour has the climate-change crisis front and centre of his analysis of flawed modernity, and his take on this crisis has implications for my thesis. For Latour, populism as a form of localism stands condemned because its shock troops – Trump is deemed especially culpable – are climate change deniers. In turn, globalization and the modernity it subverts are built on a systematic denial of nature, save as a playground for human exploitation. In this *gestalt*, modernity (as globalization) and populism (as localism) are both out of the same stable, despite the fact that one world-view shades towards the archaic – the ‘land of Old’ – while the other cleaves to the hyper-modern (Eurozine, 2018). Trump’s predilection for what Latour calls ‘life offshore’ (rootless capitalism and – paradoxically – safe havens) and his championing of a down-home version of American exceptionalism is the apotheosis of modernity’s, and globalization’s crisis, in the present conjuncture.

For Latour, the crisis of modernity (or at least of Western modernity) appears in sharp contrast to more usual commentary on this theme. In one manifestation it is an elemental conflict between two seemingly alternative prospectuses, each with its own survival strategy. One is globalist and postmodern; the other is localist and keens for past times. The first is what Latour calls a ‘baroque form of hyper-modernization that is futurist and post-human’. The second, antithesis of the first, is a ‘massive regression in all countries towards an ethnic or national sense of belonging’ – ultra-localism (Eurozine, 2018; see also Reckwitz and Pakis, 2020). Each describes and prescribes ways of being in the world that seem mutually exclusive, yet have proved equally corrosive. This is because their apparent antithesis is false and so, while agonistic, they are incapable of mounting and sustaining an earth-friendly politics. Rather than challenge the global socio-political order, populists and centrists have actually stabilized and entrenched its dreadful logic (Blühdorn and Butzlaff, 2019). The tension or conflict between them offers no real escape from the destructive effects on the planet of the politics of modernity. As globalists become increasingly aware of the depredations they have wrought on the planet and flee to their offshore havens, the ‘common people’ head for the imagined redoubts of yesteryear. This is a well-worn antinomy and a fashionable, if dire, scenario, but as we have intimated it is too simple by half, at least where populism is concerned. There are other interpretations of the relationship between modernity and populism, and of how to weigh the likelihood of social transformation that resides therein. To contextualize these interpretations, we will have to talk in more general terms about modernity and postmodernity and how these bear on our theme.

Hyper-globalism aside, usually theorists have been reluctant to elevate globalization to the status of a modernist grand narrative, but that issue has

spawned a debate that remains unresolved in research on modernity. The protracted furore over the future of the state and the national imaginary is illustrative of the problems faced by global theory in this respect. And the elephant in the room in that debate, and for that matter in demands to 'take back control' – from the EU, transnational capital or vaguely defined external others – is the putative transformation of institutional, philosophical and quotidian modernity. But what does transformation signify? We need to start with modernity's core precepts:

First are the quintessential modern institutions of market capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, the territorial nation-state and the international system of states.

Second is the moral and intellectual purchase of the Western cultural account. This account emphasizes individual and social progress through the application of universal rationality and empirical science, and counsels the mastery of nature for human ends.

Third is the corpus of knowledge that provides the philosophical underpinning of that cultural account. It manifests in the aforementioned ontological centrality of the rational human being, which in turn informs debates about moral and political authority and conceptions of free will versus determinism. It appears more instrumentally in claims that purposive, self-interested behaviour explains the dynamism and superiority of market societies when judged against historical and ideological rivals.

As Anthony Giddens noted in the early 1990s (1990, 1992), what was then tagged as globalization was the spread of this corpus from the West to the rest. Nowadays, such implied teleology finds little favour in accounts of civilizational narratives and multiple modernities that sponsor many globalizations, nor in the annals of postcolonial theory. But Giddens too saw modernity as fractured and unpredictable rather than teleological. And as I noted in Chapter 4, the idea of 'new' globalization, with its decentred feel, also serves to modify the Western cadence of much early research on global dynamics. These are important qualifiers to the blunt attribution that globalization equals Westernization, resulting in a settled condition of globality. But for my purposes here, they are of less significance than Giddens' core argument about the relationship between modernity and globalization, and how that bears on the prospects for crisis, social transformation and, in a somewhat lower register, political turbulence.

In addition to the institutional and philosophical corpus set out above, Giddens identifies three dominant and interconnected factors that contribute to the dynamism and riskiness of modernity, and reveal the latter as immanently globalizing (1992: 53, 71). We have canvassed these in previous chapters, and they are worth repeating here:

- the separation of time and space that he calls time-space distanciation;
- the development of disembedding mechanisms that ‘lift out’ social activity from localized contexts and reorganize social relations across large time-space distances; and key to my thesis,
- the reflexive appropriation of knowledge. Reflexivity is central to the concept of modernity; a process that subjects social practices to constant examination and reformation in the light of incoming information, thus ‘constitutively altering their character’ (Giddens, 1990: 38).

The extent and intensity of reflexive practice distinguishes traditional from modern societies and both from the condition of postmodernity. Though here the plotlines get rather tangled because Giddens rejects the idea that there is a rupture or epistemological break between modernity and postmodernity. Rather, he views modernity as immanently fluid and risk-laden, both for self-identities and for institutional orders. Giddens prefers the sense that we are living in a period better characterized as late-modernity. For him, this is an important distinction, because he can still depict the late-modern condition as fraught – in part because globalization releases social relations from the constraints and comforts of time and place – but not out of control or irretrievably liminal. In place of the postmodernist conceit that nothing can be vouchsafed with any certainty, and that a new social and political agenda has emerged, in late-modernity social relations are not deemed hopelessly plural. And critically, modernity still supplies resources for increased reflexivity that enable most actors to keep control – of their bodies and much else. Here we stray back into the area of expressive reflexivity broached in Chapter 3.

Reflexivity on the part of actors may well conform to the Enlightenment model of the rational self, and this is Giddens’ argument. In this model, individuals take control of their self-development through processes of self-monitoring and the monitoring of change in social, political and cultural environments. This tradition emphasizes the cognitive and evaluative aspects of identity formation. But *expressive* reflexivity has a more aesthetic and interpretative feel to it (Lash and Urry, 1994: 6) that expands the choices available for individuals when

faced by the demands of what Bauman calls 'voracious modernity' (2000: 15). It is the scope and impact of these choices that is, or may be, challenging in terms of the kind of politics and sociality they portend. The choices range from exclusivist forms of collective identity, like ultra-nationalism, through a world in which the 'other' is consigned as alien and untrustworthy, to adopting designer selves in line with fashion or circumstance, making identity construction an aesthetic choice (Foges, 2020).

Of course, we should not assume that expressive reflexivity necessarily brings out the dark side of identity formation. But we can still note that the chances of its doing so are greater in circumstances of flux, contingency and experiential or perceived insecurity, much like we face today. A world in which everything appears contingent and biddable might summon up the prospect of greater autonomy for agents, but can also erode their sense of ontological security, where this refers to a 'sense of continuity and order in events' (Giddens, 1990: 243). And where modernity has tended to produce ambiguity rather than wholeness of identity, then resolution, or maybe just solace, is sought in both pre-modern and postmodern imaginings. This could involve a search for more secure identities, or the creation of contingent redefinitions of selfhood. While you might deem that the former is more 'authentically' populist, in fact it seems to exhibit both these strands in different measure.

We can identify two types of reflexivity. The first supports a confident modernity underpinned by the reflexive subject. Conditions may be volatile, but are seen as manageable. The second owes more to the aesthetic dimension of reflexivity and its part in the construction of the self. This strand is a reaction to the cognitive aspects of modernization, to a world-view that in the populist scheme is already bankrupt. Aesthetic reflexivity consists of a search for the authentic, the expressive and the natural components of selfhood as the basis for identity. In that search, individuals are able to connect much more directly with these expressive symbol systems or meaning systems than with those mediated by technical experts, abstract systems and representative institutions. Whether as havens of security in a risk-laden environment, or as personal solutions to identity problems, the appeal of aesthetic sources of self-identity is strong and getting stronger. The question is, has the balance tipped definitively towards the latter version of reflexivity? Is cognitive reflexivity being left behind in favour of more atavistic and elemental sources of identity and their attendant political forms?

Giddens says that social theory is rarely cut from whole cloth, and neither is social practice. Nonetheless, I lean to the transformative motif, in part because the aesthetic dimension of reflexivity predicates a politics moving to personal

and cultural dynamics; and this is clearly visible, if not dominant, around the world. It is a *modus* in which the usual structures of political mediation and identity formation – social class, bureaucracies, mass media, mass political parties, perhaps even the liberal state as a ‘rational’ actor – have decreasing purchase on popular identification. For populists, modernity and its confrere globalization have meant that moral values and the symbols of allegiance rooted in place have been relativized to the point of atrophy. At the very least this has led to a growing uncertainty, in which the spectre of loss of control and social chaos are manifest. Such uncertainty is not likely to be allayed in the medium to long term by the promise of a return to politics as usual. Indeed, the depredations of Covid-19 may hasten the latter’s demise, as public opinion excoriates national governments for their (mis)handling of the pandemic. Of course, there are still too many variables in play to venture anything like firm predictions in this regard.

Modernity is struggling to come to terms with its own intense reflexivity. On the one hand, we have Giddens’ picture of radicalized or ‘late’ modernity, in which modernization has nurtured active processes of self-identity that are still viable. On the other hand, there is a scenario in which the self is ‘dismembered by the “fragmentation of experience”’ (Giddens, 1990: 150). In the latter version, populism claims it can put Humpty back together again and even redeem the failed prospectus of reflexive modernization by ending ambivalence and ambiguity; after all, it is a redemptive formula. But that outcome is by no means likely. Meanwhile, the politics – and most certainly the rhetoric – employed by populists suggests that they don’t really subscribe to the project anyway, if that means shoring up the canons of political modernity. Populism is not against modernity as such, but generally disports as the antithesis of that version trafficked in mainstream Western political theory and found in its paradigmatic forms. This may look like a back-to-the-future kind of strategy, rather than an embrace of postmodernism *per se*. But it downplays Giddens’ suggestion that modernity is just ‘radicalized’ or is in the process of benign transformation, for a picture of social change wherein modernity is being swallowed by its own spawn. In other words, it is much closer to the visceral sense of social transformation than Giddens, Bauman and Beck are prepared to go.

Each of these authors underestimates the extent to which we already narrate and conduct politics in the postmodern idiom and take comfort or, more often, alarm from its credentials. As we noted in Chapter 3, in addition to rhetoric and principles, the kinetic forms of politics are changing; not by any means completely, but perhaps irrevocably. My focus on what Ingolfur Blühdorn and Felix Butzlaff call ‘notions of subjectivity and contemporary needs and patterns

of self-realization' underlines the nature and the import of this shift (2019). As these authors argue, what is taking place is an 'incremental exhaustion of the old democratic project and the search for a new political form that matches the values, preferences and needs of contemporary societies and individuals' (2019). This is transformational, or potentially so, and very discommoding, if not as immanently regressive, as some critics believe.

For, as Blühdorn and Butzlaff say, the 'recent tide of populism' is not just the work of 'menacing demagogues and ideologues', which is where much commentary resides. Rather, as they say, it is a 'constitutive ... feature of a new era that distinguishes itself through categorically different understandings of modernity, emancipation and progressiveness beyond the old conflict lines' (2019). In other words, it is a *postmodern populism*. Before examining that concept in greater detail, let's expand on the idea of the postmodern.

POSTMODERNITY AND POSTMODERNISM

Giddens distinguishes between postmodernism as an aesthetic reflection on the nature of modernity and postmodernity, which is the antithesis of the institutional and philosophical forms of modernity canvassed above. As an aesthetic, postmodernism's anti-foundationalism directly challenges the rationalist cast of Enlightenment thinking. Reason provided the steadfast philosophical basis for Western societies, offering security and emancipation from the dogmas of tradition. But modernity, says Giddens, was always 'enigmatic in its core', and thus pregnant with further change, possibly towards a 'post-modern social universe' (1990: 49, 52).

The concept of postmodern is full of ambiguity, but we can distinguish three main usages. The first is a philosophical critique of foundationalist principles on the philosophy of knowledge. The second musters as an aesthetic strategy that looks to relativize scientific discourse. Meanwhile the third, perhaps most germane to the theme of this book, denotes an epochal cultural transformation seen in features of the external world. As I have noted, commentators also differ on the disjunctive nature of postmodernity. Giddens' views on this have been remarked, but Foucault too prefers that we stand in the midst of a period of 'epistemic transition' (Giddens, 1990: 14) rather than one of philosophical and social rupture. So, just how far postmodernity remains parasitic on modernity is an important question when discussing the ravages of the Great Unsettling spoken of by Steger and James (2019). As we shall see, when judging populism, it is also resonant. The crisis of modernity is many-faceted and appears both as a faltering in the philosophical project defined by the concepts of rationality,

progress and the unified self, and in the universalist pretensions of Western moral philosophy and civil law. It also manifests as a challenge to the main principles of modernization, those of liberal perfectibility, human emancipation and globalization. On this accounting, the crisis is thoroughly systemic in its threat to the Western cultural account as a global script or meta-narrative. This threat extends to questions of identity under conditions of increasing contingency, risk and stress. It also extends to how we understand globalization.

If we are experiencing a shift from modernity to postmodernity, how should we gloss the change? Most often, postmodernism carries the burden of being seen as nihilistic, or just a form of 'conservative obscurantism' (Habermas, 1984: 73). Jürgen Habermas dismisses much of the writing of postmodernists as anti-modern because it discards the ideals of universal truth and progress, and dismisses the overarching goal of a moral community based on communicative competence and the ability of subjects to recognize and act on 'truth claims' (Habermas, 1984). Habermas – with a host of others – conjures a very bleak picture of postmodernity, while acknowledging its relevance as a description of key facets of contemporary social constitution. Like populism, postmodernity is deemed to have a pathological character inimical to the emancipatory potential of modernity and democracy.

So, one way or another, populism's world-view is easily implicated in modernity's crisis, and its politics are now a feature of that narrative's lingering denouement. The politics of Brexit and Trump's comportment as president are vignettes in this narrative and they too demonstrate populism's Janus-faced character. We have already noted that there is a paradox between proclaiming the worth of absolutes – the nation, the people, and so on – while practising the advanced relativism of 'post-truth' politics. If it was not a misuse of the term, we could even agree that this is the *acme* of postmodernism and of post-modern populism.

In his provocative essay on the cultural 'logic' of late capitalism, Frederic Jameson (1991) and a tranche of other scholars, artists and architects opine that the triumph of economic globalism from the late 1970s 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. Befitting what he also called the 'post-literacy of the late capitalist world', 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' (Jameson, 1981: 127). Crucially, postmodernism brings with it the

erasure of older distinctions, not just between reality and fiction, but between elite and popular culture.

Modernism was the product of the age of money and of rationality; post-modernism is the product of a new era characterized by 'the intensification of the forces of reification' (Jameson, 2001: 58). In the age of global capitalism, the utopian sublime of modernism, seen most clearly in art and aesthetics, is vitiated and the anxieties and emotional void left, along with a growing legitimation deficit, have been filled, at least until recently, by a cultural ideology of consumption (Habermas, 1975). Because of the universalization of market capitalism, the distinction between culture and economics has also 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 and marketization. Jameson also says that postmodernity 'makes the cultural economic' at the same time that it turns the economic into so many forms of culture (1991: 58). In this milieu, politics has become aestheticized. And in his 1998 book *The Origins of Postmodernity*, Perry Anderson links these trends – without approbation – when he calls attention to *plebeianization*, a concept first used by Jameson. The concept describes the collapse of old bourgeois norms among the rich and powerful and their assumption of a plebeian aesthetic, even though material inequalities remain strong and possibly more entrenched than ever.

In such a milieu, Donald Trump parades as America's first postmodern president. Jeet Heer (2017) argues that there seems to be a 'deep symmetry' between Trump's politics and the depiction of the postmodern society found in Jameson's work, as well as in Jean Baudrillard's account of the 'Perfect Crime' (1995). In Baudrillard's jeremiad, reality has been 'murdered' and, as he says, the result is that the 'culture of meaning [is] collapsing beneath our excess of meaning, the culture of reality [is] collapsing beneath the excess of reality, the information culture [is] collapsing beneath the excess of information ... sign and reality sharing a single shroud' (1995: 17). In lock-step, Trump panders to the *image* of the successful businessman, though his record suggests otherwise. His stock-in-trade is indignation, deep affront at 'fake news', but also its promulgation and, of course, a love of conspiracy theory. While he claims to share the anxieties and travails of ordinary voters, his declared affinity is a conceit, a feature of the '*encanaillage* (slumming) of the possessing classes' as they mimic being at one with the people (Kellner, 2018).

Labelling any contemporary populist leader as postmodern is rarely an expression of approbation. But the ascription does point up significant features of populist politics today and of its significance for the present temper of late

capitalist globalization. The value of theories of postmodernism is that, *pace* Jameson, they link cultural changes to deeper economic transformations. In this scenario, Trump – maybe postmodern populism *tout-court* – is not a rogue strain of usual politics, a fluke or a throwback, but an expression of the cultural dynamics of late capitalism.

Heer has a completely jaundiced view of all this. When he talks about Trump and Trumpism (populism) being the latest expression of the revolt against late capitalism, it is not to redeem it. For him, populism remains a counsel of despair, a blind alley, even for those who insist it is a route-map to better times, and this makes it very difficult to cast as a progressive strain of politics. And herein lies the paradox adverted earlier in this book. While Trump may be a postmodern president, many of his supporters are seeking relief from a ruined modern world *yet* equally wary of the frenetic nature and liminal feel of its postmodern successor, especially where jobs, communitarian values and whole identities are concerned. Their aspirations are the antithesis of postmodernism's contempt for solidity and all claims to authenticity. If this is a paradox, it should be interpreted as typical of the complex of motivations that inform waves of protest politics around the world at present, whether over globalization or not (Nederveen Pieterse, 2018). Yet despite appearances to the contrary, ambivalence rather than demonstrated and sustained coherence of identity and interest marks the demeanour of those disconcerted by usual politics, and who seek relief in postmodern populism and in other available forms of 'unusual' politics.

THE FEATURES OF POSTMODERN POPULISM

Treating postmodern populism as just expedient has to be given context in wider and deeper currents of social and cultural change. I have alluded to these changes throughout the book, and what follows rounds out that argument. So, it will come as no surprise that the *first* feature of postmodern populism is its emergence as an explicit challenge to the very idea of transcendental meanings and forms, of grand narratives – at least where these are identifiable as (failed) modern icons.

The *second*, and related, feature is the changing temper of identity politics. Matters of identity – both personal and collective – are central to the crisis of modernity. The tensions between what Giddens calls the 'situated practices' of individuals and the properties of large-scale, even global, systems increase the scope for such a politics. In this respect, the debate over reflexive modernization, quality of life, identity and globalization are completely intertwined.

Earlier, in Chapters 2 and 3, we described the tribulations caused by economic dislocation, by a global-modern *gestalt* that has undone security of place and identity for many people, depleting reserves of self-worth and eroding long-standing solidarities built on shared experience. Upbeat interpretations of such changes point to the continued scope for cognitive reflexivity to sustain coherent self-narratives and offset the likelihood that growing vulnerability will make us feel more insecure, more angry and possibly mad. But that is a tall order and may be less appealing or accessible than offers of redemptive politics, bruited as compensation for the loss of solidarities – class, trade unionism and the nuclear family among them – all mauled in recent decades.

In 1950, Maurice Halbwachs wrote that modernization adversely affects the ability of subjects to ‘remember’ who they are. This dystopian vision is most pronounced when there are no longer firm reference points in the past, or anywhere, and when cultural forms are deemed fleeting and erasable. The postmodern condition thus described is the opposite of populism’s stress on safe havens to protect self and collective identities, but does that leave room for a politics which is not angry, introverted, exclusionary or narcissistic? In other words, does that leave room for populism as a vehicle of democratic renewal, rather than its opposite? Most of the commentary on populism *per se* and national and right-wing strains in particular, argues otherwise (Henry Jackson Society, 2020b). The excess of contingency noted by Scott Lash, or seen in Beck’s risk society motif, is deemed unlikely to produce a benign and emancipatory politics of identity. And politics today is all about identity, in the case of populism spiced with outrage at the continued failings of a malfunctioning economic system. Here too there is a global context. Processes of modernization and globalization have released, or in some cases sundered, the individual from the shared meanings and rootedness of traditional pasts and from the places in which these meanings were stored. The outcome may be subjects who are empowered and in control, selves that are atomized and rootless, or agents who have sacrificed reflexivity for glimpses of the Promised Land as revealed in the rhetoric of ‘strong’ leaders and in memes on social media.

Whichever is the case, the individual often feels cast adrift from what Lash and Urry call the ‘shared meaning and background practices of the “we”’ (1994: 315). So, how they look to re-construct the ‘we’ is crucial to the kind of identity politics that ensues. When discussing modernization, it is easy to assume the reflexive version, wherein personal, community or even network identities are constructed purely out of choice, and not in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense out of ‘habit’, or out of grief and anger over its loss. But the idea of habit or ‘habitus’, to which Lash and Urry also refer, admits no reflexivity – or

at most, the aesthetic kind. The 'we' conjured here is the 'we' of palpable communities and tribes in which culture is the jumble of shared meanings that bind people to place and to the past. In other words, it is a playlist for (national) populism, although also for other strains of more-or-less radical local politics. Overall, postmodern populism comprises a connected, and sometimes pathological, response to anxiety and threat, but also an almost libidinous repertoire of democratizing possibilities. That, at least, is Jameson's take on things. The problem is that forms of democratic rule combining the universalism of Enlightenment philosophy and the demands of postmodern identity politics are hard to find. So, which strain is likely to inherit the earth in turbulent times?

The *third* feature is more grounded in the scurrings of everyday politics and political allegiances, but still speaks to the theme of signal changes in political modernity. Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) label this trend as partisan *de-alignment*, the weakening of the bonds between mainstream political parties and the people (2018: 225pp), and this thesis has been much canvassed in the literatures on party identification and electoral politics (Clarke et al., 2017). A rather straitlaced term, the notion of de-alignment carries a significant burden of possibility, as Eatwell and Goodwin allow. The relatively stable politics of post-war liberal democracies, with strong mainstream parties and loyal voters, has frayed and the bonds that engendered lifelong political allegiance are in disrepair. In their place is a far more volatile politics that makes Western political systems 'more fragmented and unpredictable than at any point in the history of mass democracy' (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018: xxiii). But how much transformative weight should we place on these generally acknowledged facts?

At one remove, they endorse the familiar refrain that nowadays there is growing frustration with usual politics and usual politicians, but that need not predicate the collapse or transformation of the system. At another remove, the trends point to the demise or transcendence of a staple 'truth' revealed in the left-to-right fault line of mass politics in liberal democracies. Despite the reference to the existence of 'left-' and 'right'-wing populisms, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the postmodern version, along with other radical political forms born of this turbulent era, registers the passing of what was a transient index of political development for too long taken as a modal feature of all democratic politics.

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 has

commented that in areas like immigration control and identity politics 'the worst of the right has aped the worst of the left' (2020a). Regardless, such promiscuity is in the nature of the populist beast and it syncs with public consciousness on matters of partisan allegiance and policy consistency, where the usual maxims are debilitated. Postmodern populism insists that there should be no prior closure on what constitutes the right template for political life and the ground-rules under which it is conducted. Whether you endorse this or not, it is not a recipe for stability.

Which brings us to the *fourth*, and related, feature of postmodern populism: that it is the product of a modal turbulence as well as being its avatar. For usual social science, there is a problem with such indeterminate ontology, because the multiple circuits that provide shape and substance to postmodern politics are rarely deeply structured. This impermanent feel makes for institutional lightness and, for some commentators and practitioners, this attribute is hardly fitted to the demands of systematic structuration. Instead, and with something of a Bourdieuan feel, the circuits are liminal 'fields of practice', not to be mistaken for complex institutional structures (Knorr-Cetina, 2007: 214). In a recent foray on the kind of politics that currently displays such features, both locally and transnationally, Helen Margetts and her co-authors depict a resulting turbulence which tends to 'chaotic pluralism' and is characterized by diversity and heterogeneity, by non-linearity and, as we shall see, by high interconnectivity (2016; see also Sandywell, 2011).

Turbulent politics is far more disorganized, unpredictable and unstable than the architects of pluralist, neo-pluralist or revisionist theories of politics ever envisaged, and the logic of collective action scarcely describes or explains it (Olson Jr, 1965; Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). At its most conceptually embracing, this whole argument is an evocation of complexity models of social constitution, seen in the increasing ubiquity of disordered systems and fluid identities, as well as in reactions to them from more embedded actors and structures. At a somewhat lower level of conceptual generality, it conforms to Benjamin Moffit's argument that as well as being a symptom of modernity's crisis, postmodern populism actually performs it (2015).

So, the *fifth* feature of postmodern populism, one I have adverted throughout, is its mediatised nature. The analytical worth of mediatization as an organizing concept lies mainly in the focus it provides on how, or whether, the media permeate, influence or determine wider culture and society (Morozov, 2011, 2013; Apuja, 2012). Mediatization is a contested notion. But with only a little equivocation can be understood as the processes through which different communication media play an increasing part in the framing and

constitution of everyday experiences and wider cultural, economic and political scripts (Castells, 1996; Hjarvard, 2008; Hepp, 2015). Without giving way to technological determinism, it might be said that new communication technologies frame how we engage with them and each other by promoting and embodying the value of speed, immediacy, modal interactivity and bespoke consumption as cultural aesthetics (Castells, 1996/2000). Today, all politics is conducted within this frame. Framing allows actors to simplify and manage their environments by 'encoding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of action' (Snow and Benford, 1982: 137).

Castells' early pronouncements on the process were attuned to the idea that if digital media have become the privileged space of politics – and maybe the forcing ground for a 'postmodern' variant – in a period still characterized by the forms and values of political modernity, the scope for disruption, and no little angst, remains large. On the up side, he applauded the potential for a new and modular politics to emerge, including the promise to cross or ignore borders in search of support, democratic gain and common understanding. And he also identified the role of information technology in spawning and sustaining innovative forms of grass-roots movement. His more recent anthem to 'networks of outrage and hope' (Castells, 2012) explores the ways in which information technologies allow previously invisible constituencies of hitherto unlooked-for 'activists' to register their presence, and all without regard for the architectures of usual, organized and brokered politics, and the trammels of strong identification (see also Bimber and Davis, 2003; Chadwick and Howard, 2009; Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Margetts et al., 2016).

In the new spaces of politics, the use of information technology by citizens and consumers may well confound the mobilization of bias found in any brokered politics, and its advocates certainly claim that this is so. That was the claim of Trump's successful campaign in 2016 and it is the stock-in-trade of many populist leaders who rail against the *status quo*, asserting that 'mainstream media' renders them voiceless. At the same time, this challenge to the onto-political certainties and norms of usual politics begets its own critique (Connolly, 2002). And in that critique, much as I canvassed in Chapter 2, the temper of a politics framed by media is often dismissed as immanently 'anti-political', whether in the Baudrillardian sense, or through damage to the canons of the liberal territorialist paradigm, the etiquette of representative democracy and the accommodative temper of pluralistic political discourse (Balandier, 1992; Axford and Huggins, 1997). The appeal of mediatized politics today, especially where populists and their supporters are concerned, is, in large part, due to this untutored quality and its very contingency. Both work to exploit

the plasticity of opinion formation in uncertain times. Digital media, especially social media, are both the medium of expression and part of the ontology of postmodern populism. In sum, mediatization is the fluid that lubricates connections between the systemic and the subjective (Couldry and Hepp, 2013). It is a contested, but potent summary of key processes and a meta-theory of social change.

How does postmodern populism comport in a cultural milieu where it is tempting to talk not only about the mediatization of politics, but of everything? Let me repeat: it would be a mistake to treat the process of mediatization purely as an instrumentality, rather than a societal meta-process. A process that sees technological changes in communication impact on consciousness and on the ontological certainties that structure lives. In this regard, the embrace of 'new' media technologies and formats in everyday life through the use of smartphones, apps, email, search engines, blogs, social networking sites and artificial intelligence (AI), are more than means of communication and sources of information. They are investments in culturally sanctioned lifestyle choices; the stuff of a mediatized and globalized cultural economy.

As we have noted, in this cultural environment, politics becomes aestheticized. Identified by Walter Benjamin as a major ingredient of fascist regimes, the process of aestheticization is now recognizable across a much wider span of politics where (communications) technology has changed art and life forever (Benjamin, 1936). Benjamin's argument is that fascism entails the introduction of aesthetics into politics, but the reasonable inference is that the link between politics, art and ideology need not be confined to pathological strains. More recently, David Harvey (1989) argued that neoliberalism and its postmodern cultural logic have rendered meaning and coherence flexible, relative, and governed not by facts but by feelings. At much the same time, Martin Albrow opined that politics is no longer a conflict over dominant ideas, but an 'opportunity to participate in cultural production and conflicts and tensions over identity' (1996: v). In short, today, the aestheticization of politics through-and-as-media is more ubiquitous than ever.

Trump, whether skewered or adorned by the legend 'the first postmodern president', certainly understands the power of politics as aesthetics, and plays to his constituency's reliance on aesthetic reflexivity as a spur to action. The key point is that this is not just a tactic, or an adroit manipulation of circumstances and technology, although it is those things as well. If Trump is a performer it is because postmodern politics is a performance. This is less a polemical attribution, still less an insult, than a reflection on what politics has become – saturated by media and the 'giddy proliferation' of communications

(Vattimo, 1992: 14). Postmodern populism has to be seen in this milieu, which has 'post-truth' politics as a modus, rather than (just) a corrupt tactical weapon in the armory of persuasive techniques. And so Ben Moffitt is quite right to insist that populism is a political style, comprising 'repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government to everyday life' (Moffitt, 2017: 38; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014).

The idea of performance is key to this formulation, and used pejoratively leads to claims that politics is no more than a spectacle, a field where lies are just 'alternative facts', as Trump's adviser Kellyanne Conway memorably attested, and the president himself deployed when framing protests against racial inequality in the summer of 2020 as an urban crisis fit to undermine the Constitution. Moreover, the critical narrative around the use of social media as a tool of political persuasion adds to the sense that it nurtures a malevolent anti-politics, an algorithmic populism (Maly, 2019) The thesis, simply put, is that the information users receive online has been filtered – personalized – by algorithms to deliver only bespoke messages, ones that reinforce familiar or sympathetic world-views (Pariser, 2012; Pasquale, 2015; Gagain Jr, 2016; Cadwalladr, 2017; Sunstein, 2017). Separated from opinions with which they might disagree, more and more citizens and consumers are said to live in an insulated world, albeit one of information plenty. But the access they enjoy does not dispose them to understanding or tolerance, still less a cosmopolitan outlook. In a recent foray much in this vein, Cass Sunstein catalogues the ways in which the norms of brokered conflict and the politics of accommodation in a pluralist democracy are 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 (Sunstein, 2017; see also Pariser, 2012). If true, how damaging is this for democracy?

Of a certainty, it challenges received wisdom that independent, authoritative sources can, and perhaps should, set the temper of debate and curate the political agenda; assumptions implicit in the founding myths of democratic elitism. But such a change might be seen as democratizing in its own right or, more contentiously, popularizing. Regardless of intent, the emergence of the 'thin' networks and protean identities said to be characteristic of the interactive Web is discommoding for any politics configured by notions of bounded space, ontological thickness, and maybe a regard for truth when making claims publicly. And in the case of the latter, the agency of different audiences has to be weighed in any assessment of influence. No serious research on 'audiences' these days starts from the assumption that they are mere recipients of rhetoric

and easily gulled (Liebes and Curran, 2016). Unlike the old hypodermic model of media influence, the idea of the passive 'audience' has morphed into one where participants engage in increasingly bespoke networks as agents and content providers.

Moffitt points to the manifestly performative character of postmodern populism, including how it has 'performed', and thus triggered, the crisis for which it is usually slated as an angry response (2015). He explains how the performance of crisis enables populist actors to pit 'the people' against all manner of 'other'. By controlling the script in this way populist leaders are able to simplify the terrain of political debate and advocate headline solutions and the virtues of strong leadership. The conduct of the 'Leave' campaign in the UK during 2016 speaks to the efficacy of this performance. Of course, in Moffitt's account there is still the sense that the audience for performance is largely *tabula rasa*, innocent of presumption, and inactive until mobilized. But can that always be the case? That said, Moffitt's is a nuanced and insightful treatise on how populism 'propagates' crisis. As he concludes, by addressing the 'performative repertoires, practices of mediation and role of spectacle ... we are better equipped to understand the phenomenon in the future, and to discern more clearly its increasingly important position in the contemporary political landscape' (2015: 211).

The idea of algorithmic populism is also intriguing, first because it suggests a computational agency only partly reliant on human actors, and thus on performance, and second because it chimes with other features of postmodern politics that have contributed to a more disaggregated and sometime febrile climate of exchange and debate. I rehearsed the implied 'logic' of connective action in Chapter 2, so I will not dwell on it here. Suffice it to say that this kind of engagement is only possible when the assumed rules of political mobilization and identification are somewhat frayed. At such a pass, the social affordances supplied by what Barry Wellman calls 'networked individualism' contribute to a shifting of cultural boundaries, away from 'thick' solidarities to a new trope for society (Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). Networked individualism has Internet use in a positive feedback loop with the shift from 'solidary, local, hierarchical groups and towards fragmented, partial, heavily-communicating social networks' (Wellman et al., 2003). As I have noted previously, for populists this looks like, but may not be experienced as, a paradox. One final point: on the matter of the balance of truth and lies in political discourses, what people accept as truth depends pretty much on whose authority they are willing to trust. In a climate where trust is already damaged, so, inevitably, are conceptions of truth and falsity (Malik, 2020b). We may not like it, but it is undeniably so.

And there is always the more uplifting possibility that networked individualism may not imply any kind of social pathology; a modal deconstruction of the inclusive 'we', because Internet gatherings can be a trope for collective consciousness when they manifest as virtual gatherings where individuals muster and yet perform everyday acts of subjectivity like *retweeting* or *following*. But can collective consciousness subsist for long in technological and cultural environments that privilege the expression of personal narratives and vernacular experience? Critically, in Barry Wellman's corpus social media is not another world, alien and damaging to the user's everyday life, but an opportunity to promote new forms of individuality *and* sociality in the increasingly blended existence of the Internet user. Couching the matter in this way tends to the benign, especially when set against the coarser reality of Donald Trump's attempts to persuade voters online, where meaning is so casually set adrift from fact. But the wider intimation of seminal change is clear. And here I defer to Ico Maly (2019), who says that populism in the age of digitalization has fundamentally changed political discourses and itself. Thus, '[c]itizens and human and non-human activists all co-construct the message of the populist and the resistance to it. Algorithmic activism has become a key ingredient in the construction of the "voice of the people". Activists, including "populists", are engaged in an endless algorithmically shaped battle to co-construct the "voice of the people"' (Maly, 2019: n.p.).

It is not so much that populists are technically more adroit than their political rivals, as that in postmodern guise populism is more at one with the cultural and technological currents abroad in this period of transformation. According to Maly, (postmodern) populism is a 'digitally mediated communicative relation between different human and non-human algorithmic actors' (Maly, 2019: n.p.; see also Gerbaudo, 2016). In this digitally mediatized world, social media enables leaders and politicians to curate their own voice and message, although only within the formats of the medium they adopt (Axford, 2018). As noted, these media offer specific affordances through which they not only shape the discourse, 'but play a part in the construction or destruction, as well as the distribution of the populist voice' (Maly, 2019: n.p.; Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018).

Finally, in this vein, Steger and James make a good case that populists have 'performed' (anti) globalization, by pitting the toils of a global imaginary against the endangered virtues of the national variety. Their analysis of Trump's rhetoric depicts a 'fierce struggle' with market globalism over the meaning of globalization (Steger and James, 2019: 205). The field of contestation is the ideological hegemony of market globalism's core concepts – the allegedly

irresistible surge of neoliberalism, the practical virtues of unfettered markets, the absence of preponderant power vested in particular actors, statist or otherwise, the widespread developmental benefits for individuals, countries and regions, and the alleged boost to the spread of democracy. By challenging these conceits, Steger and James claim that populism gains ideological heft, not only by 'contesting market globalism's central claims' but 'filling them with contrary contents and strong appeals to "the people"' (2019: 205). Aimed at mobilizing collective emotions these overtures comprise everyday metaphors and images that make abstract and complex processes accessible to 'ordinary' people (Freistein et al., 2018).

Given the academic propensity to treat populism as a 'thin' ideology, or dismiss it as mere style, and thus ephemeral in the wider scheme of things (neither of which I endorse), Steger and James's analysis is an important counterpoint. It shows that postmodern populism is a developed anti-globalist script that is having marked impacts on contemporary geo-politics and on global and local consciousness. The problem for populist leaders, even successful ones, is what to do 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-governmentalism, thinly disguised racism and fundamentalist anthems. Only when that question is answered can we assess whether postmodern populism is the wave of the future, yesterday's fad or history's 'empty signifier' *par excellence*.

EPILOGUE: POSTMODERN POPULISM AND THE NEW GLOBALIZATION – REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL?

The rise of postmodern populism must be set in a wider politics of anger and revolt (Appadurai, 2013; Foa and Mounck, 2015; Appelbaum, 2020). It is part of the crisis of modernity and of the recently dominant model of market globalization (Lonergan and Blyth, 2020). In many places it manifests as an anti-global and largely defensive nationalism. In fact, it is all these things and more. An instance of what Laclau called an 'empty signifier', the politics of postmodern populism is really a transformative moment in the constitution of twenty-first-century globality; an exemplar of the playing out of the elemental, and sometimes tortuous, dialectic of local and global. In this scenario, generally it comports as a glocal phenomenon, but that hybrid ontology often shades into more obvious, and sometimes horrid, localisms. Notwithstanding the presence of underlying and generic precepts, postmodern populism is notable for its variety, and the influence of locally mediating factors is key to understanding its politics both comparatively and globally. A phenomenon of its time then, and increasingly modal, although with variable purchase on hearts and minds, it is a salutary reminder of the visceral power of place and of the particular in global constitution.

For all these reasons, it is appropriate to see postmodern populism as a form of 'internalized global', *pace* Beck, and a feature of Steger and James's 'Great Unsettling'. In this guise it figures primarily as a demand-side factor fed by moral, and other kinds of, outrage and by outright anger over an economic system – neoliberalism – no longer deemed fit for purpose. Anger and confusion too at a cultural milieu that relativizes identities and advocates self-determination, but still denigrates those who cleave to the non-woke virtues of the 'land of Old'. In the USA, but potentially with a much wider appeal should things worsen, the onset of the Covid-19 crisis has given rise to a variant of this populism – mostly on the right and mustered against the restrictions imposed to combat



the pandemic (Juergensmeyer, 2020). For the populist right in America, and in the midst of a presidential election campaign, this was an affront of choice. Whether this constituency will be further inflamed by the availability of a safe and effective Covid-19 vaccine – as trailed in early November 2020 – and thus the threat of more state interference, remains to be seen.

Although Steger and James are right to talk about anti-globalism as a major contributor to populism's growing ideological heft, that seems to me less important than its attraction as an off-the-shelf vehicle for a new kind of politics, and as a radical solution for the ills attributed to a cultural-economy of relativism and a history of bad faith by political, cultural and economic elites. The question is, 'why?'. In this regard I argued that its very lightness of being – so very postmodern – is a more important datum than its ideological weight, even though anti-globalism is, paradoxically, a world-defining rallying-call, supplying populists with some ideological cement to shore up their eclectic policy mix. Postmodern populism is appealing because it congeals the low opinion of usual politics held by many people, and harnesses the outrage felt by a motley assemblage of those feeling materially left behind by globalization and culturally bereft because of it. For critics, this is not enough to redeem its sullied reputation, leaving aside the awkward datum that it has been known to cohabit with, and sometimes be defined by, doctrines of white supremacy, religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism and outrageous strains of conspiracy theory. In temper, postmodern populism chimes with, and exemplifies, today's 'post-truth' politics, inscribing the uncomfortable knowledge that politics and identities are increasingly malleable and authenticity hard to conceive, let alone come by, even when the search for that elusive quality is the reason for its dissenting stance in the first place.

This mix, and the politics it spawns, plays differently across the world, but always coheres around perceived loss of identity, status, dignity, voice, respect and, of course, economic well-being (Goodwin, 2020b). While playing to different cultural scripts in particular localities, and producing more-or-less agreeable politics to boot, these are modal issues and pointers towards long-term, large-scale, global change.

Which should not detract from the need to address the quality of political life under specific populisms, glimpsed in the style of leaders or movements, and revealed in their hustings. Laclau's aphorism, which saw populism as a kind of *pro-tem* arrangement while real politics dusts itself down, also admits a more challenging, and likely more worrying, interpretation of postmodern populism. In this interpretation it is not a variant of usual politics, or a periodic feature of systems that are disturbed while still tending to equilibrium, but a moment

in the disruption and transformation of modern politics, of modern life. Of course, this possibility has purchase beyond populism. What if dissenting politics today – all ‘unusual’ political agonisms, from *Cinque Stelle*, through *Black Lives Matter*, to #Me Too, ‘Make America Great Again’ (MAGA) and even QAnon – is the politics of ‘empty signifiers’, unencumbered by the burden or promise of ‘thick’ ideology or programmatic intent? What would that portend? Would it be calamitous, entirely devoid of principle and lacking in moral and policy compass? Would it show any respect for pluralism and liberty, or just release that libidinal energy spoken of by Frederic Jameson? And would it tend to a denouement that is recognizable in terms of conventional political alignments? Let’s think a little about the politics of revolt, about forms of unusual politics, around the world today.

GLOBAL POLITICS AND THE POLITICS OF REVOLT

I described and assessed shifts and paradoxes in global trends over the past few decades, wherein responses to crisis have clustered uneasily around a more robust national-centrism, both in developed and emerging markets, albeit for different reasons. Postmodern populism is not just a *response* to this crisis, but its actual *narrator* for millions of people. In this febrile climate, globalism – certainly globalization – survives, but not in free-market, high-roller guise. Populism reflects the confusing and indeterminate nature of the times; sometimes championing free markets, while trumpeting the virtues of closed or tightly regulated borders, refurbished sovereignties and controls over labour supply; all antithetical to market liberalization.

True to form, the onset and playing out of the Covid-19 crisis adds another twist to this saga, occasioning yet another episode of the ‘globalization is dead’ thesis. I cannot pursue that tantalizing theme here, but responses to the pandemic and engagements with globalization in the pre-crisis years reveal a complex, and less than uniform, picture of dissenting politics, and of national dispositions. Across the board it is possible to discern different clusters of protest (revolt) that are 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 and Syria, but also in Catalonia (Nederveen Pieterse, 2018).

As I described it, this is not a monolithic pantheon, as each cluster moves to different temporalities and rhythms (Nederveen Pieterse, 2018: 168). 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 global or

local expressions of a single global systemic crisis. As we have seen, anger and a sense of loss, or of promises unfulfilled, drives many such. Jan Nederveen Pieterse also notes that their concerns overlap and that they are part of a 'general conjuncture' of discontents (2018: 169). But whether there is, as he says, a 'convergence of radicalism', a 'globalization of defiance', a correspondence of 'left' and 'right' manifestations of that impulse, or even a unifying ideology of opposition, is much more open to question. Populism, and some kinds of alter-globalization for that matter, is 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.

REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL?

I started this book by saying that *postmodern populism* – which implies the relativization and even transcendence of modernity's principles and forms – holds up a mirror to current politics and the current phase of globalization, and what that shows is both unifying and palatable. But the fissiparous quality of protest politics tempers any impulse to generalize. This is a world manifesting different kinds of revolt, and that variety is itself a reflection of growing – not to say systemic – multipolarity. The de-centredness, or multi-centredness of this world also qualifies any neat 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. And to underline further the variety of origin and temper, Modi's populism in India is a mix of autocracy, ethno-religious nationalism and neoliberal economic dogma (Bobbio, 2013), while at the end of his first- and only- term as president, Donald Trump still beggars any model of ideological (or policy) consistency, touting a blend of Jacksonian conservatism and protectionism alongside neoliberal formulaics, and an increasingly white version of nationalism.

Of course, 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 cures or palliatives for perceived maladies that

are inimical, or at least challenging, to democratic politics (Inglehart, 2018). On this count, postmodern populism musters as a distinct (though not singular) challenge to the remnants of embedded liberalism and the currency of its neoliberal spawn, or a remedy for their ills. As Dani Rodrik says, populism so conceived is part of an ideological and policy rebalancing of globalization; maybe its reworking (Rodrik, 2018). That said, postmodern populism may be no more than a cathartic response to periodic crises, a shock to the system, rather than its successor-in-waiting, and that syncs with its hit-and-run style of politics. Populism appears to demand transformation, albeit of a back-to-the-future variety, but is perennially light on detail. In the fullness of the Covid-19 pandemic, and in its aftermath, such coltishness may continue to find favour with sections of disaffected electorates, but in the longer term, perhaps not.

And to a great extent that depends on how deep and how widespread the politics of anger and of cultural insecurities run. How serious is the demand for change in the battle to rebuild the world and domestic economies after successive crises? We know the depth of anger and the degree of polarization, or so we now think, although for too long many commentators dismissed such frustrations as either whimsy or else a dangerous basis on which to build a new politics, to fashion radical economic policies, and to mend broken cultures. Better to fall back on what was tried and tested. Populism's credentials in these respects are still open to question. How committed are various electorates to radical solutions, and what would a politics born of such radical commitment look like? As we have noted, the 'cultural turn' of late has encouraged citizens to repose biddable political issues into matters of identity that are not so malleable, and these may be legion. All this speaks to both pre-modern and postmodern definitions of the self and the collective, and is a profound datum on the condition of modernity.

So, in the broader warp of social change what signifies is a politics founded on insecurity as the dominant motif for turbulent times. Crucially, insecurities are manifest over the stability of borders and identities, as much as over jobs and wages. Of course, Covid-19 adds a new source of universal insecurity though there is hope that might be assuaged. Populism did not cause these insecurities, but taken in the round it narrates a crisis of modernity that is unlikely to be resolved through mere refurbishment of usual politics. Because of that it has a course still to run. Trump's rise was central to the narrative of postmodern populism's success. But does his defeat signal its imminent demise? Probably not, so a key question about the shape of future politics in both weak and erstwhile strong democracies is whether it can be redeemed as a project that tempers globalist excesses, holds at bay the indifferent globalities of microbial

infection, and heals cultural divisions? Again the answer is probably not, and certainly not entirely. What I have argued here locates postmodern populism as a feature of a globalized world itself in the midst of change, and a quickener in the ontological shift away from political and quotidian modernity. Populism may not be an embedded feature of the politics of postmodernity – after all, what could be? But it is expressive of what is a now a modal force for change – for both good and ill.

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